

Defining "success" in Indigenous education: Exploring the perspectives of Indigenous educators in a Canadian city

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to frame success for Indigenous students in public boards in the experience, knowledge and beliefs of practicing Indigenous educators. Seven Indigenous public school educators in teaching and leadership roles were asked to discuss what success for Indigenous students meant to them. Through a relational, narrative interview process, a cohesive focus emerged on holistic views of education and success, the importance of non-Indigenous teachers' engagement with multiple Indigenous perspectives, particularly those of their own students and their families, and the centrality of trusting, interconnected relationships between teachers, students, and families. The findings are practical and directly applicable due to the educator-to-educator design of the study, and are also contextualized within Indigenous models of success (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007, 2009; Toulouse, 2013). It is noteworthy that Indigenous educators focused on designing public education through Indigenous worldviews and pedagogies to benefit *all* students. This study is significant in its ability to illuminate a broader view of success in public education as well as to provide specific examples to build this holistic success.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Personal introduction

Before I seek to present the questions, literature, methodologies, findings and interpretations represented in this thesis, I am compelled by the counsel and the example of Indigenous methodologists and mentor researchers to present myself as a person, including my motivation for participating in this work (Absolon & Willett, 2005; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012). Kovach (2009) and Smith (1999, 2012) role model thorough, holistic introductions that touch on many aspects of their lives, including professional, educational, personal and family identities. As Absolon and Willett (2005) state:

Location is more than saying you are of Cree or Anishinabe or British ancestry; from Toronto or Alberta or Canada; location is about relationships to land, language, spiritual, cosmological, political, economical, environmental, and social elements in one's life. (p. 98)

With this high standard set, I undertake to introduce myself in a holistic, authentic way:

Hi! My name is Martha Moon. Home for me is a little student house not far from Lakehead University on traditional Anishinaabe territory. Home is a bike ride to the water to soak up sun on the snow or waves on the rocks; to rest. Home is the Greyhound station, waiting to embark on the next adventure. Home for the past twenty-five years of my thirty has been a white bungalow on a hill in Peterborough, Ontario, also on traditional Anishinaabe territory. It is the one with the big wreath and the perfect maple for climbing. Home is laughing over dinner with my many cousins, aunts, uncles and my grandparents. Home is a busy little Christian school, a diverse and politically active public high school, an arms-open church community, the Lake with my cousins, and a city forest with a rushing creek. My path has taken me to Capernwray Harbour Bible Centre on Thetis Island in BC for a year of studying the Bible in a relational Christian community, to the Muskokas in the summers to work at a Christian camp as a canoe tripper and program director alongside my sister, to Queen's University to study Geography and Biology, to Lakehead University for a Bachelor of Education with a focus on Indigenous education, outdoor education and social justice education, to teaching placements in Sandy Lake, Ontario and Timmins, Ontario, and to urban Western Canada to work outdoor education jobs for two summers and to teach for four years, and now back to Thunder Bay as a full-time master's student.

This journey has been full of growth, challenges, questions, and new perspectives. Being welcomed into Indigenous community and learning a bit more about Indigenous worldview and history, particularly in the context of education, was a theme that wound itself through the past several years. Being invited to play volleyball in an Indigenous community, volunteering at an urban Native Friendship Centre, and being welcomed into church and family community during my five-week teaching placement in a fly-in First Nation exposed me to powerful ways to relate to others.

Throughout the journey, home has also meant being in a canoe with my teacher-outdoorsman-church pillar Dad, having a big life talk with my family doctor-life coach-expressive arts practitioner Mom, or guitar jamming with my community focused-pastor-sister. My family comes from England, Ireland and Scotland. I am just beginning to learn more about our history, but I think most of them arrived in Ontario about six or seven generations ago.

My heart's home is Jesus. I dwell in Jesus's words, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5, the Bible, New International Version). This sustenance for my soul and this life for my being is definitive of who I am. During a period of change in my life, I once prayed to God, saying that I do not know where my life path is going. Immediately I felt the response: Yes you do! And I pictured Jesus kneeling on one knee by a sea with His arms wide open to me.

In locating myself as a Christian and as a White person, I also identify with oppressor, colonial groups in Canada. I acknowledge this. With a humble spirit, I seek to walk in the love, wisdom, truth, and holiness of my Lord, Shepherd, Heavenly Father and Creator as I negotiate this path, and as I take an active role in my Church's journey to reconcile and to relate.

As a teacher, I worked with Indigenous students and those of many other backgrounds in a diverse public school board for four years. Learning from my students, their families, and my Indigenous and Settler¹ colleagues was the best introduction to a teaching career I could have asked for. We journeyed through remarkable challenge and loss as well as joy, growth and connection, premised on relationship and on learning environments where students were acknowledged for who they were, encouraged to share their strengths and to draw on those of others. I saw Indigenous student success on a regular basis and was honoured to be part of it. Some days, the success I noticed was in the social and emotional realms. Other days, academic

¹ This term will be more fully explained in the "choice of terminology" section.

breakthroughs were celebrated. Sometimes physical accomplishments were remarkable. A spirit of learning, growth, and community was what inspired me most, and is what became the focal point of our classroom and outdoor education interactions.

General introduction

Discontent with Indigenous Education² is a leading issue in Canadian media and politics (Fulford, 2007; Rae, 2013). The degree to which it is current and political is evidenced in newspaper headlines on the proposed First Nations Education Act (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2013a, b; Galloway, 2013), active petitions and public consultation meetings on the same topic, major foundations' focus on change such as the Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative, Michaëlle Jean Foundation and UNESCO, and worldwide attention being directed to Canada's treatment of Indigenous people (Mas, 2013a).

A difficulty with addressing Indigenous Education as a nation is the lack of consensus on what success means (CCL, 2007) and on how to go about addressing what many Canadians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, would agree are school systems that are failing Indigenous students (Cowley & Easton, 2004; Kanu, 2002; Little Bear, 2009; Small, 2013; Wesley-Esquimaux 2013). Indigenous communities' well-reasoned rejection of the Government of Canada's proposed *First Nations Education Act* reveals vastly discrepant visions for education (Chiefs of Ontario, 2013).

Amidst the many deficit views presented in media (e.g., Friesen, 2013), academic studies (e.g., Cowley & Easton, 2004), and by government officials (Valcourt, cited in Mas 2013a) is the call to take time to consider what *is* successful in Indigenous education (Desmoulins, 2009; Oskineegish, 2013; Wesley-Esquimaux, 2013). In the present study, my intention is to contribute to the growing body of literature that highlights success in Indigenous education in Canada, following the lead of scholars like Castellano (RCAP, 1996), Bell (2004) and Fulford (2007) who have been working from a pan-Canadian perspective, as well as researchers who have worked in specific Indigenous communities to the same end (e.g., Berger, 2009; Oskineegish, 2013).

²Education occurs in many places and contexts, not limited to formal schooling. However, the term Indigenous Education is often used in reference to publicly funded education systems.

My contribution to this body of literature comes from my specific context: a Settler Canadian teacher-educator working alongside gifted and experienced Indigenous educators in public schools in an urban area. My identity as a Settler Canadian is important, because it drives the motivation of the work: to bring Indigenous educators' insights to light to provide guidance not only for my own practice, but also for that of fellow Settler Canadian educators. My urban location is also important – I offer a contribution to the growing body of literature on Indigenous education in Canadian urban public school boards. Many existing studies tend to measure “success” via Eurocentric standards using provincial achievement tests, graduation rates and drop-out rates (Cowley & Easton, 2004; Kehoe & Echols, 1994; Little Bear, 2009; Wolf, 2012). This is highly problematic because Indigenous views of success are excluded, and because achieving ‘success’ within European frameworks may be connected to faster loss of culture (Berger & Epp, 2006). This study seeks a broader definition of success. Working alongside Indigenous educators is also significant; accessing their expertise to aid in the development of Settler Canadians is highly valuable (Berger, 2008; Curwen Doige, 2003; Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010) and under-solicited (Cherubini, 2008). I worked with Indigenous educators in my urban context to explore what ‘success’ might mean for Indigenous students.

Indigenous teachers in the public system are cultural brokers (Kitchen, Cherubini, Trudeau & Hodson, 2009), fluent in both Indigenous and Eurocentric knowledges and pedagogies, as evidenced in St. Denis's (2010) ground-breaking study with fifty-nine Indigenous public educators. Their knowledge and experience can form a powerful bridge in the personal and professional development of Settler Canadian teachers, inviting them to consider wider perspectives – Indigenous pedagogies and worldviews in particular. The relational nature of participant-researcher interactions is a defining feature of the present study. It was an absolute honour and privilege to enter a learning role with each participant. In this work I hope that I successfully convey the tone that I experienced as I related to the participants – a tone that is uplifting, focused, assuming the best, and conducive to working together for change.

I had the opportunity to research and write this thesis as both a full-time public school teacher and a full-time student. During the design and data collection phase, I was entrenched in the teaching world, immersed in concerns of policy, best practice in curriculum and assessment, pedagogical reform, professional development, Indigenous education, multi-cultural education, the relational dynamics of students, their families, and my colleagues, and developing my own

identity as a teacher. An over-arching concern about the meaning of student success lingered through it all, particularly because the province was in the midst of redefining how success was measured; moving toward inquiry models, overhauling report cards, and reconsidering standardized testing. I lived in another world during the bulk of the data analysis and writing phase – I was entrenched in the world of full-time academia. In this world, questions about colonization and decolonization, institutional racism, privilege, use of power, theoretical frameworks, respectful research methods, and my identity as a privileged White academic researcher were primary concerns and filters. In both settings, I worked closely with Indigenous educators, colleagues and community members who were actively effecting change, looking beyond the Eurocentric framework for success. The seven participants in this study were a bridge for me between the school board world and university world, placing both into a wider context. Their ability to bring research perspectives as well as public education experience, to work within both Indigenous and Eurocentric paradigms, to see present realities as well as future possibilities, and to contextualize education within family, cultural and community priorities was invaluable. I believe this context has helped lead to a study that is useful in both public education and academia.

The coming literature was guided by the priorities of the Indigenous educators with whom I worked as a teacher and researcher, by the professors with whom I have worked as a student and graduate assistant, by papers that I have found to be inspirational during the approximately eight years I have spent seeking to learn about Indigenous education (including education of students who are not Indigenous), and by library searches on the topic. Indigenous models of education are prioritized, recognizing the extensive research and modeling conducted by Indigenous researchers in Canada.

The findings and discussion of this thesis become a walk-through of complex issues in education and in Canadian history and society, drawing non-Indigenous educators like myself into what Indigenous student success looks like, and the context within which it sits. With only one guiding question (and several optional elaborations and follow-up questions) – *How would you describe success for an Aboriginal student in the public school board?* – the participants led me through complex and overlapping issues such as holistic, big-picture views of education's place in society, the importance of multiple perspectives and seeking out one another's stories, the legacy of Residential Schools, intergenerational trauma, relationships, welcoming Indigenous

families into schools, and possibilities for pedagogy and schooling as a whole – at both large scale and small scales. They drew upon examples from our shared public education environment, literature, and ideas that inspired them and drew attention to wider trends, ideas, and goals. The participants drew my focus away from *measuring* and into *meaning*.

Choice of terminology

Indigenous: I have chosen to use the term Indigenous in this paper to name the Inuit, Métis, and First Nations people of what is now Canada, even though my original term was *Aboriginal* in the interview guide. Throughout this learning process, I have tried to attend to the terminology used by the Indigenous scholars and educators around me. During the phases of developing a research question and conducting interviews, *Aboriginal* was used by educators and scholars in my sphere. During my year of full-time study at Lakehead University, I noticed that the term *Indigenous* was preferred by my Indigenous professor and was used in much of the Indigenous-authored current literature (e.g., Donald, 2012; Iseke, 2011; Kovach, 2009; United Nations, 2006). I recognize, along with Indigenous scholars, that the word *Indigenous* does not account for the unique nature of each First Nation, Metis or Inuit group. I will use the word *Indigenous* in my own writing but will respect the terms other scholars use when I quote them directly.

Indigenous public education: Instead of referring to *Indigenous education* or to *public education* in this writing, I have used the term *Indigenous public education*. This is based on the findings of this study – the participating educators saw Indigenous education and public education as embedded in one another, including the idea that providing good education for Indigenous students will benefit students of all backgrounds in the public system, and that the norms and conditions in public education directly affect Indigenous students and families. For the purpose of this study, Indigenous public education refers to K-12 schooling in provincially-funded schools. This definition includes the full diversity of schools and programs funded at the provincial level but excludes on-reserve schooling. Although some participants did make reference to their experiences on reserves, the focal point of this project was success within larger, ethnically diverse school boards.

Success: From the beginning of this project, Paul Berger, my supervisor, helped me to think of success as something that is inherently a quotation marks word. “Success” is seen

differently by different people, and this has significant implications (Berger & Epp, 2006). Acknowledging and exploring different definitions of success was the premise of the present study. With that disclaimer, I will take the quotations marks off “success” for this paper, and let the various scholars and educators represented in the literature review and findings define it from their own perspectives.

Settler/Settler Canadian: I chose this term to speak about Canadians who do not self-identify as Indigenous. Unlike the term *White*, it encompasses Canadians of all backgrounds and histories who have arrived here since the 1600s, although I acknowledge that *White* carries with it a connection to European worldviews and histories that hold hegemonic power in our society (Sensoy & Diangelo, 2012). *Non-Indigenous* is another term used in the literature, but I prefer *Settler* because it speaks to what people *are*, not what they *are not*. By definition, if a person or her/his ancestors are not Indigenous to a given place – in this case, what is now Canada – then that person or her/his ancestors are Settlers. By using this terminology, I also remind myself that our backgrounds as Canadians are historical and political. This is a crucial consideration tied to colonialism, Treaty and how these play out in public education. It should be noted that the participants in this study did not use the term *Settler*; it was drawn from the literature, not the interview process.

Elder: This title was used to reflect the language used by participants in this thesis. In some other contexts and communities, “Knowledge Keeper” is the term for this role. Elders are respected leaders who provide guidance in Indigenous communities through their wisdom, knowledge and experiences.

The present study: I have chosen to use this term instead of *my study* because this study is not mine. It is my interpretation of the wisdom of educators whose generosity in sharing gave me this opportunity, and whose ongoing support gives it credibility.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Considering sources of knowledge

Who is the source of knowledge on Indigenous student success? Elders? Storytellers? Those who have experienced culture clash in Residential Schools and public schools? Those whose clans or personal qualities set them apart as teachers? Though some of these key voices may be represented in the academic literature, particularly in Indigenous-led research, many are omitted. This is a serious epistemological and ethical concern. Recognizing this, I ask, with Dei (2012), “How do we tell and understand multiple stories that, all considered, help us to understand the whole story?” (p. 104). While recognizing the limitations of current academic literature, I seek to access multiple perspectives, especially Indigenous perspectives, to begin to explore this vitally complex topic.

Introduction to academic literature on Indigenous student success

This literature review begins with the broader topics of colonialism and Treaty relationship. I take this approach to respect the conceptual frameworks presented by leading Indigenous scholars who insist that Indigenous education must be considered within the broader contexts of colonialism and its impacts (Battiste, 2013; Iseke, 2013; Smith, 2012), and Treaty and its premises and promises (Henderson, 2004; Kovach, 2013). The review then narrows to consider Indigenous and Eurocentric models of success in education, as well as some of the potential tensions, opportunities and dangers implicit in the coexistence of these models in the forum of public school systems. After these holistic views on the meaning of success have been introduced, my attention will turn to schools; I will focus on some of the elements of Indigenous student success represented in published studies and how the present study fits into that body of literature.

Colonialism and its effects on education

In order to discuss relationships between Indigenous people and Canadians, many scholars have noted that we must first acknowledge the present and historical nature of the colonial society in which we live (Adams, 2000; Lawrence, 2003; McPherson, 2011). Battiste (2013), a leading education researcher and theorist in Canada, opens her new book by saying, “I

have aimed my research and discursive arrow not at teachers or their methods, but largely at the federal and provincial systems and the policy choices and the inequities coming from them” (p. 14). By addressing the wider *systemic* reality, Battiste (2013) gives context to both her concerns and aspirations for education. She says:

I ask you to imagine for a moment the experience of Aboriginal peoples in Canada.... Consider that for more than a century, Indigenous students have been part of a forced assimilation plan – their heritage and knowledge rejected and suppressed, and ignored by the education system. Imagine the consequence of a powerful ideology that positions one group as superior and gives away First Nations peoples’ lands and resources and invites churches and other administrative agents to inhabit their homeland, while negating their very existence and finally removing them from the Canadian landscape to land no one wants.... It is a subject that every citizen of Canada should know, because every citizen of Canada is connected to it. (p. 23)

The discussion of colonization of Indigenous peoples draws attention to genocide (Churchill, 1997), forced assimilation, forced removal from lands and livelihood, forceful take-over of Indigenous governance structures, economic oppression, control of identity, violation of Indigenous knowledge and skewed gender relations (Fox & Long, 2000; Lawrence, 2003; Settee 2000). When discussing colonization, the resistance, agency, and resurgence of Indigenous peoples should also be recognized (Dion, 2009; Nakata, Nakata, Keech & Bolt, 2012).

In discussing Indigenous education, it is particularly important to acknowledge the role of Residential Schools in Canada from an Indigenous point of view (Haig-Brown 1988). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission [TRC], which was founded for that purpose, presented the following conclusions in the factual, wrenching 2012 historical document, *They Came for the Children*:

- 1) Residential schools constituted an assault on Aboriginal children.
- 2) Residential schools constituted an assault on Aboriginal families.
- 3) Residential schools constituted an assault on Aboriginal culture.
- 4) Residential schools constituted an assault on self-governing and self-sustaining Aboriginal nations.
- 5) The impacts of the residential school system were immediate, and have been ongoing since the earliest years of the schools.
- 6) Canadians have been denied a full and proper education as to the nature of Aboriginal societies, and the history of the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. (p. 85)

Policy statements such as to “kill the Indian in the child” (Government of Canada in TRC, 2013, para. 5) are evidence of how education has been used intentionally, directly and forcefully as a

tool for forced assimilation in Canada. The Government of Canada's formal apology in 2008 addresses this directly. It also acknowledges the need to

educate all Canadians on the Indian residential schools system as a positive step in forging a new relationship between aboriginal peoples and other Canadians, a relationship based on the knowledge of our shared history [and] a respect for each other. (Government of Canada, 2008)

Although this has been formally stated, provincial curricula still lack in Indigenous content (Godlewska, Moore, & Bednasek, 2010) and Indian Residential School survivors are still asking that Residential School history be taught in schools (TRC, 2012a).

To close this brief consideration of the direct relationship between colonialism and Indigenous education, I quote Battiste: "Aboriginal students have been contaminated by an educational system built on false colonial and racist assumptions that target them as inferior, and create self-doubt" (2013, p. 180). While recognizing the intensely negative effects of Indigenous schooling in Canada, Battiste (2013) also sees education as a place of possibility:

We must believe that teachers and students can confront and defeat the forces that prevent students from living more fully and more freely. Every school is either a site of reproduction or a site of change...It can sustain colonization in neo-colonial ways or it can decolonize. (p. 175)

With that challenge in mind, I turn to Treaty relationship as a premise for positive change presented by both Indigenous and Settler Canadian scholars.

Treaty relationship

The idea that "We are all Treaty People" (Epp, 2008) reminds all Canadians of their historic and current place alongside Indigenous people in a centuries-old relationship. The treaties of peace and friendship and the numbered treaties guaranteeing specific rights and responsibilities signed across Canada centuries ago apply today (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). Saul (2008) frames the importance of this relationship by describing Canada as a Metis civilization, its values – such as diversity and social equality – being derived from four centuries of Settlers relating with First Nations people.

Given the incongruence between the Treaty ideas of equity and mutual respect and the colonial reality, scholars have created and critiqued terms such as "decolonization" (Tuck & Yang, 2013; Zavala, 2013) and "solidarity" (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012) in an effort to

reconcile and move forward from these realities. The large body of scholarship on the intertwined realities and tensions of colonization, Treaty, and decolonization (Kovach, 2013; Nakata et al., 2012; Tupper & Cappello, 2008) serve as a reminder of the complex relationship in which education – as an idea, an institution, a history and a current practice – is embedded.

Treaty relationships come to bear on education. Several scholars cite education as a potential site for reconciling the Treaty relationship in Canada (Kovach, 2013; Mussell, 2013; TRC, 2012a; Tupper & Cappello, 2008). Henderson (2009) cites education as a central element in “guarantee[ing] a life of collaboration and mutual respect for all Canadians” (p. 5). Thus, when considering success in the diverse public institutions of school boards, Treaty is an idea that can provide an historical and legal anchor as well as a basis for renewed relationship for Indigenous and Settler Canadians.

Indigenous models of success in education

Many Indigenous scholars value education as “at the heart of the struggle of Aboriginal peoples to regain control over lives as communities and nations” (Castellano, Davis & Lahache, 2000, p. xi), a way of “fulfilling the promise” (RCAP, 1996), and a site of renewal and “enriched livelihood” (Henderson, 2009, p. 5). On the other hand, McPherson and Rabb (2011) propose that while education is the solution to the problem of “the oppressor within,” which they describe as the ongoing destructive effects of Residential Schools, “the wrong kind of education” can exacerbate the problem (p. 208). Therefore, it is imperative that practicing educators, policymakers and scholars in education attend to Indigenous models of education. Several comprehensive models require our attention.

Some of the first are the National Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations [NIB/AFN] policy statements *Indian control of Indian education* (1972) and *Tradition and education: Towards a vision of our future: A declaration of First Nations jurisdiction over education* (1988). They were written to articulate the “philosophy, goals, principles and direction which must form the foundation for any school program for Indian children” (NIB/AFN, 1972, p. iii), originally in response to Pierre Trudeau’s 1969 *White Paper*, a bill proposing the abolishment of the *Indian Act* and the complete assimilation of Indigenous people into Canadian society. The NIB/AFN statements were pointed and comprehensive responses, outlining detailed requirements for the success of Indigenous education both on-reserve and in

integrated settings (provincial and territorial schools). The reports addressed topics including local control of education, school board representation, education programs (including kindergarten, vocational training, alcohol and drug education, etc.), language and culture, Indigenous teachers and counselors, non-Indigenous teachers and counselors, facilities and fair funding – issues which are still of top concern in Indigenous education in Canada today, particularly with reference to the proposed *First Nations Education Act* (CBCa, 2013). Poignant statements such as, “Until now, decisions on the education of Indian children have been made by anyone and everyone, except Indian parents. This must stop” (NIB/AFN, 1972, p. 27) and, “The role which teachers play in determining the success or failure of many young Indians is a force to be reckoned with” (NIB/AFN, 1972, p. 19) have remained strong themes in the literature ever since. Although the *Indian control of Indian education* (NIB/AFN, 1972) policy statement is over forty years old, it has direct relevance to the question at hand – Indigenous success in public schools:

Indian children will continue to be strangers in Canadian classrooms until the curriculum recognizes Indian customs and values, Indian languages, and the contributions which the Indian people have made to Canadian history. Steps can be taken to remedy this situation by providing in provincial/territorial schools special auxiliary services in cultural development, curriculum development, vocational guidance, counseling, in-service training of teachers, tutoring and recreation.... The success of integration is not the responsibility of Indians alone. Non-Indians must be ready to recognize the value of another way of life; to learn about Indian history, customs and language; and to modify, if necessary, some of their own ideas and practices. (p. 26)

Due to the reality that many of the recommendations in these key policy papers have *not* yet been implemented in Canada, they remain pivotal documents on Indigenous priorities for Indigenous education.

Another foundational model is the three hundred-page “education” section of the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (1996), which was the largest Government of Canada commission in its time. It followed the highly publicized and highly contended Oka Crisis of 1991. The commission used a public hearings structure to give First Nations, Métis and Inuit people across Canada the opportunity to speak their views, spearheaded by renowned Mohawk scholar Marlene Brant Castellano. The *education* section was premised on the idea that “despite the painful experiences Aboriginal people carry with them from formal education systems, they still see education as the hope for the future, and they are determined to see education fulfill its

promise” (RCAP, 1996). In summarizing the findings of the commission, the end goals of education – or what I would interpret as “Indigenous student success” – were clearly stated:

They want education to prepare them to participate fully in the economic life of their communities and in Canadian society. But this is only part of their vision. Presenters told us that education must develop children and youth as Aboriginal citizens, linguistically and culturally competent to assume the responsibilities of their nations. Youth that emerge from school must be grounded in a strong, positive Aboriginal identity. Consistent with Aboriginal traditions, education must develop the whole child, intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically. (p. 404)

The report provided extensive elaboration on these themes, including presenting current successful models, and providing historical, legal and statistical context (RCAP, 1996).

The NIB/AFN (1972, 1988) policy statements continue to be cited in the literature today, as do the findings of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996). More recently, a new touchstone model has been developed, this time by the Canadian Council on Learning’s Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre, which includes eighty organizations and individuals across Canada working toward improvement in Indigenous Education. In 2007 and 2009, the Canadian Council on Learning released *Redefining how success is measured in First Nations, Metis and Inuit learning* (CCL, 2007) and *The State of Aboriginal learning in Canada: A Holistic approach to measuring success* (CCL, 2009), each containing comprehensive holistic lifelong learning models of First Nations, Métis and Inuit education that were developed through nationwide consultation with Indigenous leaders, educators and Elders led by Mikm’aq scholar Marie Battiste. The aim was to provide “a comprehensive definition of what ‘learning success’ means for Aboriginal people” (CCL, 2009, p. 11). Findings were presented in intricate visual models (Appendix C) accompanied by detailed written descriptions as well as graphs and tables to show how the indicators are applied. The Inuit holistic lifelong learning model, for example, is depicted as a throwing blanket – a traditional activity where people of all ages hold onto the edges of a strong round blanket and one member of the community is thrown into the air and caught on the blanket, showing the profound value of community well-being and interdependence. The thirty-eight community members holding the blanket represent thirty-eight Inuit values and beliefs, including resilience, practice, cooperation, sharing, love, survival, conservation, teamwork, resourcefulness and patience (CCL, 2007, p. 20). In all three models, the “cyclical, regenerative nature of holistic lifelong learning and its relationship to community well-being” (CCL, 2009, p. 11) are foundational. The First Nations model, Métis model and

Inuit model have aspects unique to themselves and also have unique ways to depict the importance of multiple sources of knowledge, distinctions between formal and informal learning, and multiple forms of well-being. In the 2007 CCL document, charts with exemplar indicators are presented. The layout of the chart gives insight into the breadth of the learning models: There are columns for home, school/institution, community, land and workplace, and rows for early childhood learning, elementary/secondary education, post-secondary education and adult learning. In the 2009 CCL document, the holistic nature of considering success is developed further, including charts which detail sub-domains in each of the four primary sources and domains of knowledge: “world of people” (“self,” “family,” “Elders,” “community”); “land” (“natural history,” “traditional skills,” “land use”); “languages, traditions and cultures” (“languages,” “traditions and ceremonies,” “culture”); and “spirituality” (“spiritual development”) (p. 16). Indicators and measures are also included, with the acknowledgement that certain data are not sufficiently available at present. The 2009 document gives global context for the movement toward developing Indigenous models of success by referring to work underway in Hawaii and New Zealand and work by the United Nations. It also ties the success question into community well-being indicators such as housing conditions, social well-being and learning, Residential Schools, family living arrangements, health and learning, low-income families, learning and employment, demographics and geography, racism, and learning (CCL, 2009, p. 3). The key attributes of Aboriginal learning are identified by CCL (2007) as:

- Learning is holistic.
- Learning is a lifelong process.
- Learning is experiential in nature.
- Learning is rooted in Aboriginal languages and cultures.
- Learning is spiritually oriented.
- Learning is a communal activity, involving family, community and Elders.
- Learning is an integration of Aboriginal and Western knowledge.

In summary, the CCL success models (2007, 2009) present a picture of what success looks like for Indigenous people. This picture has become a touchstone, drawn upon by Canadian educators and researchers.

In her 2013 Canadian Teachers’ Federation document *Beyond Shadows: First Nations, Métis and Inuit Student Success*, Pamela Toulouse presents an overview of Canadian literature on success. She does not explicitly provide a definition for success, but frequently uses the word “wholistic” with it. The model she presents (Appendix D) is centred around “Facilitating

Indigenous Student Success and Engaging Indigenous Communities” (p. 4), with seven elements encircling and overlapping it: “Shadows of Colonial Effects,” “Social Justice and Inter-Agency Allies,” “Honouring Indigenous Contributions,” “Building Relationships with Indigenous Peoples,” “Teacher Knowledge and Indigenous Inclusion,” “Indigenous Education is Canadian Education,” and “Sharing Our Gifts: Truth and Humour.” Like the CCL documents, success is embedded in multiple layers of history, relationship, knowledge, and perspective.

My reading of Indigenous models of success has led me to the conclusion that the contexts or contributing factors for success are quite often entwined with the definition of success itself. For example, engagement with community knowledge is said to contribute to success, and being engaged with the community *is* a form of success. Whereas Eurocentric models of schooling and success normalize the idea that a student’s experience and degree of success can be summarized in a two-digit number, a grade, Indigenous models of success are not reducible to a single factor, indicator, or number. As a Settler Canadian, my search for common ground is mitigated by a warning: “This intersecting space however, often requires the reduction or modification of Aboriginal people’s perceptions of holistic lifelong learning and well-being to accommodate governments’ measurement frameworks” (CCL, 2007, p. 14). With this warning in mind, I continue to consider Eurocentric models of success and how they come to bear on our current public education system.

Eurocentric models of success in education

EuroCanadian educators may find it difficult to articulate the origin of the values and assumptions that define our view of education. Some cite Aristotle’s ideas concerning the moral role of education, and Dewey’s (1902) constructivist view of learning experientially as foundational. Other scholars cite the mindsets of the Industrial revolution (Gilbert, in Friesen, 2007), the Prussian military, and the monastery (Friesen 2007). How these influences translate into formal education in Canada today would be a complex study to undertake. A few key points are worth addressing here. Kirkness (1998) points out that mastering the “3Rs” – reading, writing and arithmetic” (p. 12) has been the focus of Canadian public education, an underlying assumption that implicitly excludes foundational elements of Indigenous education, namely learning from Elders. Hookimaw-Witt (1998) highlights the fact that education is not neutral and does not necessarily bring increased living standards, particularly if it maintains the cultural

devastation instigated through the Residential Schools system. Thus, if nothing else, it is important to question the underlying values of current Canadian education systems, to recognize their colonial, Eurocentric origins, and to actively seek Indigenous views on education.

Interaction of Indigenous and Eurocentric models of “success”

Hampton (1995b) boldly states: “Indian education is inherently a bicultural enterprise” (p. 8). Recognizing this is central, especially when considering what Hampton (1995b) names as the complexly interrelated goals of Indian education: assimilation and self-determination. However, what this bicultural enterprise does, could do, or should look like is highly contested and power-laden, especially considering that basic assumptions are so different, such as a subjective vs. a so-called objective orientation and transformative vs. controlling aims in learning (Ermine, 1995, p. 102).

Scholars warn against metaphors and frameworks that over-simplify the processes, tension and power relations involved in the coexistence of Eurocentric and Indigenous views (Gatzambide-Fernandez, 2012; Henze & Vanett, 1993; Tuck & Wang, 2012). Donald (2012), however, sees potential in the tensions between worldviews and knowledges – a potential for meaningful ethical and relational interactions, an opportunity to find balance between respecting differences and finding points of connection (p. 104).

A balancing element to holding differing perspectives in tension is the desire to find common ground in Indigenous education for practical reasons: “If Aboriginal people and governments are unable to establish a shared perspective of learning and well-being, indicators run the risk of becoming either irrelevant for Aboriginal Peoples or unable to inform effective government policy” (CCL, 2007, p. 14).

As evidenced in Indian Residential School history and the continuation of its legacy in education (Hookimaw-Witt, 1998), Canadian school systems do not achieve balance in Indigenous and Eurocentric worldviews. Rather Indigenous perspectives are rare and not prioritized (Godlewska, Moore, & Bednasek, 2010), with the effect that Indigenous students learn a Western European version of their own history (Adams, 2000), and Canadian students are ignorant of Indigenous perspectives (Godlewska, Moore, & Bednasek, 2010). When Little Bear (2009) outlines European conceptions of learning and then Indigenous ones, the lack of overlap becomes clear, as does the fact that learning conceptions built upon in schools are almost all

European. In his apology for Residential Schools, Prime Minister Stephen Harper, on behalf of the Government of Canada (2008), acknowledged the underlying belief that Indigenous ways were inferior. The continued prevalence of this belief is evidenced in recent Canadian findings: “most of our respondents perceive that success is still generally measured using only Eurocentric means; successes that do not fit this Eurocentric norm are not often identified or celebrated as such” (White, Budai, Matthew, Rickson Deighan & Gill, 2012). There are bound to be negative implications in a situation where Canadians recognize the need for increased understanding of Indigenous perspectives (Government of Canada, 2008), but still operate a school system with near-exclusively Eurocentric forms of identifying success.

A consideration of deficit perspectives

I would be remiss to skip over the idea of deficit thinking in this exploration of Indigenous education. Deficit perspectives permeate and endure in the literature on Indigenous education (Fryberg et al., 2013; Little Bear, 2009; Wolf, 2012). One form of deficit thinking presents Indigenous students, their families and their communities as inadequate. Another presents school systems and teachers as lacking in their knowledge, awareness and ability to teach Indigenous students well (Godlewska, Moore & Bednasek, 2010).

Differences in student achievement measures are real. Measured by indicators of success used in the Eurocentric school system – which are highly problematic in the first place (Anuik, 2008; White et al., 2012) – Indigenous students are rated significantly and persistently lower than their peers (Cowley & Easton, 2004; Kanu, 2002). In light of this, Hodson (cited in Wolf, 2012) advocates an alternate interpretation to the deficit view:

Alarmist concerns regarding academic achievement, school attendance, graduation rates, and other realities central to the schooling of Native young people, must be seen as merely surface reflections of deeper and more troubling aspects of contemporary life experienced by our youth. For far too many Native youth, those realities include time spent in classrooms that are emotional, spiritual, and psychological war zones. (p. 82)

According to this view, factors inside of school and outside of school must be considered. These may include poverty, racism, history, social problems, violence against women, violence against girls, gangs, and addiction (Little Bear, 2009). In response to these realities, Goulet (2001) found:

Attending to issues of poverty and dysfunction in the community does not mean thinking less of the students or their families. It means that the teacher adjusts her teaching and

expectations for engagement and participation because she is aware of how the social stresses are affecting the child. (p. 77)

Goulet (2001) goes on from this consideration of social stresses to study Inuit students' success, modeling a disposition that acknowledges colonial realities while centering on strengths and potential.

Concerning the deficit view of Settler Canadian teachers, unsettling realities are present:

The education systems in Canada have also consistently been reportedly unresponsive to the educational needs, wants, strengths, and weakness of Aboriginal Peoples. They have largely resisted making the infrastructure, curricular and pedagogical changes required to effectively service Aboriginal students. (Little Bear, 2009, p. 6)

Ignorance and resistance to change are evidence of colonialism and longstanding, systemic dysfunction in Canadian society and education. Yet they are neither inevitable nor permanent, as Costello (2011) found in her work with Settler Canadian teachers.

Although disturbing findings exist regarding the academic achievement of Indigenous students and the competence and openness of their Settler Canadian teachers, this study does not dwell there. Those realities are seen, as Wolf (2012) stated, as indicators of underlying issues and as evidence of colonialism. They must be addressed in public education – they do not define its limits.

Breadth of perceptions of Indigenous student success

In the following section, I move from models and theories of education to specific studies addressing Indigenous student success. Instead of limiting the scope of this literature review to a particular conception of success, multiple conceptions will be presented here, reflective of a society where Indigenous people with their multiple knowledges and values and Settler Canadians with their multiple knowledges and values have coexisted for centuries, albeit in unequal ways. An example of the inherent tensions between these multiple conceptions is this: some studies are premised on the idea that statistical measures of Indigenous student success are inappropriate while others use statistical measures of Indigenous student success as the foundation for their findings!

The nature of published literature on Indigenous student success is interesting. Much of the literature is theoretical or policy, with few studies taking an explicitly empirical approach where data are gathered to address Indigenous student success. Some qualitative studies are

available. These seem to be characterized by small sample sizes and use primarily interviews and open questionnaires to collect data, sometimes incorporating arts-based approaches such as photo voice. Although I searched the hard copies of the last 5 years of *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, ERIC, CBCA databases searching “(Indigenous OR Aboriginal OR Native OR Native American) AND student AND (success OR achieve),” as well as similar searches on “Theses Canada” (government archives) and ProQuest Theses, very few studies surfaced that directly address the meaning of success in public education at the K-12 level. For that reason, I have presented the studies I *did* find, as well as some studies within the larger body of literature that touch on ideas that impact success.

Acknowledging the ambiguity and multiple conceptions inherent in this discussion of the meaning of success, I now share some perspectives that, taken together, give form to the topic. The words of Ermine (1995) are inspirational here: “You can see that in writing about Indian education I am often so close that I can only see one side. Rarely am I able to step back and see one or two other sides but it takes many of us to see more than that” (p. 42). Rabb (1989) describes this approach as the “polycentric perspective.”

Canada-wide studies on successful schools

In several instances, case studies have been used to highlight successful Indigenous education environments. These studies do not focus on defining success, but on showcasing schools that are deemed successful. Their criteria for success will be described shortly. One large-scale example is the Society for Excellence in Education’s publications *Sharing Our Success: Ten Case Studies in Aboriginal Schooling* (Bell, 2004) and *Sharing Our Success: More Case Studies in Aboriginal Schooling* (Fulford, 2007), with the purpose of examining “a set of schools which are producing tangible progress for Aboriginal learners in order to identify practices associated with their success” (Fulford, 2007, p. 13). Each report is hundreds of pages long, providing full context for each case study, as well as presenting patterns or findings. The methodology section of the 2004 report describes an initial quantitative data collection orientation. It evolved into a qualitative approach once researchers (four out of seven of whom were Indigenous) began working in the actual school contexts. This included semi-structured interviews, qualitative interviews, surveys and classroom observations (Bell, 2004). The findings of the 2004 report acknowledge the “rich diversity in approaches and circumstances” of

the schools but find similar elements of their success which include:

Strong leadership and governance structures, often with long tenure, high expectations for students, focus on academic achievement and long-term success, secure and welcoming climates for children and families, respect for Indigenous culture and traditions to make learning relevant, quality staff development and provision of a wide range of programs/supports for learning. (Bell, 2004, p. 13)

Elaboration on these themes includes the importance of trust and respect in developing school climates that engaged both students and their families, and holistic thinking and programming to encompass physical, emotional, spiritual and mental needs (Bell, 2004). The report recognizes differences in funding and resources, especially between band-operated and province-operated schools and acknowledges the “multiple barriers that inhibit their students’ learning” describing each school as “solution-oriented, developing and adapting educational practices to fit its particular challenges” (Bell, 2004, p. 13).

Defining success is an intriguing aspect of this report. While Bell (2004) reports that the schools had different levels of compliance (and willingness to comply!) with standardized, publicized measures, and that the *purpose* of monitoring student programming and program effectiveness was internal (placing students, programming for students and improving programs), what success *means* is not as clear. In the selection of these successful schools for the study, the researchers originally intended to use purely quantitative data such as graduation rates, provincial test results and satisfaction surveys, but found that the availability of these data was limited. In the end, nominations, some quantitative data, and consultation with Departments of Education, school districts, First Nations groups, universities, and the federal government were used to select sites, with criteria being “performance on a range of indicators,” willingness to participate in the study, and geographic, governance and delivery mode diversity (Bell, 2004, p. 21). In Fulford’s follow-up study in 2007, the criteria for success were similarly imprecise:

The selection of schools relied primarily on a nomination process in consultation with Ministries of Education, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, regional Aboriginal authorities, school districts and the Principal Investigator. The criteria for selection included: evidence of student success on provincial exams or other standardized assessments, student attendance and engagement; retention and graduation rates, parent and community satisfaction and support, integration of culture and language into programming; percentage of graduates employed or enrolled in post-secondary education or training, etc.; innovative programming and instruction, staff development and other relevant indicators that emerged through the consultative process. A variety of governance, grade configurations and delivery models were purposefully represented in

the sample. (p. 17)

Final decisions for school selection also rested on practical factors such as where schools were located and their willingness and ability to complete requisite research and administrative tasks relating to the study (Fulford, 2007, p. 17). This imprecise selection process for successful schools is indicative of the competing definitions of success seen in Indigenous education today, including the mismatch of Eurocentric and Indigenous priorities, and the difficulty in differentiating *conditions* for success from definitive *features* of success itself.

Fulford's follow-up report (2007) outlined very similar attributes of successful schools to those presented by Bell in 2004:

High expectations for student achievement, effective leadership and governance structures, multiple programs and support for learners, secure and welcoming climates for children and families, grounded in Aboriginal culture, language and traditions, high percentage of Aboriginal staff and quality staff development, assessment linked to instructional and planning decisions, vigorous community partnerships and beneficial external alliances. (Fulford, 2007, pp. 11, 12)

Later, the report highlights specific successful practices identified in each school and presents conglomerated data such as a summary of promising literacy practices, a summary of assessment practices, and an overview of Indigenous language learning across the schools.

Anuik's (2008) book review of Fulford's (2007) work praises the approach taken on considering success:

It complicates the picture of Aboriginal education by challenging us to reconsider the broad brush of statistical depictions and to ask where the successes in Aboriginal education are occurring, why they occur, and their effect on how we think about performance and training for the First Peoples of Canada. (p. 168)

The Canadian Council of Learning also highlighted particular schools' successes in a case study format (Blue Quills College, 2009). The case studies consider education from a broader perspective than the schooling studies cited above. The four case studies often contain multiple programs, and together encompass education experiences as broad as adult language immersion, curriculum development, summer language and culture camp, photographic exhibit, and radio and television shows. In the study, promising practices are founded on place, spirit and Indigenous language, which are seen as the base of Indigenous knowledge, and also embody one or all of the foundational principles. They have been included here verbatim because of their depth and complexity:

- improves the learning of Aboriginal individuals (First Nations, Métis Inuit) and respects diverse learning styles in a holistic manner based on their spiritual, intellectual, emotional and physical selves,
- legitimizes the voice of all Aboriginal people (First Nations, Métis Inuit) through *place* and culture, including the circle of learning and respecting how one generation passes knowledge and culture on to other generations,
- encourages *a transformative approach* to learning which embraces Indigenous knowledge, experience and knowing while respecting mainstream knowledge and experience, and include both a formal and informal approach for learning programs that reach all ages,
- supports *learning* and *community* by linking and encouraging the involvement of parents, Elders and community in order to build a successful learning continuum and healthy resilient communities. (p. 4, emphasis in original)

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) is another source for case studies on successful education programs for Indigenous learners. Various curricula across Canada are described with attention paid to *how* the development occurred, and by whom, and the values upon which they are founded. For example, the Dene Kede curriculum, developed in conjunction with Elders, is based on relationship to the land, relationship to the spiritual world, relationship with others and relationship to the self. From there, fifty thematic units were developed that integrate math, literacy and all other learning strands (RCAP, 1996).

Student perceptions of success

Lewthwaite and McMillan (2010) took a much different tack than the case study approaches described above. They asked Inuit students in two communities about their views of success in school. Questionnaires and interviews asked students to describe a time when they had been successful in school, what their teachers did to help them learn, what was happening in the classroom when they were learning best, and what could change (at the teacher and classroom level) to assist them in learning. This study is fairly unique in that success itself – not just the factors contributing to it – is discussed, and it is discussed from a student perspective. Lewthwaite and McMillan (2010) found that all participants viewed success as “working to an educational end” (p. 152) or assisting someone to do the same within the context of first-hand experience. Success was tied to the satisfaction of the accomplishment as evidenced by a completed product, with minimal reference to external formal evaluation. Persevering and “working to an end” were valued by Inuit students and teachers alike (Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010, pp. 152, 154). The role of teachers in creating positive learning environments was seen as

pivotal, and linked to teachers' ability to show that they care and to "make you work," balanced with not "just hav[ing] to have things her way" (Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010, p. 156).

Using a sharing circle approach, Bazylak (2002) worked with five female Indigenous high school students in Saskatoon to discuss success. He did not directly define success but seemed to leave this up to the interpretation of the participants. His stated purpose was, "to highlight Aboriginal students' perceptions of their own success as a feature of problem-solving that focuses on positive factors with a solution-based philosophy driving educational transformation" (p. 135).

In his findings, Bazylak (2002) emphasized balance by using a Medicine Wheel framework that included the four directions and presented success factors within mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical dimensions with "an ecological centre and volition at the core" and "teachers" as a "final ring surrounding the whole" (p. 136). He found that "factors that encourage success" include:

- a new understanding of spirituality
- family involvement
- friends
- development of self-identity
- multicultural environment
- support programs
- drug and alcohol avoidance
- Aboriginal teachers
- grade 12 diploma
- relevant curriculum
- supportive and flexible teachers
- nurturing a gift (p. 149)

Conversely, "factors that encourage failure" were found to be:

- contrasting world views
- lack of parental involvement
- lack of an engaging curriculum
- schools are goal-oriented
- lack of cultural content in school
- low teacher expectations
- drug and alcohol use
- loss of Native language instruction
- placement into alternative programs
- lack of career counseling
- lack of teacher flexibility (p. 149)

The varied and comprehensive scope of these findings makes it clear that achieving success is a complex process that stretches beyond what occurs in the academic realm.

Desmoulins (2009) addressed student perceptions of their success and compared these with the perceptions of educators, framed within a study on the identity-formation of Indigenous students in an urban high school. Her discussion is highly nuanced with some central points being the idea of Indigenous student agency, the importance of relationships to success, and the idea that students may leave and return to school as part of their journey.

Melnechenko and Horsman (1998) conducted a study designed to find out what led to success in middle school for Indigenous students. Students' quotations about the meaning of success show great variation. In some cases, it is about disposition and personal decision-making such as working hard and resisting distractions, in other cases it is about inherent intelligence and talent, and in still other cases it relates to performance in class. The influences of family, good relationships with teachers, curriculum and programs, and peers were found to be the main themes in students' responses about what led to their success.

An indirect consideration of students' perceptions of success is presented by Hewitt and Lee (2012). The Indigenous student participants were not directly asked what success looks like, but were given an open opportunity to share about their exchange trip to another Indigenous community. Elements they shared included building relationships, connecting with culture, expanding horizons and combating racism and prejudice as core issues in their reflection on their learning. In light of the project, Hewitt and Lee (2012) state, "The value of educational experiences and programs should not be measured solely by looking at numerical results, such as grades or days in school, but rather equally by measuring the effects on students' confidence and dreams for the future" (p. 113).

Community perceptions of success

Kirkness (1998), in her well-cited article, *Our peoples' education: Cut the shackles; cut the crap; cut the mustard*, advocates for a pointed consideration of education in each community. She presents Linklater's questions: "Where are we now? How did we get to where we are? Where do we want to go? How will we get to where we want to go? How will we know when we are there?" (Kirkness, 1998, p. 14). With respect to the last question, she says:

You will know when you have achieved your goal of quality education when your

children are enjoying the challenge of school/learning, when their self-esteem and self-confidence are evident, when your children are proud of who they are, when their links with the older generations are made.... You will know when you have achieved your goal when most children who enter your system graduate and go on to further education or get a job, when they are living happy and fulfilled lives of their own making. (p. 15)

This could be seen as a pointed definition of success. It is also broad enough to apply to many educational contexts. *How* to achieve this success is also described:

Our independence education will be based on a marriage of the past and the present. It will honor our cultures, which include our values, our languages, and our people's contributions to the development and progress of this vast country. Most importantly, you will have found in your quest for a meaningful education for your school or community that the answers you have been seeking can be found within yourselves, within your own communities. (p. 15)

This focus on Indigenous peoples and communities as the source of quality education for Indigenous students is part of a strong trend beginning with *Indian control of Indian education* (1972) and continuing through the Canadian Council on Education's work (2007, 2009) as well as recent media response to the proposed *First Nations Education Act* (Chiefs of Ontario, 2013).

Berger (2008) studied success in Inuit schools from the perspectives of Inuit parents and community members by interviewing adults in one Nunavut community. He found that Inuit felt that standards were low in Inuit schools: "I always feel that our kids are being cheated out of that system. 'Cause they can't compete when they go to college or university down south" (participant, cited in Berger, 2008, p. 126). At the same time that higher standards were sought in the Eurocentric school system, Inuit parents wanted to see an increase in Inuit culture and language in the schools, demonstrating the cross-cultural complexity of seeking success. Agbo (2004) also participated in discussions and interactions with community members as well as non-Indigenous teachers in a northern Ontario First Nations community. His findings regarding the successful teaching of language and culture focus heavily on the relationship between teachers and community members. This is evidenced by participant statements such as:

Teachers are different from us and they've got the way they do things and we also have our own way of doing things. I know parents won't come to teachers if they don't go to them. Teachers have to show understanding of our way of life and our problems." (participant, cited in Agbo, 2004, p. 20)

Agbo's findings demonstrate the community belief in the necessity of relationship in creating conditions for Indigenous student success, an idea strongly confirmed in the literature (e.g.,

Goulet, 2001; RCAP, 1996).

Teacher factors

Several studies highlight the influence of teachers' knowledge and disposition on Indigenous students' success. The way teachers interact with their Indigenous students can foster success or become a barrier to it. Little Bear (2009) lists teachers along with racism and social problems as barriers to Indigenous students' success! In specific, he names "lack of knowledge on the part of teachers regarding culture, history, language, and social conditions of Aboriginal people" as one of the "hindrances to learning" (p.15). Gray's (2011) photo voice findings confirm this, teacher behaviour being described by a student as a determinant of peer attitudes, which then impact social relationships, and self esteem:

I felt insignificant because there were very few First Nations kids there, and a lot of the teachers – not all of them, but – they were pretty condescending, towering over me, trying to fix me, you know, and so a lot of the other students felt superior...so they used to pick on other Native kids, and myself... until we stood up.... it's an ongoing cycle – we'll always be considered less than the normal, and it's unfortunate, you know, 'cause we end up going through that, feeling like that, until we are 17, 18, until we finally just get sick of it...and either rise above it or commit suicide – either literally, or by falling into a bottle, or a needle, or whatever, just to deaden the senses. (p. 21)

This quotation gives a poignant, long view of the potential influence of teacher attitudes. With reference to her own study as well as St. Denis's (2010) findings, Gray reframes "drop-out rates" as "push-out rates," referring to "structural inequalities" in which teachers might unconsciously participate, thereby inhibiting the success of their Indigenous students (p. 23).

This, however, is not the only school experience represented in Gray's study. The same participant spoke about another school where he felt "on even keel" (p. 21) after a tour and meeting some of the staff, which demonstrates to me that school staff (presumably teachers) can also have a very positive effect, even on a student who has experienced school negatively in the past due to teacher influence. Bell (2004) also identified teacher attitude as a variable in creating successful schooling experiences for Indigenous students. Some teacher factors that have been studied are educators maintaining silence around race, leading to ignoring inequity and maintaining a White status quo (Castagno, 2008), teachers' ability to connect classroom realities to students' worldview, culture and community, patterns of communication, and teachers' ability to notice and adapt to students' preferred learning styles (Agbo, 2004; Goulet, 2001). Many

studies have found that teachers' relationship with their students is a significant factor in teacher and student success (Goulet, 2001; Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010; Lipka et al., 2005). In Lipka et al.'s (2005) study on teachers' ability to leverage cultural factors to improve student success in math, the authors state: "First and foremost was the long-term positive relationship between teacher and students that contributed to a classroom environment in which trust and mutuality were constructed over time" (p. 382). One manifestation of this was "the ways in which the teacher relinquished control of communication in order to foster student inquiry and promote math talk among a community of learners" (p. 382). This emphasis on teachers' ability to relinquish authoritarian control harkens back to Lewthwaite and McMillan's (2010) findings on students' own views of their success and is a primary finding in Oskineegish's (2013) work: "Successful education requires a shift from authoritative teacher to learner" (p. 97).

In St. Denis's (2010) extensive critical ethnography using open-ended questionnaires and focus group interviews with fifty-nine Indigenous public school educators, she found that "good teaching involves loving and caring for their students, communicating with the whole child, helping to find their students' gifts, developing pride and self-worth in their students, and creating a safe learning environment" (p. 7). Further, when addressing Indigenous teachers' perceptions of Settler Canadian teacher colleagues as allies, St. Denis (2010) found being "genuine, honest and trustworthy; good listeners; and persons who remained positive and open minded despite facing many challenges in education" (p. 8) to be key features. In addition, valued allies respected and supported the community by using its resources but not taking over or acting as "experts about or saviours of Aboriginal people and culture" (p. 8). Coming from Indigenous educators enmeshed in the public school system, these findings are very relevant for any practicing educator.

Saunders and Hill (2007), whose mixed-methods study drew upon the views of Haudenosaunee students and educators, address the potential for coalitions between educators, students and their families at a school-based level. They advocate for "reciprocal learning, community, and co-authorship" where educators work for Indigenous student success through a stance of learning from their students and their families, inviting meaningful community involvement in schools, and encouraging students to be self-directed in their learning (p. 1033). This view of the "teacher factors" in success depends on teachers as relationship-builders who genuinely value the knowledge and strengths of their Indigenous students, families and

community members.

Curriculum and Indigenous Knowledge

Donald (2012) points to meaning conveyed in the curriculum as foundational to Indigenous education and the Indigenous-Canadian relationship. For example, the fort, which is glorified in Canadian texts and historic sites, entrenches an image of Europeans as insiders and Indigenous people as outsiders (Donald, 2012). Content can lay the groundwork for interactions between students in the community of learners. Kanu (2006) explores this idea in her quantitative study where social studies grades are compared between Indigenous students who are studying in a class where Indigenous perspectives are infused and one where they are not. She found significantly higher grades were achieved by Indigenous students in the class with infused Indigenous perspectives. White and Cook (2001) speak about the importance of including traditional teachings in the curriculum as a way to support Indigenous students' learning while also "fostering a culture of human rights" (p. 331).

Battiste and Henderson (2009) state: "Indigenous Knowledge is foundational to the learning of Aboriginal people and is a part of the collective genius of humanity" (p. 5). Multiple arguments for the importance of naturalizing Indigenous Knowledge are presented, such as beginning to "neutralize racism, colonialism, and assumptions of the inferiority of Aboriginal peoples" (Little Bear, 2009, p. 24). However, Indigenous Knowledge cannot simply be slotted into Eurocentric worldviews (Battiste, 2013). One example of this is that "Elders, knowledge keepers and cultural workers are indispensable to the naturalization of IK" (Little Bear, 2009, p. 24).

The learning spirit

The holistic nature of Indigenous Knowledge assumes that learning has a spiritual nature. This is clear in multiple studies (e.g., Barrett, 2010; Curwen Doige, 2003; Ermine, 1995; Vizina, 2007) and fits with the foundations laid in the Indigenous models presented above. Spirituality has vast applications such as speaking in a soft voice in order to be careful of the spirit of the learner instead of criticizing, and the consideration of "good energy and kindness" in learning (Vizina, 2007, p. 28). Teachings such as trust and humility, as well as guidance on life's journey are also associated with the "learning spirit" (Vizina, 2007). The Canadian Council on Learning

presented an entire learning bundle on “the learning spirit,” recognizing that these premises are much overlooked in the present school system (Sankhulani, 2007). Barrett’s (2010) study speaking with educators (mostly First Nation, some Settler Canadian) on this topic included findings such as: “I think we have to decurricularize the curriculum and develop it in such a way that the Spirit is the center of that curriculum, and not have Spirit as a piggy-back to what is already there” (Delvin Kanewiyakiho in Barrett, 2010, p. 5). Some of her summary points were teaching from the land, teaching through dialogue, attending to students being good human beings, and recognizing the role of ceremony, story, art, song, dance and drama (Barrett, 2010).

Assessment

In keeping with a holistic model of education, assessment must also be holistic. The 1972 *Indian control of Indian education* document states: “eliminat[e] the use of I.Q. and standardized tests for Indian children. It has been shown that these tests do not truly reflect the intelligence of children belonging to minority, ethnic or other cultural backgrounds” (NIB/AFN, p 10). The Canadian Council on Learning models (2007, 2009) respond to this need. Verwood, Mitchell and Machado (2011) developed a sophisticated assessment model based on the Medicine Wheel. Indigenous student success is assessed using 4 components: “mental” (“critical thinking,” “research,” “resources,” “analysis”), “emotional” (“personal balancing,” “harmony” and “growth”), “physical” (“interaction with community,” “participation”) and “spiritual” (“respect of self and others,” “reflection,” “self-awareness”). This model does not condense down to a Eurocentric spreadsheet or final data point; instead, it draws in multiple factors for a holistic view.

These models contrast greatly with the Eurocentric measures most often used to determine levels of success in public school boards. This contrast does not remain neutral; Eurocentric measures are privileged over Indigenous-inspired ones. This was clear in the results White and colleagues drew from qualitative surveys with public educators implementing an Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement in British Columbia: “it became apparent that most of our respondents perceive that success is still generally measured using only Eurocentric means; successes that do not fit the Eurocentric norm are not often identified or celebrated as such” (White et al., 2012, p. 51). Anuik (2008) also recognizes and takes issue with this practice: “contemporary policymakers bemoan the perceived low achievements of Aboriginal students in

formal learning” based on statistics including graduation, attrition, and incarceration rates but “enlightened scholars speak to the faultiness of portrayals painted with numerical data and ask if the instruments for measuring performance accurately tell the story of teaching and learning for Aboriginal students” (Anuik, 2008, p. 167). From these perspectives, it becomes clear that assessment of success must evolve along with perceptions of success in Indigenous education.

Control

The most recent Truth and Reconciliation Commission report states that Residential School survivors “want control over the way their children and grandchildren are educated. Reconciliation will come through the education system” (2012, p. 7). This has been a theme for decades in Canada (NIB/AFN, 1972, 1988) and continues to be emphasized (McPherson & Rabb, 2011). Torralba (2012) showed that education is being used for asserting identity and control. In his study, which takes an historical, literature-based perspective of the Yupiit in Alaska, he explicates the transformation of institutions including, and affecting, education, including engagement in “socio-political participation” in economic spheres, “place-based and cultural-based pedagogies” transforming schooling and the leadership role of community leaders and Elders in directing change in local schools (p. 38). Here, once again, education is seen through a holistic lens, embedded in social, political and cultural processes. The idea of control is also addressed by Castagno and Brayboy (2008) in their extensive literature review on culturally responsive schooling for Indigenous students from an American perspective. They address many aspects of schooling, but centre on self-determination (along with racism and Indigenous epistemologies) as highly important and often overlooked in schools.

Restoule (2008) looks at public school systems that *do* allow for Indigenous influence on the education system, while noting that control is currently limited. He highlights the First Nations Education Initiative Committee in New Brunswick, which, through a formal relationship between several First Nations and the provincial government, serves Indigenous students through tuition agreements, funding Indigenous educators, cultural and learning resources, and other initiatives. He also highlights an Elder-in-Residence program in British Columbia where Elders are actively involved in schools through cultural teachings and leadership. Restoule’s view is that these programs have the potential to influence Indigenous self-esteem and identity, which could positively impact graduation rates (p. 382).

Education of all Canadians

The statement that the “principal problem in Aboriginal education in Canada is the education of Canadians” (Godlewska, Moore, & Bednasek, 2010, p. 417) is well supported by Indigenous scholars (NIB/AFN, 1972; Toulouse, 2013; TRC, 2012). The Truth and Reconciliation Interim Report stated that Residential School survivors “want the full history of residential schools and Aboriginal peoples taught to all students in Canada at all levels of study and to all teachers, and given prominence in Canadian history texts” (TRC, 2012a, p. 7). Despite ongoing focus on a fuller, more relational education, the fact remains that “Canadians have been denied the right to learn the truth about the diversity and beauty of the First Peoples of Canada” (Toulouse, 2013, p. 17). Considered through a lens of success, who knows what results we will see in the social, emotional, spiritual, physical and intellectual realms when Indigenous students are made to feel secure and valued through a public education that honours their worldviews, knowledges, histories and people! And who knows what the success of Settlers will be like when they have this understanding!

How this study contributes to the literature

In the literature I have reviewed, there is general agreement amongst Indigenous scholars and leaders in Canada about what constitutes success in education. Documents such as *Indian control of Indian education* (1972), the Final Report of the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (1996), the recent Canadian Council on Learning documents (2007, 2009) and Toulouse’s *Beyond shadows* (2013) create a remarkably cohesive description of success in education, sharing characteristics such as holistic, lifelong learning, relationship and mutuality between Indigenous and Settler Canadians and their knowledges, and a historical view, often recognizing colonialism and the intergenerational effects of Residential Schools. Indigenous self-determination is emphasized, with education being seen as a key component in building a strong future. It is also clear that this Indigenous view of education is not generally honoured in the present Eurocentric school system.

What is not as clear in the literature is how these views of success might look in a practical, on-the-ground sense in public school systems. In the present study, by asking

practising Indigenous educators in an urban centre about how they would describe success for Indigenous students, the theoretical and the practical meet, the result being tangible, forward-thinking perspectives offered to educators and researchers. Enriching this dynamic is the fact that these educators are well-read in both Indigenous and Settler scholarship and policy, and established in both Indigenous communities and Eurocentric school systems, allowing them to bring unique and broad perspectives. In fact, some of the literature cited here was brought to my attention by participants themselves, who interpreted and applied it during their interviews. Thus, I hope that this study can provide some common ground for theory and practice, and some common ground for Indigenous and Settler perspectives in public boards.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Acknowledging the methodological traditions I come from

As a researcher of European descent in my twenty-fifth year of immersion in Eurocentric educational institutions, I acknowledge the complexity of seeking to draw upon principles outlined by Indigenous scholars primarily *for* Indigenous scholars (Absolon & Willett, 2005; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008) while also working with Eurocentric paradigms of qualitative research, established methodologies and methods, the expectations of the university I attend and the government organization that partially funds my work, and my own worldview which draws upon my family, school, class, gender and cultural experiences. It is also important for me to acknowledge that my undergraduate and master's level courses presented primarily Eurocentric worldviews, methodologies and methods. Although I was exposed to some Indigenous thinkers through readings and guest speaker appearances, the overwhelming majority of input has been Eurocentric. Thus, although combining Indigenous methodologies with Eurocentric frameworks has been problematized (Kovach, 2009), I feel that citing both the Indigenous influences and the Eurocentric influences on my research approach is honest. I seek to be transparent about my identity as a European Canadian under heavy influence of Eurocentric traditions who is seeking to increase my learning and application of Indigenous approaches.

Seeking to honour Indigenous worldviews and methodologies

This study was designed to honour the principles of Indigenous research as I have come to understand them along my journey as a beginning researcher. Designed to draw upon the wisdom gained through life and professional experience of Indigenous people and on the topic of Indigenous students, the inspiration for this study came from the joy, connection and learning I experienced in conversations as an undergraduate thesis student exploring the experiences of Indigenous people living in Kingston, Ontario (Moon, 2008). The inspiration grew during Margaret Kovach's July 2012 address at Lakehead University on the topic of Indigenous Methodologies and in reading her book on the same topic (2009), through the writing of other leaders in the field of Indigenous methodologies (Wilson, 2008; Smith, 2012) and the role modeling and mentorship of my Lakehead University professors who have worked within

Indigenous communities with participatory and relational stances (Agbo, 2004; Berger, 2008). Considering Kovach's (2009) emphasis on Indigenous leadership in Indigenous research and with a desire to conduct research with integrity and relevance, I was guided by an informal "circle of advisors." I asked three Indigenous educators and one fellow master's student, one of whom was a close friend, to provide support and to correct me when necessary. They advised me on the formulation of the research question and the interview guide, on proper protocol, and on conducting the interviews.

Working within Eurocentric methodologies

From the perspective of methodologies, this study works within a constructivist worldview in that it seeks participant perspectives in constructing a model of what success means for Indigenous students in public boards (Creswell, 2009). Critical theory underpins the stance I take in questioning the phenomenon of Indigenous success within a Eurocentric school system, drawing particularly on Freire's work on dialogue (1970) and Sensoy and Diangelo's (2013) foregrounding of privilege and inequity in school settings.

A qualitative research design was chosen for this work to solicit a "holistic account" through "reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involved in a situation, and generally sketching the larger picture that emerges" (Creswell, 2013, p. 186). Elements of the grounded theory approach inspired the study, including the centrality of participants' views and "constant comparison" of data and memos across the data set (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 189). I also used the grounded theory approach of first identifying the themes found in the data and then comparing it to the literature to avoid relying on borrowed concepts (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

I do not claim to present a comprehensive theory through this work, but rather draw attention to priorities and perspectives that run through the data to answer the question of what success looks like for Indigenous students in public boards from the perspective of Indigenous educators within those boards.

Research question

My research question was: *How do Aboriginal educators describe "success" for Aboriginal students in a large urban public school board?* This led directly to the main question

asked to Indigenous educator participants: How would you describe success for an Aboriginal student in the public school board?

Site description

The research site was an urban centre in Canada with more than one publicly funded school board as well as privately funded schools. The public boards are large, culturally diverse, and relatively well-resourced. As a result, there is an extensive organizational structure including educators who are teachers, learning leaders, school-based administrators and system-based administrators. Some Indigenous students enrolled in the boards' schools have lived in the city all of their lives. Others move between this urban centre and First Nations communities within the province or between provinces.

Data collection

Interviews. Individual interviews were conducted in March, April, May and June, 2013. They occurred in a variety of locations, dependent on the preference and convenience of the participant. Kitchen tables in family homes, coffee shop booths, offices, and a family room were used. Participants were asked for consent to audio record the interviews, and all of them agreed to this. Recording was on a small, discreet device to allow for a relational atmosphere where a computer was not needed. I took notes by hand as back-up. In one case, the interview was cut short, so email was used to gather some more of the ideas the participant wished to share.

Semi-structured interviews have long been established as central tools in qualitative research and are used in many studies in this field. They are often chosen for – and seen to be limited by – their ability to gain a participant's own perspective on the subject being studied (Creswell, 2012). They can be conducted face-to-face, on the phone, or over email. In my case, all three modes were used. With all seven participants, in-depth interviews were conducted in person, and follow-up work was done over email or by phone. The consent form stated that the interview was expected to last 60-75 minutes, however participants were told that the interview could be as short or long as they liked and that they were invited to take the lead. The shortest interview was 20 minutes and was followed up by fairly brief email correspondence, the longest was 2 hours and 10 minutes, and the others varied in length between 40 and 90 minutes. Phone

and email follow-up was usually fairly brief (except for one longer conversation that elaborated on a participant's findings) and focused on participants' feedback or additions to findings.

The interview guide (Appendix B) was provided by email to the participants before the interview, and was also available in hard copy at the time of the interview. The participants were presented with the first interview question, and made aware that the remaining questions were rephrased versions of the first one or were optional supplementary questions that they could choose to answer – or they could ignore these and take their own direction. For some participants, the supplementary questions were used to get the conversation re-started when one thought had finished. For others, the guide was rarely referred to. More than once, a participant asked, “So what else do you want to know?” Sometimes, my answer to this question was not a prompt from the interview guide, but something that followed naturally from the conversation. In one case I answered, “What do we do to get there?” in response to a participant's description of a successful setting that I found somewhat abstract. Another prompt that I spontaneously used when a participant seemed to be stalled – which was sometimes the case when discussing the constraints of the present school system that seemed to limit success – was, “So if you were [the highest official in the school board], what would you do?” Or, “If everything was going in a good direction, what would I see in 10 years if I came back?” Interviews generally ended by thanking participants for sharing their time, and reminding them that I would send the transcript for review.

Participant selection. I knew, personally and/or professionally, six of the seven participants, and knew of the seventh through mutual contacts. I had interacted closely with most of the participants in professional and/or informal settings, which meant that trust, rapport, and mutual esteem was already established. This fits with the Indigenous Methodology principles presented by Kovach (2009) where situating oneself and interacting in a relational way are essential. I formally invited one participant (the one I had not yet met) to take part in the study through email, and set interview times with the others through various combinations of informal conversations, emails, texting, phoning, and communicating through mutual contacts.

Participants. The participants were Indigenous educators holding various positions in the public school systems in the urban centre under study, including classroom level and

leadership level roles. Some worked full-time in one school and others worked with several schools. Each of them self-identified as an “Aboriginal educator.” The participants come from a variety of rural, reserve and urban settings, several citing experiences in other provinces and educational contexts. Participants’ years of formal teaching experience ranged from approximately five years to approximately twenty years; on the whole, I would describe the group as experienced. Many of the participants held or were planning to undertake master’s degrees and several were involved in formal or informal research within their boards through their educator roles. Thus, as a group, they were very well-read and brought both academic and practical dispositions as well as personal, family and cultural perspectives outside of their formal roles.

Indigenous protocols. Following the guidance of Indigenous mentors within my informal “circle of advisors,” I used tobacco protocol to begin each interview, thanking the participant for their time and engagement with me. I also presented each participant with a coffee card as a gift of thanks. In my approach as an interviewer, I tried to be a listener much more than a speaker, encouraging participants to take the lead. I drew this approach from interaction with Elders in my personal life and teaching career. Ironically, at the end of one interview when my interactions with the participant became more conversational, the participant said that s/he appreciated the reciprocity s/he felt in that form of interaction. I learned as I went!

Data management

I transcribed one interview immediately following meeting with the participant, and the rest were transcribed in July, August, and early September, 2013. The transcripts were then sent to participants with an invitation to review them and report any concerns. No participant reported concerns. Next, “key findings” were typed up based on reading the transcript and listening to the recording at least twice. The key findings were sent to each participant at the end of August or beginning of September with another invitation to review. Only one participant responded, and s/he was happy with the key findings. In November, I wrote an application to share the thesis findings at an academic conference. To verify that the study summarized the participants’ views, I sent each of them the “findings and interpretations” and “educational importance” sections of that written application. Four of seven participants responded, all

positively. In December, I sent the Connected Beads Model (presented in the findings section of this thesis) and a brief written summary to the participants with an invitation to review. One participant wrote back in support of the model and with some added perspectives, which I incorporated into this thesis. Finally, a customized version of the full thesis was sent to each participant. In the one hundred page document, I highlighted only the words of the participant to whom the document was sent, giving the opportunity for each person to verify that the presentation of the quotations was true to her/his intent. All but one participant responded verbally or through email to say that that they were happy with or did not have concerns about the thesis. At the time, some had read the entire document and others had read parts of it. To track this multi-stepped member checking process (Sandelowski, 2008) a chart was created to track all data sent to participants as well as their responses.

Data analysis

In September and October, I reviewed the audio of each interview several times. During this process, I began open coding (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). This took the form of highlighting directly on the transcripts ideas and quotations that appeared to be of primary importance to each participant as I re-listened to their interviews. I also added to my key findings notes for individual participants during this process. From September to November, I undertook focused coding in my comparison and synthesis of “the most significant and frequent initial codes” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 193) that I identified in the data, laying out working models as I processed the data. I used constant comparison and thematic analysis (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013) drawn from the transcribing, re-listening, and key finding stages that allowed me to centre on common themes as well as notice anomalies. This synthesis and experimentation with models coincided with deadlines for conference submissions and PhD applications, giving me impetus to draw clear conclusions from the data and to ask participants to verify these. In December, I undertook a final stage of data analysis that coincided with the formal thesis write-up. I carefully re-read each interview transcript to ensure that my developing models were inclusive of the key points each participant brought up. I also focused on sections that participants had noted as most important or over-arching, or on concepts or words that participants used extensively in their interviews, working to ensure that the participant’s own emphasis took precedence. In writing up the findings, I outlined the key themes that I identified

in the data, including participant voice and context, to the greatest possible extent. Finally, I interpreted the data as a model that connected these themes. I compared this model to those produced by Indigenous education researchers and discussed the relationships I discovered there.

Trustworthiness

In this section, I will use the qualitative concepts of transferability, credibility, dependability, and confirmability to address the “overall rigour” of this study (Given & Saumure, 2008).

Transferability “addresses the need to be aware of and to describe the scope of one’s qualitative study so that its applicability to different contexts (broad or narrow) can be readily discerned” (Given & Saumure, 2008, p. 896). This was addressed by detailed description of the research site, the participants and my relationships to them. This occurred in the methods section as well as the context given to participants’ quotations. From this information, readers can begin to conceptualize a context for the study, and thereby decide for themselves to what extent the findings may apply to other contexts under their consideration. Additionally, an (electronic) paper trail (Given & Saumure, 2008, p. 896) is on file, including audio files of the interviews, typed transcripts, key findings documents, working models, and the responses to these documents sent by participants (although not all participants responded). I have confidence that what I describe represents these Indigenous educators’ views of success. My confidence is drawn from participants’ affirmative responses, as well as my immersion in the data and my efforts to present ideas in context.

The conditions for credibility, “where the researchers have accurately and richly described the phenomenon in question” (Given & Saumure, 2008, p. 896) were pursued through prolonged engagement and member checking. I was engaged in the education community within which these educators work for four years, giving me the political, social and cultural context for what was shared (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). With four of the seven participants, I had engaged in conversations about Indigenous education before the study began. In addition, I had interacted with two more of the seven in group settings, exploring issues in Indigenous education and public education in our city together. These prior interactions gave me grounding for rich description of the participants’ views. As described in the methods section, member checking (Sandelowski, 2008) was conducted throughout the study, giving participants the opportunity to

review – and to refute – findings at multiple stages. The comments were all affirmative during these checks, such as, “AWESOME!” and “Thanks for sharing! Looks awesome – wow you captured so much; I am honoured!” However, if the comments had not been affirmed by any one of the participants, I would have revised my findings until they reflected the participants’ intentions, a process that I committed to from the beginning of the study and made explicit to the participants in the consent process and also during interviews if they expressed concern about the sensitive nature of anything they shared.

The dependability of the findings are based on the importance of clearly laying out procedure and research instruments so that if “similar conditions are applied, a similar explanation for the phenomenon could be found” (Given & Saumure, 2008, p. 896). The interview guide and consent form are attached (Appendices A, B), and variance from these is described in the methods section. In addition, several layers of “auditing” occurred throughout the process. The most formal was the conversations and drafts shared with my supervisor and committee member. As Settler Canadian scholars with experience in Indigenous education settings, their questions, critiques and affirmations helped me to be clear about the processes, findings and conditions of the study so that the findings will be dependable for those who may choose to build on them or replicate them. It is possible that as Settler Canadians, we missed the same things. The circle of advisors’ layer was an extra support. The advisors helped me to create favourable conditions in the first place, including choosing a relevant question and provided checkpoints throughout the process, as described in the methods section. A third layer was formal and informal conversations with other professors – inside Lakehead University and outside of it – where my methodology, methods and findings were under scrutiny. I was open to their criticism, and used it to build the dependability of the study.

Confirmability, “the need to ensure that the interpretations and findings match the data” (Given & Saumure, 2008, p. 897) was established through a long period of data analysis, multiple member checks, and the auditing processes described above. It was of utmost importance to me that participants were satisfied with how their views were represented in the findings, recognizing that as a Settler researcher interpreting Indigenous educators’ views, there was significant risk that my worldview and background assumptions could skew meaning. Confirmability (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2008) has been strengthened through reflexivity and the auditing role of my supervisor and committee member. As Maltreud (2001,

in RWJF, 2008) states, I am aware of my role in constructing knowledge from participants' words, and am aiming to be open about the background and perspectives that I bring to the work.

Limitations

The choice of participants in this study comes with inherent strengths and weaknesses. An inherent strength is that each of the participants has been successful in the Eurocentric school system, evidenced by the roles they currently hold within it, and has been successful in living out their Indigenous identity, evidenced by their self-identification as Aboriginal educators. However, by selecting these participants, I have excluded Indigenous people who have *not* been successful in the public school system or have chosen not to work within it for any number of reasons. Thus, I may be missing certain critical perspectives that could have provided completely new insights.

Ethical considerations

In addition to familiarizing myself with the Tri Council ethics policy, I attended to the OCAP (ownership, control, access, possession) guidelines presented by the First Nations Centre. This informed my decision to offer participants access and the opportunity to critique data and interpretations at multiple stages of the research process. The understanding that each participant is the owner of her/his own data was my motivation for taking the time to highlight each participant's direct quotations and paraphrased statements in the lengthy final thesis document, creating a more time-effective way for participants to review and control how their words were used. When the final version of the thesis was approved, I sent it to participants, recognizing that the document belongs to them and that they are free to use it however they choose. The finished thesis and executive summary was also sent to the school board for the wider education community's possession and use.

In the wording of emails that invited educators to participate in the study, or to review findings and interpretations, I consciously worded my invitations in ways that did not imply expectation or demand, but opportunity. One of the people in my informal circle of advisors helped me to think this through and gave me some wording to use. Subsequently, the wording of the interview guide was open-ended, valuing and welcoming "intuitive insight," and multiple

“variables or influences,” (Castellano, 2004, p. 104) rather than limiting the question and line of inquiry in a reductionist way.

Conscious of the reality that much research in Indigenous communities has benefited researchers more than participants (Smith, 1999), and has often had negative effects on the Indigenous people involved (Kovach, 2009), and with a desire to conduct research with integrity and relevance, I asked some Indigenous educators and a fellow master’s student, one of whom was a close friend, to form an informal “circle of advisors” to help guide me. These people took on different roles and were involved for different periods of time. They advised me, and where necessary, corrected me in forming a focal point for the study, in creating the interview guide, and in using cultural protocols such as offering tobacco to each participant at the beginning of the interview. This advice was also drawn out during interviews – some of the participants having already agreed to an advisory role and some being invited to give advice on the spot. Due to the level of trust, rapport and openness established in the interviews, participants took up the invitation to point out gaps in my thinking. For example, one participant pointed out that I was assuming a uniform reality when I spoke about “Aboriginal student success,” and reminded me of the individuality of each student and each context. S/he pointed out my inaccurate assumption more than once during that interview, helping me to see things more clearly, and improving the quality of interviews that followed.

The Lakehead University Research Ethics Board approved the research. This application process included letters of support from leaders in the particular urban Indigenous education community where research was proposed to take place. The school board where the research took place approved the research on the condition that it not be named.

Chapter 4: Findings and Interpretation

Introduction to Findings and Interpretation Section

Following an overview of my rationale for choices in wording and presenting quotations, the findings and my accompanying interpretation of them will be laid out in two parts. The first part draws on participants' views of what success itself *means*, including their considerations of how it is defined, and by whom. The second part is a model that incorporates elements of all seven participants' descriptions of success for Indigenous students in public school boards. The model was developed as I worked through participants' responses and identified several entwined, layered themes. The themes are essential to one another, and together build a powerful, cohesive picture – what I have called the connected beads model. To verify that this model does indeed address the views of the participants, I asked for their feedback and critique. All feedback I received was affirmative, with one caveat: to remember that this particular string of beads is part of a “wider tapestry.” In presenting the model, I begin by describing the strands at the core of the model- aspects of Indigenous student success that were highlighted by all seven participants and seen as essential to good practice. I then present the beads, which are participants' examples of tangible practices to build Indigenous student success.

I use direct quotations from participants extensively so that you, as a reader, have the benefit of participating in this conversational wisdom-seeking experience as close to firsthand as possible. As one element of the model is described, it inevitably overlaps with other elements of the model; as one quotation is presented, it will overlap with another, building a layered, circular picture of the findings.

Rationale for Decisions in Quotations and Wording in Findings and Interpretation

Masking female/male identities. In presenting participants' views, I chose to use “her/him” and “s/he” instead of using gender-specific pronouns to work toward maximum anonymity.

No pseudonyms. Participants' views are not linked to pseudonyms. This allows their ideas to be conveyed without having them connected together in a way that would build a participant profile, which would decrease anonymity.

Number words. In some cases, I state the exact number of participants who made a certain comment. In other instances, to promote flow, the word "several" is used to mean at least three participants, and "many" and "most" are used to mean four to six participants. "All" refers to seven out of seven participants.

Removal of references to specific Indigenous groups. Specific Indigenous groups are not mentioned because this could lead to the identification of the participant, or of the geographical area, and therefore the board. When a participant gave several examples to support an idea, I chose to present the more general examples. One such situation was using a story about teaching Treaty instead of one that referred to a traditional story specific to a certain Indigenous group.

Reasons for maintaining strict anonymity. Anonymity is of high importance for two reasons: in the ethics agreement I made with the school board that employed some of the participants, a condition of conducting the research was that the board not be identifiable. In the ethics agreement I made with individual participants, this requirement for anonymity was stated – although if it were up to me, I would have preferred to give the participants the choice between anonymity and being identified and credited with their ideas. As it stands, I have a professional commitment to the anonymity of each participant.

In maintaining anonymity in this way, we lose a degree of context and continuity for each participant, as well as the context of the place and individual Indigenous groups. This loss is significant. This study is not, however, a phenomenological attempt to discern the experiences of each Indigenous educator, but rather an opportunity to seek wisdom on the meaning of Indigenous student success in public education through the eyes of these educators. With respect to the loss of geographic and Indigenous group continuity, such as crediting a specific Indigenous group with a particular teaching or idea, I have the utmost respect and thankfulness

for the teachings and stories that were shared, and regret that they could not be directly cited as the specific, situated entities that they are.

Relative frequency of quotations. Multiple quotations are presented for each participant who was interviewed. Since some interviews were under one hour and others over two, there are more quotations to draw upon for some participants than for others. In addition, some participants provided succinct responses or treatments of certain topics while others used a storytelling approach, elaborated on a theory from the literature, or gave professional and personal examples. Some participants focused the majority of their interview on exploring one or two aspects of success while others touched on a wider variety of topics. For these reasons, ratios of quotations are not equal between participants, and some participants' quotations are much longer than others'. I have attended to the issues that each participant presented as central so that the ideas they emphasized are represented here.

Light editing. To present participants' views clearly, I removed some of the words that were used in initial interviews. Words such as "um," "so," "like," "you know?" and "right?" that were used in verbal responses were removed in the published quotations if they did not appear to be intended to add meaning. Repeated words or phrases were also removed if it appeared that the participant was repeating in order to gather her/his thoughts instead of repeating for emphasis. Minor grammatical incongruences were corrected. In most cases, I also removed my own words and presented participants' words in an uninterrupted format. In one case, I included my own words in pointed brackets (<>) because my part of the conversation seemed important for readers to see. Another form of light editing was the use of square brackets. These were used to generalize references so that particular schools or programs would not be identified or to add in an extra word or tweak a phrase to create greater flow. In a few cases, instead of using square brackets, a number that could be used to identify a school or program was simply changed. Another light editing aspect is italics. I have added them at my discretion to highlight words on which participants put special emphasis.

There are two reasons for light editing: to lessen the possibility that participants could be identified by verbal idiosyncrasies and to promote flow for readers. To help ensure that participants' meaning was preserved in this process, this thesis was sent to each participant, with

their own quotations highlighted. With only their own words highlighted, they had the opportunity to check how they were quoted, along with how these quotations were situated and explained.

Findings and Interpretation Part 1: Viewpoints on Success

Along with describing in depth their views on success, several participants spoke about contexts, perspectives, and histories of success in education. Following their lead, I will open this findings and interpretation section with the same intent. Please note that this preface to the idea of success will give a glimpse of what is to come; further elaboration will follow in later sections.

Several participants remarked that success is a very broad term. They also pointed out that it can be seen in different ways: “It has to do with just perception... It can be interpreted differently – it all depends on a person’s perspective.” And:

Success is relative to who you’re asking. So if you’re asking someone from a different perspective, or even from a different experience, they’re going to see it differently. Different doesn’t mean *bad*. But it is different.... It’s a loaded question!

Participants situated these perspectives in differences between Indigenous and Eurocentric worldviews, the history of Indigenous schooling in Canada, and in relation to the currently dominant measures of success in public systems, noting that descriptors of success are separate from its deeper meaning. This broad consideration of success, and the recognition that it is seen differently through Indigenous and Eurocentric lenses, is congruent with the work of leading Indigenous scholars (Battiste, 2013; CCL, 2007; Hampton, 1995b; Little Bear, 2009).

Success is personal. Of very high importance, participants pointed out that success is individualized. For example, “Success would just be for every student to reach and surpass their own personal potential. And that looks different for every individual person.” The participant elaborated further on the personal, contextual nature of success:

For everyone it can be personalized; individual, for every student, not only Aboriginal students. I’ve asked the same question to parents when I was doing my thesis... all their answers were different. So it could mean being a good person, it could mean an academic success, it can be more of a social-emotional, it can be physical in terms of showing up. So I think it’s really broad. And it can be determined and interpreted individually for every student.

The personal nature of success was emphasized by many participants with statements such as: “like all other students in our board, we want them to be successful, and whatever that looks like for them,” and “I don’t know if it could be measured. I mean, we use public system or [provincial guidelines] to guide that process, but really, I think it’s up to the individual. The individual feels success and what it means for them,” and, “We have 250 students and I can give you 250 success stories.” Particular suggestions and examples of how to foster this individualized success will be presented as beads in a later section.

The premise that success is personal reflects central elements of the CCL (2007) First Nations Lifelong Learning Model: “the individual’s learning cycle” and “the individual’s personal development,” tied dynamically to “sources and domains of knowledge” and “the community’s well-being” (p. 18-19), connections which are also drawn by participants in this study. Personalizing learning is also a focal point in research and policy outside of Indigenous circles (Bray, 2014; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2014; Davis, 2008).

Not different- but not the same either. One participant made this statement:

I think success for Aboriginal students doesn’t look any different than success for other students, right? I think personalizing the learning experience for any student is what eventually is going to lead to their success, whether they’re Aboriginal or not.

When initially asked to describe success for Indigenous students in public boards, several participants’ responses were similar:

I would describe success... for an Aboriginal student in a public board to be present, to be engaged, to attend, to participate, to feel confident in... what they’re learning and what they’re doing. Really, it’s no different than any other student... but, it’s not the same either.

Similarly, another participant responded, “I would say that my hope would be that success for an Aboriginal student in 2013 is the same as success for any student.” Following the statement that success should look the same for Indigenous students as it does for other students, each participant went on to situate this statement in holistic, historical, cultural and/or personal contexts, which will be shared in the following sections.

Indigenous or Eurocentric? “I think another important factor in all this is, what are we measuring, right? Are we measuring traditional Aboriginal values and are we measuring what’s more important in today’s Western society?” This question was voiced by many participants, and took multiple directions as they considered it. One participant said:

Typically, the way society sees success is from a Westernized pedagogy. But when you’re talking about an Indigenous pedagogy, it’s very different. It doesn’t mean it’s less expectation, it’s just the expectation, actually, is bigger. It’s more comprehensive. When you’re looking at developing and uncovering those gifts, as I mentioned earlier, you’re looking at coming to see those things that help make who you are, but those gifts that you’re going to help share... traditionally, from a *very* young age... when they played those games, [community members] would see who had the skills to help make – to help grow and develop, so that they may be the camp crier, or they might be the ones that would be lead warrior because of the skills they had, or they would be the one leading the hunt, so that then it was about developing those skills through those games, through those stories, so that when they became old enough, then they had nurtured those skills, so that then they could go back and help their community survive. So it goes back to reciprocity.

This view that in an Indigenous pedagogy there are higher expectations for success than in a Eurocentric pedagogy is refreshing, particularly considering the deficit tendencies of the perspectives presented in the media (e.g., Friesen in *Globe and Mail*, 2013), government statements (e.g., Valcourt in Mas, 2013a), and academic literature (CCL, 2007; Little Bear, 2009). This higher expectation of success resonates with Hampton’s (1995a) work with First Nations learning in the university context and is central to the model presented in this work.

A linear conception of success was contrasted with a cyclical view. One participant explored this idea: “Success would mean that you fulfilled something, right? But it doesn’t necessarily mean it’s the end of anything, either. It would be continuous. It would just keep going from that one success to another, hopefully.” Later in the interview, s/he elaborated further:

I don’t know where I learnt this, but we don’t, we’re not supposed to think linear. We’re not thinking like this, because then we’re assuming that there’s an end. And when you think in a circle, there is no end. You just keep going, right around. It’s not this, ‘OK, I’ve reached this point now. Now what?’

This view questions the Eurocentric model of outcomes and end point goals. The distinction prevailed in participants’ responses – their conceptions of success, although sometimes focused on particular short-term goals, were more holistic, valuing balance. The participant quoted above linked the cyclical view of success to balance:

Success is in many different forms, and if you want to look at it as components, like a Medicine Wheel component, I think that's what it would be, is finding achievements in each component, whether it be a day, a week, a month, a year. Because the whole purpose of the wheel is that it's cyclical; it never stops, right? And when you have each one of those components taken care of in a day, let's say, then there's that balance. So success is kind of balance. Having those needs met.

This view of success seemed to tie into the personalized, individualized view that many participants seemed to view as definitive. One participant told a story to illustrate this point:

I'm actually really growing to hate that word just because of how many different ways we can use it. But I guess, like all other students in our board, we want them to be successful, and whatever that looks like for them. So, you know, for my brother, he never finished high school, but he went on to work and he does what he loves.... Is he successful? In my mind, yes he is. In the minds of maybe, the stats of the province, maybe not. He might be one of those drop-outs or those leavers or those non-completers, or whatever they're calling them these days. And they're being categorized into one of these pillars, right? So, I guess if we're looking at success from a statistical perspective, it's askew for me, in my mind.

S/he went on to problematize the notion that success is defined as the completion of high school, questioning who has the power to decide, both at the school system level and the classroom level:

How are we deciding what that looks like? How are we deciding if that's right? And how is that applying to Aboriginal students who come from such a complex background that graduating is probably not a priority for them. Or it's not something that they value as much as, say, doing well at the next big powwow, or participating in that family's ceremony, you know? But because teachers – and I'm not saying this as a criticism – I'm just saying a lot of teachers don't have that background of understanding how important those things are to Aboriginal people. And so how do those feed into what's happening in that child's life in that classroom at that moment? And how are those being celebrated?

Considering the distinction between Indigenous and Eurocentric views on success was important to participants. A lack of equilibrium was pointed out by one participant, who explained coming to an awareness of this through an article (MacIntosh, 1990) we had both read on White privilege.

What is our system founded on? The very Westernized... very White way of seeing things... and doing. So right from the get-go, there's barriers. But I find people don't want to be honest and look at those barriers. You know, and not that that's right/wrong, but ... the difference for that is what creates – is what becomes almost the foundation for the inability for our students to be successful.

Later in the interview, s/he tied this to colonial history: “Within the public system, there’s still elements, I even believe, that still very much resonates colonization and Residential Schools. Because it’s still about conforming,” a statement that connects to the work of Desmoulins (2009), Hookimaw-Witt (1998), and McPherson (2011). S/he went on to explain her/his view that “our Aboriginal students who can’t conform are the ones who struggle the most. And the ones who *can* conform for whatever reason, or multiple elements that have impacted... know how to navigate both worlds.”

This view of equating success in Western schooling to conformity is similar to the concern raised by Berger, Epp and Møller (2006), who spoke about a possible correlation between Inuit students losing their culture and succeeding in a Eurocentric school system in a Nunavut community. One other participant also spoke about the difficulties inherent in navigating both worlds, balanced with her/his view that doing so is necessary:

It’s hard for me to get both of those worlds, walking together sort of thing. ‘Cause the dominant culture always wants to run, whereas the Aboriginal culture always wants to take things at a pace that’s enjoyable, for me, anyway. So you’ve got your Western and your Aboriginal perspectives and these two worlds trying to create these conditions for success together, but the reality is one’s always moving a little bit faster than the other, and not willing to wait. Not willing to listen. Not willing to *participate*. So you’ve got a student that’s being dragged by one and pulled back by another. And pulled back is even the wrong term.... I think for an Aboriginal student to be successful, both of those have to be present for them, in some way.

The participant who spoke about navigating both worlds as a form of conformity situated this process with a consideration of history and how it impacts the present:

Understanding the stages of colonization, I guess that’s the other piece.... The initial stage of colonization was about, OK, we’re living separately. And then that second stage, we come over, and we’re going to help and we’re going to live mutually. But then that mutual trust and respect gave way to dominance. And that’s where you have the treaties, the Indian Act, and Residential Schools. And then all those other pieces that come as a result. Now, we’re moving more into a stage of renewal, if we look at it from an Indigenous perspective, right? Where people are coming back to our traditions, people are coming back to the language, people are coming back and being advocates, because they are educated but knowledgeable in our Indigenous ways. So they can walk in both – firmly – one foot in each world. We sometimes refer to that as a two-eyed way of seeing.... that way of being able to see *both* perspectives, and to *walk* firmly in those two worlds.

<hm. That’s the key word, firmly, eh?>

Well, and the thing is – because that’s what our kids have to do. And that’s what makes it hard. And that’s what impacts success. Because, how can you walk *firmly*, without faltering or falling on one side or the other? If you have all of these pieces, the historical pieces that have impacted – historical policies and almost becomes a legacy that has been – not developed, but a legacy that has been passed on. The kids still – kids, parents, grandparents don’t *really* understand, but it’s there.

This idea that history lives in how Indigenous families engage with school, and that history’s role is often unstated and not fully understood, was referenced by other participants as well. A participant stated, in quoting Betty Bastine, “To understand the present, you have to understand the past.” This fits with the views of McPherson (2011) who draws particular attention to assimilation, both past and present.

The idea of navigating two worlds (walking in both worlds, or having a foot in each world, or two-eyed seeing) was seen by some as a necessity, or even a goal:

I’ve also heard the term, walking in two worlds. So that’s being able to keep kind of one foot grounded in... your traditions and your family origins... the way you do culture and the way you live your life. But also, just keeping up with – you know it’s that balance of the traditional Aboriginal and the Western influences. I think you need to be – in order to be successful – you need to be able to balance that. For sure. We just sat with... a respected Metis Elder, and she just said, ‘Segregation... doesn’t work. Don’t expect everybody to leave. They’re not going anywhere’.... So just being able to live a good life with current society.

Participants’ acknowledgement of different, and sometimes competing, worldviews is consistent with others’ writing (e.g., Battiste, 2013; CCL, 2007, 2009; Hampton, 1995a; Little Bear, 2009). Critically questioning what it really means to “walk in two worlds,” and how difficult it can be when values are opposed, is addressed by Henze & Vanett (1993).

Relating to the difficulty of walking in two worlds, McPherson and Rabb (2011) write about “the possibility of the incommensurability of worldviews” (p. 147). They point out the importance of acknowledging that the interconnected elements of language, style of thinking and reasoning, and philosophy can differ so greatly between cultures that the two are incommensurable, and should be accepted as such (p. 147). It could be, then, that expecting students to “walk in both worlds” is a philosophical impossibility. Layered on top of that is McPherson and Rabb’s explanation of how colonial, Eurocentric views of Indigenous people, expressed in documents such as the Royal Proclamation of 1763, treaties and the Indian Act have been given priority over Indigenous people’s views of and portrayals of themselves (p. 59). The

two worlds are not given equitable positions in Canadian society. Walking firmly in both worlds, then, is a formidable expectation for students.

Pace. A frequently-cited area of sharp contrast between Indigenous and Eurocentric views of success was pace. It was prominent in how the participating educators worked through the meaning of success for Indigenous students in public boards. Several participants stated that they viewed high school graduation as important, which was congruent with the goals of the boards within which they worked. However, based on Indigenous worldviews, they believed that timing should be responsive to individuals, not imposed on them:

For me, I don't look at it as a yearly, linear movement, more so long-term; I guess longevity. So are they graduating from high school? 'Cause so many things change from year to year, right? You have little tiny successes throughout the year, whether it be through art or literacy or socializing within a classroom, but I think, for me, the big – success was graduating. Was making it that far.

This focus on pace was stated by another participant in this way:

We all want success for every child, but their participation just may look a little different. They may not be in a place for that to happen. In that structured amount of time.... Most oftentimes, they take a little longer than that.

Similarly, another participant stated:

I think success, big-picture-wise needs to be the same. So you want to still teach them the same skills and attitudes. But the *way* you're going to achieve that is probably going to look different, and your timeline is probably going to be different.

Another participant linked pace to a discrepancy between Indigenous and Eurocentric views:

So again, you're a bit void of that Indigenous pedagogy and understanding that things will evolve, as they need to evolve, not because you say that they need to, and not because somebody says that this is when it needs to happen. So that's why you see, a lot of our kids... it takes them [an extra year or two] to graduate.

For me, a high-impact explanation of pace was one that arose through an informal conversation with a third person who dropped in during an interview. The person was speaking about trying to learn a new song on the guitar. The participant said this: "You'll get it, you'll get it. Take time." To me this perspective was in stark contrast to the message I often gave students in my daily teaching practice, which I think is the point participants were making in contrasting Indigenous and Eurocentric approaches to time. It was interesting to note that pace was

considered such an important platform for discussing success, an interface that highlights the differences between the linear, calculated Eurocentric view of success and the circular, responsive approach described by Indigenous participants.

Descriptors vs. meaning. In my over-arching question, I used the phrases “What does success look like for an Aboriginal student in the public board?”, “How would you describe success for an Aboriginal student in a public board?”, and “What does success mean for an Aboriginal student in the public board?” interchangeably. As I looked at participants’ words, I realized that what success *looks like* and what it *means* were generally seen by participants as two different things and that participants addressed both. Many participants agreed that measures of success such as graduation, attendance, grades, and engagement could be used as indicators of student success. At the same time, most took issue with a simple statistical use of these measures void of personal, family, cultural and historical context, concerns that are shared by Indigenous scholars (e.g., CCL, 2007; Wolf, 2012).

Participants seemed to differentiate measures such as graduation, attendance and grades from what success itself means: “In the public school system... the completion of high school would be the easy way out. But I think there’s much more to creating success for *Aboriginal* students in our board than just pumping them out of a high school.” When these standard measures were cited, they were often situated within a bigger picture: “outcomes, but also applying... so yes, attendance, marks, being able to apply [the] knowledge gained, would be one. Being able to *apply* that knowledge.” The same participant also stated, “What’re we looking at in terms of success? Well probably a sustainability, like being able to sustain a passion for learning, and wanting to take it elsewhere.”

When I asked one participant what I would see if Indigenous public education was going really well in ten years, her/his statement was revealing. It incorporated the academic measures of success addressed above, but also placed them in a context that considered emotional and social domains, situated in history:

You’re going to see kids not dropping out. In junior high. You’re going to see more parents actively engaged and participating. You’re going to see kids’ basic needs being met. So the complexity of their needs be addressed, and that can be with school support, or kind of voluntarily as what most parents do. See more kids graduating. You see more kids attending post-secondary. You see more kids engaged in activities outside of school. You know what, and just breaking it down. You see more confident [students]. You see

more engaged students. Engaged in their education. Much more willing to ask for help. To seek support and to trust in that support a little bit more. But it would look no different than what success looks like for the general population, if you're looking at it through a public board perspective. They'd be passing, they'd be attending, they'd achieve well, you know, they'd be active participants and contribute to their lifelong learning process too.

A big-picture view that encompasses families along with students, domains of identity and emotion as well as academic achievement, and reasons for learning more broad than those contained within school, were central to how success was described in this study. This is consistent with the literature (CCL, 2007, 2009; Ottmann & Pritchard, 2010; Richmond & Smith, 2012; Toulouse, 2013). This study's core findings about storytelling and multiple perspectives, relationship and interconnectedness, and holistic thinking and being are drawn from such responses.

Success at school and board levels. In addition to their consideration of the success of individual students, several participants called into question what is being evaluated as success at school and board levels. One participant spoke about the need to critically examine the available data:

I think they need to examine the data of Aboriginal students more closely. And they need to outline not only the barriers, and where, but what's working and why.... There's been a lot of success, just in our own school setting. There's been a lot of success around planning for students, there's been a lot of success around successful transitioning, there's been a lot of success in building relationships with students and with families. So it all depends on what you're going to measure, again.

Another participant emphasized the importance of studying research in Indigenous education so that decisions can be made based on broad findings instead of relying fully on personal experiences of success with certain Indigenous students.

One participant made it clear that although success is currently measured a certain way, there are more ways to consider success:

Sometimes *we* put judgments, society puts judgments on that piece of success. But that doesn't mean that that's all that that success is about. And that's *that* judgment or *that* judgment, but that doesn't mean that that's the whole picture.

This sort of personalized assessment as a school's primary measure is in contrast to dependency on standardized testing as definitive of success. The effects of the latter can be highly negative:

When you have some of the right-wing thinking that's out there in [region of] Canada, and you have schools being ranked according to standardized tests and stuff, it's pretty easy for educators to get disillusioned by the fact that – okay, if this is what we're looking at, and this is what we see as success, that our school has to compete so-to-speak, then there's probably a lot of educators that are thinking to themselves, 'Wow, it would probably be a whole lot easier for me to work over here with these kids.' In the [upper-middle-class areas of the city].

The systemic effects of measurement of success on educator views and movement is worth considering if strong teachers are to be retained in these settings. One way to place these statistics in context is to go back to the idea of story: "We think we're making progress and then we get these numbers and we're like 'Oh.' Attendance rates. What's going on behind the attendance? What's the *story* behind it?"

Public Indigenous education of Settler students. Throughout this study, it became clear that the education of Settler Canadians and the education of Indigenous Canadians are intrinsically linked when we consider Indigenous student success:

For me, that's success of Aboriginal education generally, is getting kids excited learning about Aboriginal people. And if kids are excited about it, Aboriginal people are going to feel good about who they are. And if they feel good about who they are, they're going to belong. And if they're going to belong, they're going to be successful. And if they're going to be successful, they're going to complete school or whatever it is that we need them to do, right? But they're going to do it in a way that they feel that they can.... They'll have the confidence to perform, however that looks for them. And what that success means to them.

Participants' focus on the importance of the education of all students to build success in Indigenous education surfaced continually and will be documented in quotations in later sections. It resonates with the statements in the recent Truth and Reconciliation Commission report (2012a), and Toulouse's (2013) model, as well as the National Indian Brotherhood's foundational statement on Indigenous education (NIB/AFN, 1972). Godlewska, Moore and Bednasek (2010) support this view in their opening statement: "The principal problem in Aboriginal education in Canada is the education of Canadians" (p. 417).

Complex, nuanced considerations. Given the interconnected, holistic responses that participants shared, it is difficult to pull them apart to discuss here. Recognizing that, I share this

quotation that ties many of the pieces together and leads into elements that will be further discussed in this work:

Success is such a broad word, hey? Such a big word that you try to encompass so much. And there's so many ways that we look at it, right? There's the provincial standard, which is high school completion and what that looks like in its many ways, shapes and forms... or just going into post-secondary of some sort. However we look at that success from a provincial medium or a governmental strategy, policy, but then there's the other side of it, right? For Aboriginal people, success in a historic context might be looked at as moving up in a society, or moving up in stature, or achieving some sort of – one of the Seven Sacred Teachings, you know? In our world today, success might be identified as being able to avoid the negative influences in life – so drugs, alcohol, gang affiliations, those sort of things. Finding a culture identity or an anchor to ground themselves... I've read stories of students who through powwow dance, have come to realize that there's more to them than they've realized. And teachers who share stories of the kid who you thought did nothing, and then you ask them about their weekend, and they say, 'Oh, well I went to this powwow,' and you say, 'Oh well what did you do?' And they just can't stop talking, right? So having that anchor, or that piece of identity to them, is, I think, crucial to success. You can't have any of those other pieces of success until you have that one piece, right? And whatever that is for that child. It might not be culture. It might be a sport, it might be video games..... You find ways to bring that in to help feed the other successes in life.

This holistic view of success is crucial to keep in mind, particularly considering that Eurocentric definitions of success underpin the current education system and quite often stand in contrast to holistic Indigenous perspectives (Kirkness, 1998). Broadening our view of success and recognizing success in domains that we have not previously considered directly impacts students. As one participant stated:

There're likely some really big gains and a lot of success stories that go unnoticed. Because it's much more difficult to measure those, and not only that, it's not always the biggest priority for the schools. So based on just bureaucracy and accountability and standards and the pressures, it's not always a priority.

With this in mind, I conclude this initial discussion of success by considering the intent of measuring success.

Intent of measuring success. When I asked one participant *if* success should be measured, s/he responded by explaining *why* it should be measured:

Yes, and I think the intent of looking at the successes is to inform and to help serve for the greatest good of all the Aboriginal students. I think it's important to look at what's working and to be able to share that information to help others.

In keeping with that intent, I present this connected beads model, which is my way of sharing the understanding of success that fellow educators have shared with me.

Findings and Interpretation Part 2: The Connected Beads Model

Intent of the model. The intent of presenting this model is not to prescribe a “solution” to Indigenous public education, because as participants stated, there is no one solution since Indigenous students are unique, as are their school and community contexts. In keeping with that view, my intent is to draw attention to some key values, worldviews and visions for the future that the Indigenous educators in this study emphasized. I hope that the model will be useful in other settings to provoke conversation and collaboration between Indigenous and Settler members of learning communities. I balance this hope with the emphasis participants put on the contextual nature of Indigenous education - this model is not a recipe. As Restoule (2008) states, “What is possible in Aboriginal education is largely a matter of vision and creativity” (p. 382). My intention is to offer this model as one contribution to the vision and creativity at work in Canada today.

At the core of this model is “We,” which is comprised of three strands: storytelling and multiple perspectives, relationship and interconnectedness, and holistic thinking and being. On the core strands are many beads. These are specific examples of practices to build success. The use of beadwork as a metaphor here is not drawn from one specific Indigenous teaching, but is meant to reflect both the practical and profound importance of beading in the Indigenous communities in which I have been involved. Beaded gifts from Indigenous colleagues and community members remind me of interconnectedness and being welcomed into new ways of seeing and relating.

As a participant pointed out when s/he reviewed the model, this particular string of beads is part of a larger life tapestry. Thus, this model is presented with the intent that it be considered critically and contextually and with the recognition that is part of a larger whole in education and in life.

Context of the model. Just as context must be considered in the potential application of this model, the context of its creation must also be considered. This model is situated in the

context of participants' and the researcher's work within diverse school boards in a particular urban centre in Canada in 2013. It is situated in a context with multiple influences, ideologies, and competing priorities. It is the interpretation of a twenty-nine-year-old White female educator-researcher seeking wisdom from Indigenous educators, each of whom bring their own experiences, cultural backgrounds, knowledges and beliefs. The participants were careful to acknowledge the contextual nature of their responses, a trend that is prevalent in Indigenous scholarship (Dion, 2009; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008), and which I have sought to honour through my personal introduction at the beginning of this paper.

Development of the model. As I was thinking and praying about the findings and interpretation, and about my role in presenting them, this model came in its visual form. I have since shared it with the participants to provide the opportunity for them to verify that it upholds the integrity of their ideas. The model came after months of listening and re-listening to the interviews, of reading, summarizing and synthesizing the transcripts, and of interacting with participants about their responses through sending them my evolving interpretations and inviting their feedback.

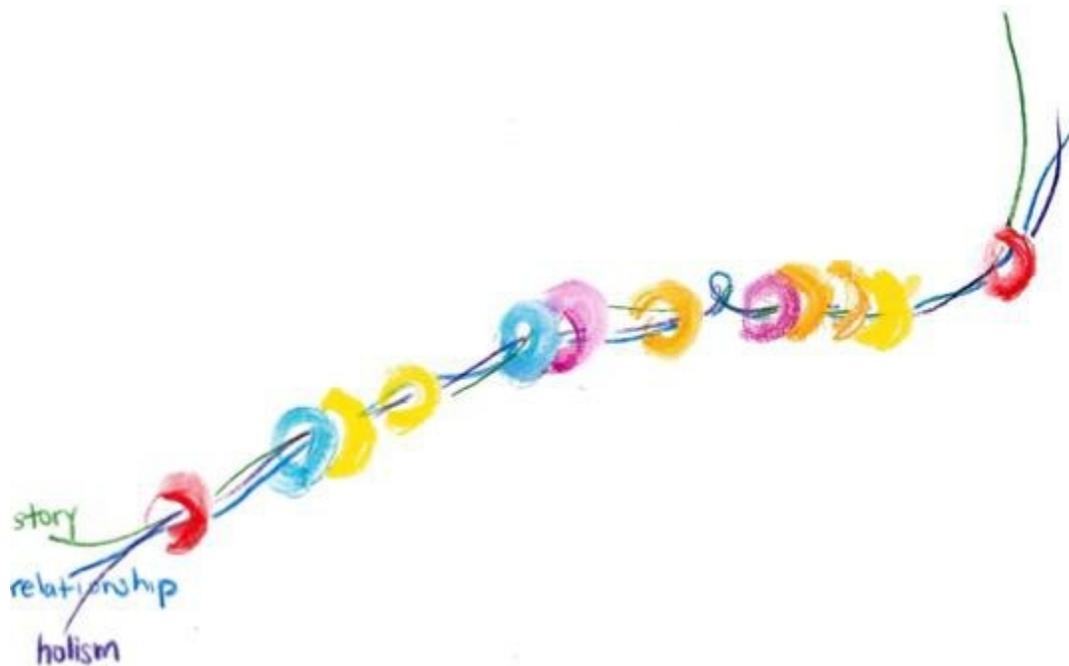
Figure 1: The Connected Beads Model

Figure 1. The Connected Beads Model is based on a "We" core of Storytelling and Multiple Perspectives, Relationship and Interconnectedness, and Holistic Thinking and Being. Beads represent practical strategies that have the three strands at their core.

"We": Three Central Strands



"We" is the central finding of this study – the basic assumption, the tone, the premise. It is represented here in the three strands. Being *We* is at the core, evidenced in each participant's responses individually, and their responses as a whole. Participants spoke in *We* to describe our collective role as educators. Success in education was presented as a *We* endeavor, both in process and in outcome; Indigenous education completely linked with public education. When participants spoke about ways to enrich success for Indigenous students, they were careful to point out how these would enrich the success of *all* students:

So not only are Aboriginal students succeeding, but *all* students succeed. Because that's the other part. When we look at success for Aboriginal students, many of those same

strategies, many of those Indigenous ideologies that support a First Nations/Metis way of seeing, knowing, doing and believing actually works for *all* students.

In tandem with planning for the success of all students, they invited educators to see Indigenous students as *their* students, instead of as “Indigenous” and somehow separate.

We in education was linked to *We* in Canada on a broader level:

If [Aboriginal education] becomes part of who we *are* instead of something we *do*, it's a very different perspective, right? And Aboriginal education will move from being the checkmark to, 'This is who we are, this is what we do.' And that's what inclusion, for me, is about. That's what a teacher-training program would be about, is allowing teachers to feel confident enough to say, 'This is just who we are. We as Canadians are Treaty people. We as Canadians are survivors of the Residential School.' 'Cause you know – we are. People think, 'Oh, it's just the Aboriginal people.' Well no, it impacts all of us in Canada, and we all need to heal from it., right? So, I mean, how can you give teachers that perspective instead of the us-and-them game?

I invite you – the educator, researcher, policymaker, parent or community member that you are, the Indigenous person, the Settler, the Canadian, the human being that you are – to engage in *We* as you read. I make this invitation in the spirit of genuine welcome and engagement conveyed to me by participants in this study.

Story and Multiple Perspectives Strand



Central to participants' responses was the importance of sharing and welcoming diverse perspectives and stories as a way to enrich students' education and at the same time providing Settler teachers with the opportunity to broaden their awareness and understanding of Indigenous views and experiences.

Acknowledging our own perspectives and stories. A starting point for sharing and welcoming perspectives and stories is acknowledging our own. This was modeled by many of the participants even though there was no interview question that asked about personal background. One person began our discussion by stating that before sharing perspectives, following the traditional [specific Indigenous group] practice of situating oneself was crucial. S/he stated, “A lot of what I’m going to talk about is going to connect to who I am and where I

come from.” Later, when presenting points of view on a topic, s/he said, “It doesn’t mean that that’s what *is*, but that’s just the way in which I see it.” Midway through an interview, another participant reminded me, “You’re asking an Aboriginal person who’s urban, right? Mixed heritage. And my perception and interpretation could be entirely different than another Aboriginal person.” Another participant situated her/his views by saying, “In my experiences so far” before continuing. Participants’ intentional situating of themselves is reflective of Indigenous scholarship that states the importance of this action (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008).

Careful attention to recognizing that our individual perspective is one of many, as demonstrated by the participants, is pivotal in public education. One participant stated that an important factor in the success of Indigenous students is for educators to become aware that “there are differing perspectives other than their own.”

Welcoming multiple perspectives and stories. The participants saw the diversity of students and families in their public school boards as a rich source of stories and multiple perspectives. A participant drew on the work of Ngozi Adichie (2009) to illustrate the power of openness to diverse stories:

It’s pretty magical being in a place like that where there *are* so many different cultures and so many different stories. I kind of think of it as a spider web of stories that are all interconnected. I just recently watched a TED talks piece called the Single Story, and it’s this woman from Nigeria who is a poet and how she talks about: If there’s only a single story, that’s what breeds ignorance and hate. But when all the stories are mixed together, what it breeds is diversity and richness. And that is what I strive for in my classroom.

Interestingly, another participant referred to the same TED talk, speaking about another side of the issue – the effects of “single-storying” Indigenous students:

It’s a way of thinking about looking at the world, where we look at people, and we create that single story for them. So, immediately we look at an Aboriginal person and we make assumptions about that person based on the stereotypes. We create that story for them without actually hearing their story. And it happens in all cultures and all around the world. Where groups of people are single-storied... oftentimes it’s based on race, on culture, on gender, on how people choose to identify themselves. People see an Aboriginal person and they automatically go to that disadvantaged, poor achiever; I’m going to be – I’m not going to challenge this person as hard because of this, right? Because of that, kids are aware of when they’re not being challenged. And some kids are, ‘Well if you’re not going to challenge me, I’m not going to try.’ And then it progressively gets worse and worse and worse and worse.

This danger of low expectations, and the importance of high ones, is highlighted by Watt-Cloutier (2000) and Goulet (2001). The participant did not stop there. S/he continued to address how the negative effects of “single-storying” can be countered:

So how do we change that perception of that single story? Well we listen to the other stories. We listen to the stories of the survivors from Residential Schools. We listen to the stories of these parents who work their butts off to get their kid into a public school somewhere, ok? Who left their communities to come here because they believe this is where the opportunity is for their child to be successful. We listen to the story of the single mom who has three jobs and *that's* why she can't come to parent-teacher interviews. It's not because she doesn't care. Or the story of the grandmother who experienced Residential Schools, knows that education's important, but doesn't want to go to parent-teacher interviews because she's worried about being chastised by the teacher, because that was her experience in school. So she has that single story of what school is like, and what the system is like for her.

This warns of the danger of creating single stories for Indigenous students as an educator, while at the same time acknowledging that Indigenous families may carry profoundly negative single stories about education due to Canada's colonial history of education, most profoundly evidenced in Residential Schools. As we get to know each other, we have the opportunity to hear and create new stories together in Indigenous public education, as will be discussed later in this thesis.

In addition to seeking out the personal and family stories of students, as described in the quotation above, stories can be sought out in a curriculum forum. One participant described how s/he encourages openness to multiple stories through the curricular area of music:

I'm always comparing different cultures, comparing different time periods. When Tchaikovsky was alive in Europe, what were First Nations people doing here? Wow, do you think the fur traders had come to Canada yet? Do you think – were there still buffalo roaming? So often having kids visualize what life was like in a different time or a different place, and engaging their imaginations through music, whether it be through a beat or through song or through a soundscape that they can build themselves.

Sharing Indigenous stories in the classroom to bring multiple perspectives to curriculum areas is a wider trend in Indigenous education, led by the work of Archibald (2008) and Dion (2009). One facet of Archibald's (2008) work was to learn about “storywork” from Elders in British Columbia and to then prepare the stories for teachers to share in classrooms. Susan Dion (2009) and her brother read Eurocentric historical accounts of major events such as the life of the last Beothuk woman and a Treaty signing, and rewrote the stories from an Indigenous perspective for

teachers to use to bring Indigenous perspectives to public school classrooms. She also took in the story of her own mother and wrote this in a form accessible to public school teachers and students.

The participants in the present study suggest multifaceted ways to engage with stories in the classroom –welcoming the stories of students and their parents, thinking about other sides of the dominant Eurocentric story (as illustrated in the Tchaikovsky reference above), and exploring local Indigenous stories and histories. This approach invites teachers and their students to actively seek out stories, building them into their own classroom’s unique context of inquiring and learning.

Considering multiple stories also creates the opportunity for new stories to arise, stories that belong to a particular learning community:

So imagine, if you would, a teacher is sharing some of their story. And then students start to share their story. And then this single story becomes two stories and three stories and four stories. And all these stories merge into another single story that creates that classroom climate – that atmosphere that those kids are able to thrive, and share, and grow. And then those stories become experiences for those kids.

The potential impact of storytelling on student success, as described by this participant, is evident. This sharing of stories and building them into shared community experience applies beyond the classroom.

Welcoming multiple stories and perspectives can also take place at the professional level. One Indigenous educator spoke about a powerful experience when s/he was invited into a school by a staff who wanted to learn more about Indigenous perspectives and how to apply them to their work with Indigenous students. S/he described the process as “coming to a broadening [of] one’s perspective,” “the teachers’ understanding of the bigger picture,” and then “the teachers’ understanding of the importance of relationships.” How teachers saw the students, interacted with the families, and planned lessons was greatly influenced by their openness to new Indigenous perspectives.

Participants gave powerful examples of welcoming Indigenous stories and perspectives into public education, as well as welcoming the stories of each family and each student. These will be elaborated upon later as beads in this model. To close the present focus on story, I will focus on students themselves. One participant spoke about a “gold nugget” for Indigenous students: “somebody listened to their story. Someone honoured them in some way.” With this

high value on listening to the stories of students, I move forward to a consideration of the strand of relationship and interconnectedness.

Relationship and Interconnectedness Strand



The centrality of story to relationship. The strands that form the *We* core of this model are intrinsically linked. For that reason, I begin this discussion of relationship and interconnectedness with a consideration of the role of story. One participant said, “I don’t know how much of a back story you have around the legislation and the laws and the governance.... [Because] having that background knowledge impacts how a teacher reacts and responds to Aboriginal people and Aboriginal culture.” This point was emphasized by other participants as well. They spoke about educator awareness of Canadian policy and history with Indigenous people as pivotal to Indigenous student success, referring specifically to historical events such as Residential Schools, the Indian Act and Treaty. When studying this history, it is a history of *relationship* that we uncover. One participant stated,

Between the Crown and Aboriginal people, it’s the second-oldest relationship in North America.... And that relationship was built out of trust, and over the years that trust has been shifted and changed, and the dynamics of the relationship have become unstable, but that relationship has to still exist.

S/he spoke about the importance of the public school system, of schools, and of teachers in strengthening that relationship. These findings are resonant with those of Goulet (2001), who also found an awareness of the causal factors of colonialism to be central to how teachers understand and respond to their students and their circumstances. She addressed teachers’ role in “changing colonial power relationships” by working as partners with students, parents and grandparents (Goulet, 2001, p. 75).

Drawing school systems, schools and teachers into the role of strengthening the relationship with Indigenous communities brings us into the realm of story in the present, in Canadian classrooms right now. The importance of seeking to know each student’s story was described by this participant:

I think for me what I understand about this process of looking at the learner as an individual, is finding out who they are, and not just what their strengths are in school, but the things they do outside of school that they enjoy doing. And what are their connections to family?... That's part of being relational with people. If you don't know that this student has never met their dad, and then you send them into a classroom, and then the teacher says, 'I'm going to call your dad,' like, what does that do right there for the relationship? Or, 'What's your dad's name? What does your dad do?' Like if you don't know those things, how can you be sensitive to their current reality? And I would think that you would want to do that for all your kids, whether they're Aboriginal or not!

This quotation is representative of the beliefs of other participants in this study – that coming to know each student and each family through becoming familiar with their story is a foundational element of building relationship, and in turn, of building student success. Several scholars in Indigenous education speak of the importance of engaging parents in schooling (e.g., Melnechenko & Horsman, 1998; Toulouse, 2013). Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzales (1992) speak about a more active form of drawing on Mexican students' and families' stories and “funds of knowledge” in a cross-cultural teaching context, an idea confirmed in the Canadian work of Saunders and Hill (2007).

Facets of relationship and interconnectedness. Relationship and interconnectedness were described as vital at each level and each interaction in public Indigenous education. Two areas particularly emphasized by the participants were the relationships between educators and their students and between educators and students' families. These relationships are interconnected, as described in the following quotation:

So how are we engaging the Aboriginal students in school? How are we getting them to love being there, to want to be there, to want their families to be part of it, right? When I was going to school, that was a big thing for me, was I wanted to drag my mom to every one of my teachers and say, 'This is who's teaching me this and this is who's teaching me this.'

This was said in the context of teachers and school leaders creating contexts where “a child goes home at night excited about school, excited about learning, because they *see* themselves in the classroom, they *feel* like they belong in that classroom,” with the result that “those parents are going to be excited about that child's learning, and that excitement's going to spill over,” leading to gradual growth in parental engagement at school. Thus, the relationships that educators foster

with students, and the engaging learning environments that they create can engage families through their children. Another participant said:

I think that's one of the key characteristics for success of any Aboriginal student is looking at that creating a sense of belonging. An environment of trust where families are comfortable in sharing and in asking questions and where students are feeling the same.

Thus, it becomes clear that education is much more holistic than an educator delivering curriculum to a student. Rather, the relationships developed between student, family, and educator are central.

Inhibitors. One participant said that there is “A *huge* barrier to success... if you don't have that relationship.” S/he was describing contexts where the student-educator relationship is lacking, and therefore success is inhibited. One of these contexts was judgment: “Judgments add to that disconnect of that relationship. And kids are smart. They can sense and they can see.” Drawing back to the section on storytelling, a lack of understanding can also be an inhibitor to relationship, and therefore success: “Having that background knowledge impacts how a teacher reacts and responds to Aboriginal people and Aboriginal culture.” As a final note on potential inhibitors of relationship, one participant strongly emphasized the ideas of conformity and control. These are alluded to in other sections of this thesis, but it should be noted here that relational environments defined by the need for students to conform to a certain worldview, pace and set of academic goals, and by educators being the only sources of control, were described by participants as highly detrimental to Indigenous student success, particularly students who do not conform.

Personal connections. This idea was developed by some of the participants. Some told stories of connecting with family members or students over simple things like a compliment or a nickname. One participant acknowledged that some students are easier to connect with than others, and put the responsibility for making this connection onto her/himself as an educator:

What do *I* need to do differently to better engage a student? What conversation do I need to place myself [in] personally to make a connection, to be able to relate, to be in relation to the student so that then we can move this relationship into an education realm where then I can, hopefully, better engage. *I can.* Not *he can* or he will. I can. Because of what I'm doing.

This perspective gives significant responsibility to educators to work toward strong personal relationships.

Belonging. For many participants, the idea of belonging was tied tightly to the idea of relationship, and thought to be necessary for success. Educators, through the understanding they had of students' needs, through the content they presented, and through their acknowledgment of students' values, priorities and identities, could contribute to the sense of belonging that students felt within their schools. This extended to families as well, by drawing them into the process of their children's education through modes such as formal intake meetings or through the excitement and invitation of their children to have parents attend school events.

The work of Desmoulins (2009) brings a warning regarding belonging. In her findings, some Indigenous student participants found that in order to experience a sense of belonging in the school context, they prioritized their identity as a student over their Indigenous identity there. This is sobering, and links to the views expressed by a participant in the "viewpoints on success" section – that conformity can be necessary for success in public schools. The cost of this success may be high.

The embedded nature of relationship. To draw together this brief section on relationship, I note that the idea of relationship is completely embedded in the many ideas, strategies, and reflections on success presented by participants. Relationship and interconnectedness are inextricable from the other key strands in this model: sharing diverse stories and perspectives, and holistic thinking and being, as described above. Without strong relationships linking educators with one another, with families, with the greater community, and with students, success is inhibited. This focus on the primacy of relationship is in keeping with the literature on Indigenous education, which repeatedly names relationship as central (e.g., Goulet, 2001; Iverson, 2007; Little Bear, 2009; Oskineegish, 2013).

Holistic Thinking and Being Strand



The concept of holistic thinking and being has many dimensions. One way to look at holistic thinking and being is to consider the spiritual, physical, emotional and mental (or “intellectual”) realms. This form of holistic thinking and being was presented by some participants with reference to one Indigenous group’s concept of the Medicine Wheel. These dimensions will be introduced through linking them to the strands of storytelling and relationship.

Another aspect of holistic thinking and being is the idea that success – and education itself – is much bigger than what happens in classrooms from day to day. Education is embedded in our Canadian society with its values, histories, sub-cultures and institutions. Interactions, relationships, ideologies, and practices outside of the school walls come to bear on what we call public education.

Spiritual, emotional, mental/intellectual, physical dimensions. Many participants spoke about success through the lens of spiritual, emotional, mental/intellectual and physical dimensions. In the following quotation, this was contrasted with how success tends to be viewed in the current public education system:

I think that when we look at Aboriginal student success, one of the things that comes to mind for me is looking at a holistic perspective. Typically, our public school systems, our Western ideologies, are very specific and success is about grades. Success is about standardized testing. Success is about graduating in this certain amount of time, whereas, from a traditional [specific Indigenous group] perspective, success is about uncovering the gifts that Creator gave you and then it’s about nurturing those gifts, developing those gifts. And as you develop those gifts, you’re growing and developing mentally, emotionally, physically, intellectually and spiritually.

Participants shared a concern that school tends to privilege the intellectual/mental realm, neglecting the emotional, physical and spiritual. The missing spiritual component in public education was of special concern to some of the participants. In voicing this concern, this participant defined what “spiritual” means to her/him and why it is essential to education:

A lot of times... school is about the intellectual piece. So many of our students struggle with that, because it’s void of those other pieces. It’s sometimes void of the physical.

And, sometimes void of the emotional. And almost *always* – unless you're in a private school, or you're in a Catholic School – is void of spirituality. And when I say spirituality... spirituality still exists in our public schools that are *not* Catholic – those are those schools that are private schools. But spirituality is about the essence of who you are. It's that person that makes up Martha. That's a person that makes up – that's any student that sits in your desk. Their values, their morals, their perspective, their ways of seeing the world. All of those pieces that help them to make them be a human being. And that's what we mean by 'spirit.' So in that essence of spirit, we develop that. That's not only developed at home, it's also about developing at school. Because those are the instances that you come in contact with diverse perspectives, diverse people, diverse understandings, you come in contact with life skills. Through the curriculum, through what's being taught, but it's those pieces that help you to learn, and come and understand, so that you can become a productive member of society. So success isn't about graduating in [a specific number of] years. Success is – yes – that you graduate. But in your time. Success isn't about mastering a test, but developing those skills of lifelong learning that may not show in the test. So there's really different ways to look at success.

Another participant described the importance of “taking care of all [the] components” of the Medicine Wheel every day to “create a successful day” for students. Her/his focus was on students feeling safe, good and happy, with the belief that these affective considerations are central to success in learning. S/he elaborated on applying this holistic approach:

So the physical, right? Having body breaks, or having food for them. Still applying the love and the nurturing and the trust, building relationships. Inquiry. Like a lot of – get their minds going first thing in the morning, asking them questions, having conversation. And then spirit.... for me, the spirit is whatever makes your spirit feel good, right?... So you listen to a good song and you feel like 'Yeah, I'm ready for the day. That put me in such a good mood.' That's good for your spirit. So some kind of musical component, or setting intentions. Having a goal. Like, 'Today I'm going to smile more.' Or, 'I'm going to say one nice thing to someone so that they feel good.'

S/he later followed this up by saying,

That feeling happy, there's that intrinsicness, right? Where you're just like, 'I'm happy because I like what I'm learning about, and I'm happy about what I'm learning about, and so I feel good.' And then 'I get that sense of mastery because I'm doing really well, and I like learning about this stuff.' I feel like it's all just a happy cycle. I wonder if you look at the schools – successful schools, let's call them. I wonder if you look at those schools, and see, what do their music programs and their Phys. Ed. Programs look like? You know? I wonder how that would differ in comparison to high-poverty schools, or schools without resources?

These quotations, which link diverse issues like meeting students' basic physical needs, school-level programming, and happiness and intrinsic learning are evidence that a holistic approach to

education takes on many dimensions, addressing realms far beyond the intellectual, reflective of findings in the literature (e.g., Bazylak, 2002; Desmoulins, 2009; Goulet, 2001).

Systemic view of holism. Holistic thinking and being is central not only to the perspectives and stories we welcome, but also to the practical actions we take. From this stance, one participant focused a significant percentage of the interview on the idea of the big picture of success, and that it is embedded within society as a greater system. S/he stated it this way:

I think we need to start looking at our schools differently, and I think we need to be using our space and our resources in as many multi-faceted ways as possible. Instead of looking at each of these ministries, looking at Health, and Child and Family Services, and Education as three separate entities, there needs to be more of a collaborative and cooperative and – I think you’d see a huge cost savings. Long-term especially. ‘Cause then you can keep the justice system out of it too.

This systemic holistic view was the major focal point of that participant; specific applications from this perspective are presented as beads later on in the description of this model.

Another participant maintained a strong focus on the need for a holistic approach at a systemic level, focusing specifically on meeting the basic needs of students so that meaningful learning could occur:

Any change that needs to happen for more Aboriginal students to be successful is going to have to be a heck of a lot more of a collective effort than the present supports that are in place in any district.

I asked if s/he meant “huge-scale” and s/he elaborated:

Oh yeah... it has to be a huge scale for sure. My opinion, it needs to, we need to get the people well. And that includes all the health services appropriate. *Everything* from psychology to nutrition to getting their eyes checked and their ears checked and their teeth checked. Getting some counseling, you know. All that needs to happen. In order for people to be able to be more successful in school and in life, you need to look at those basic needs.

These two participants made it clear that the availability of holistic services should not be limited to Indigenous people. Rather, these services should be accessible to all students who may need them.

Holism and relationship. A discussion of holism draws on the ideas of relationship and interconnectedness. Just as success comes through healthy, balanced connections between

educators, students and their families, success is also drawn from balance in the spiritual, emotional, intellectual/mental and physical realms. This need for balance and holism was emphasized again and again by participants, making it a central strand in the connected beads model and foundational in the discussion of the meaning of success presented above.

One participant provided this description of holistic thinking in the context of explaining how important it is for educators to understand Indigenous views on family and how this links to pedagogy: “It’s not dissecting, right? It’s not separating into this nice little, you know, compartment of this, and this nice little compartment of this, but it’s that holistic perspective.” For me, this statement was an explanation of how every part of life is relevant to education and to success, and therefore holistic learning and understanding is pivotal for educators seeking to relate well to Indigenous students and their families.

Holism and story. One participant, who often referred to the importance of storytelling and used stories to share ideas throughout the interview, conveyed the need for Indigenous stories to be understood on a big picture level. S/he was referring to hearing the story of her/his mother’s Residential School experience for the first time. That story was transformational personally, but could also be transformational if taken up at school, system, and societal levels:

But when I was old enough to understand, I was given that story. And that helped me understand things a lot better. But that’s because she knew I was ready and it was time. So how can we give that story to those children without *giving* them that story, if that makes sense? How can we let them understand that the Residential Schools *hurt* their parents, or hurt their grandparents, and it’s hurting them, without making them feel like, ‘oh,’ and without making other people feel like ‘oh, you poor – .’ I could go on and on about how important those stories are for those children. And that leads into: how are those stories living in our system? How are they being present? How are those stories being lived in our province, and at a federal level? Like I said, it’s more than just our schools, more than just our school systems; it’s the community that needs to come around this and understand it.

This statement brings the importance of storytelling to a wider realm, a more holistic view. For Indigenous students to achieve success, Indigenous stories and perspectives need to be respected in society as a whole, the implications of which will filter into Indigenous students’ communities, school systems, schools and classrooms.

Dion’s (2009) *Braided Histories Project*, which presented Settler Canadian students with Indigenous stories of historical events, placed a similar value on the importance of Indigenous

stories being told and heard by Settler teachers and students. Her study did not address the wider societal impact of sharing Indigenous stories, a pertinent question raised by this participant that begs to be considered.

Participants consistently looked at success in a broader, more holistic way than the view I brought to the study. This is not surprising given Castagno and Brayboy's (2008) finding that the holistic nature of Indigenous epistemologies is identified in the literature as a major distinguisher from "dominant mainstream epistemologies" (p. 951), the very epistemologies within which I have been educated. Participants' holistic views will continue to surface throughout the findings of this study, often as aspects of beads in the model.

A holistic view also reaches all members of the public education process, as described by a participant who discussed the importance of Elders' involvement in public education: "So then, it's not just about a teacher's learning, it's about students' learning, it's about school learning, it's about *families* learning. Again it's a holistic piece that would be a benefit to all." This holistic view, intrinsic to Indigenous teachings, is central to the practices participants described as leading to success. These appear in the model as beads.

The prominence of holism in these findings is reflective of the larger body of academic literature on Indigenous education. Castagno and Brayboy's (2008) extensive literature review at a North American level as well as several comprehensive Canadian studies (Bell, 2004; CCL, 2007, 2009; RCAP, 1996) and the theoretical work of Indigenous scholars (Battiste, 2013; Ermine, 1995) have shown that holistic epistemology and practice are central in Indigenous learning.

Beads: Applying Story, Holism and Relationship



So, if we look at improving success, I guess, instead of looking at all the what-ifs, what's practical?... What are things – plausible, legitimate things that could help improve success? Because there's one thing about defining success, and now how do we get there?

Each participant presented multiple ideas on “how to get there,” many of which will be shared here as beads. These beads that are held by the central ideas of storytelling and multiple perspectives, relationship and interconnectedness, and holistic thinking and being.

The practical actions suggested by participants reflect their particular roles and responsibilities in public education. Whereas the central strands of story, holism and relationship represent ideas shared by all participants, the beads represent more specific responses. For example, intake meetings with new students and their families was a focal point for two of the participants. Both of these participants are in a position to implement this idea in their current roles. Some of the beads, such as “accurate knowledge for educators” are based on the views of multiple participants. Other beads are drawn from a smaller number of participants, with a minimum of two participants having stated any idea presented as a bead. The beads are presented as starting points and as examples, not as an exhaustive, universal list of applications.

A very important principle was emphasized by participants: the necessity of being aware of complexity and working within context. One participant explained it this way:

Part of that success piece is responding to the current realities of your learning community or your classroom, or your student. And not buying into all of the other stuff. What’s going on right there? And what research and evidence of best practice can help you support that current reality? Because the reality of one isn’t the reality of all. But we stereotype them to be that.

Participants resisted the idea of applying practices that were successful in one part of Canada to different contexts without careful consideration. Instead of seeking universal answers, one participant explained a more holistic approach in the context of a school board with students of many different Indigenous Nations:

How do we cater to one group with one program that might not work for everyone else? We strategize, we use personalization of learning, we focus on teacher development and growth, and giving teachers the skills to engage with Aboriginal students, their families, and the community. We provide resources that might be specific to a particular group, but are broad enough so that all students can get something from it. But it’s – there’s a lot of research out there. There’s a lot of people writing about it, giving these elaborate frameworks, these models, these transition programs, this funding for this and resources for that. But the reality is – if there was this one fix for all of it, we would be using it by now. And I guess we need to stop trying to focus in on it and start thinking more broadly about it.

By choosing this broad approach over a narrow one, educators are invited – compelled, even – to engage with the multiple stories and perspectives of students and their families, to develop

relationships and a sense of interconnectedness with them, and to think and work holistically within their own particular contexts.

These findings, based on educator-to-educator conversations, place significant emphasis on the importance of educators, and what we can do in our roles. The beads will be presented in an order that begins with directly addressing educators' views, attitudes and actions and then gradually moves to a larger, more systemic scale. These beads are not free-standing entities, but are connected to one another through the strands of sharing multiple stories and perspectives, relationship and interconnectedness, and thinking and being in a holistic way.



Hiring Indigenous educators. Two participants spoke directly about hiring more Indigenous teachers in the public school system. One participant explained the importance of this recommendation in a historical and personal context:

I think so much damage was done with the Residential program that we really need to look at rebuilding the whole idea of education by educating more First Nations educators. So if there's some way that we can get more First Nations people teaching, but really honour the people that are *born* to be teachers. Because there are First Nations people that are *born* to be teachers and aren't teaching, and think they can't, but I think there's so many of them out there that if they found their path to teaching, it would also be their own path to healing which is what it has been for me.

Another participant also believed that more Indigenous teachers should be hired, adding that the onus for Indigenous education could not and should not be on Indigenous educators alone. S/he made reference to St. Denis's (2010) work when s/he presented the idea of Settler educators working as allies with Indigenous teachers in Indigenous public education, an idea addressed later in this paper.

In St. Denis's (2010) study, some of the factors and contexts giving rise to Indigenous people choosing to pursue a career in teaching were outlined. On a political level, Denis (2010) referred to the instigation of programs training Indigenous teachers that resulted from the *Indian control of Indian education* (NIB/AFN, 1972) policy recommendations. On a personal level, the Indigenous educator participants in St. Denis's (2010) study cited motivations for becoming a teacher that included "having a passion and love for the profession," and "the need to encourage and support Aboriginal students" (p. 24).



Elders’ centrality to public education. Some participants made reference to the importance of Elders in public education. One stated, “Traditionally, we don’t do anything without our Elders. They are active – and a part of everything. Not just on a consultative basis, but in the actual *doing*. In the actual *teachings*. In the telling the *stories*.” These active roles could include “working with psychologists to help *them* to understand pedagogy and traditional counseling. For the Elder to be working with the strategist, behavior, complex needs. To supporting schools and students and families, that’s a huge piece that is *central*.” The centrality of Elders is confirmed in the literature (CCL 2007, 2009, Sankhulani, 2007).

Interacting respectfully with Elders was emphasized by a participant. S/he told the story of guiding educators into the process of interacting effectively with Elders. Sh/e spoke about presenting the Elders with a theme instead of a specific question, welcoming silence and laughter, and listening to stories to find meaning, especially if the story had been told previously. S/he related this to learning from her/his own grandmother:

The Elders will tell the same story over and over again. But as our team has realized, every time they listen to that story, they take a new lesson out of it. My Grandma used to do it to me all the time: ‘You told me this story already. ‘Well you never listened!’ [laughs] ‘Alright, I’ll listen.’ You might not realize why that story was being shared with you until much later on in life. Or what that means.

In addition to being aware of respectful interactions and pedagogies when working with Elders, the importance of approaching Elders to ask for their involvement was also addressed:

A wise friend told me that in talking to any Elders, the best thing to do was be completely forthright, honest and clear about your intentions. There is a great deal of mistrust between Aboriginals and Whites, which likely stems from the countless promises made and broken with the treaties. Clear communication is a must!

Additional detail on respectful interaction with Elders is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Educators are urged to become familiar with local protocol and to build local relationships to meet the important need of integrating Elders into public education.



Accurate knowledge for educators. In coming to understand the context of Indigenous public education in general, and the context of each student in particular, there is a need for accurate knowledge: “Accurate knowledge is important – the better-equipped you are, I think the more confident you will be to create that relationship that I spoke about earlier.” The primary importance of the training and awareness of educators was explained by another participant “I think that’s where we need to start. And if it’s done right, it would have a great impact on belonging and mentorship and relationship-building. That’s the first step.” Accurate knowledge is a concern that goes back to *Indian control of Indian education* (NIB/AFN, 1972) and continues to persist today (Godlewska, Moore, & Bednasek, 2010).

A participant explained that a central aspect of awareness is recognizing complexity: “If you’re looking at success for Aboriginal students, and what are the determining factors, I think it’s just having anyone *understand* that – how complex it is. Awareness is the first place to start.” This awareness of complexity includes “having an understanding of the barriers in place,” understanding “the culture and the way things are done,” and being aware that each student is completely unique with specific strengths, values, priorities, background and needs – a point that this participant emphasized throughout the interview. This idea of complexity was addressed directly by another participant and illustrated by others through anecdotes and examples.

Once educators begin to acquire knowledge, they have many forums in which to apply it. One is in using it to form the basis for their own attitudes and interactions with students and families, addressed in the bead to follow. Another is in presenting content to students: “I do know that the more information a teacher has about something, the more confident they are to make it alive in their classroom. And this is particularly true for Aboriginal culture.” One example s/he gave was having the knowledge to teach effectively about Treaties, using this as a platform for addressing the historical relationship between Settlers and Indigenous people, bringing to light both worldviews:

‘Let me help you kids understand why the treaties were signed, and why a treaty is between a nation and a nation, and that is why we have *First Nations*, because they were the ones that were here first.’ So that acknowledgement that we’re dealing with more than the neighbours across the train tracks. We’re dealing with another nation, another group. And it’s a very different way of looking at things. Or even when the Elders talk about treaties....They don’t say, ‘We *signed* a treaty.’ They say, ‘We *made* the treaty.’

And that's a very different perspective than the Europeans have, which is, 'We signed the treaty,' right? And then in a European perspective, they say, 'This is what the treaty means.' And from an Aboriginal perspective, 'The spirit and intent of this treaty was', right? So very different perspectives. But how much of those different perspectives are being shared?...And that conversation, if you had that with a group of Grade 9 kids, that's going to change everything for them. They're going to be like, 'I had no clue that Aboriginal people didn't think about *signing* a treaty, they *made* a treaty.'

Indigenous content is essential to teaching Canadian History and Social Studies, as indicated above. However, Indigenous perspectives go beyond the Social Studies curriculum:

We use Social Studies [as a way] of getting in there [with Indigenous content]. But Social Studies may not be a teacher's strong point. So how can they use math, or how can they use science, or how can they use language arts, right? How many books on their shelf are Aboriginal authors? How often have you referenced an Aboriginal role model of some sort? How often have you utilized the community resource?

In making Indigenous content a central part of practice, teachers have the opportunity to work toward the "this is who we are" position described by participants as the ideal form of Indigenous education. From this perspective, Indigenous education is not an add-on or even integrated into a preexisting structure; Indigenous perspectives and pedagogies become intrinsic to teaching and learning.

The importance of accurate knowledge is consistent with the literature. Castagno and Brayboy (2008) emphasize this point by citing multiple Indigenous scholars who focus on the pertinence of this issue to culturally-responsive schooling. Stairs (1994) speaks about contexts where Indigenous and traditional forms of teaching and learning are blended so that content, mode of learning, and underlying values are more reflective of both Indigenous and Eurocentric participants in the education system.



The process of teacher education. The importance of educating educators was affirmed by all of the participants, and there was a general consensus that teachers did not receive adequate training in Indigenous education. One said, "I think one of the keys for Aboriginal student success is having the best instruction possible and that means the best possible instruction for those teachers!" This instruction was described in many forms by participants.

They spoke about learning from Indigenous colleagues, pre-service education, and learning from families themselves.

Effectively equipping educators to work within promising practices was emphasized:

I think with the inclusive model, it's on the right path. And the personalization of learning of students is on the right track. The trick is giving the people who are doing that the skills and the tools that they need to do it in a meaningful, purposeful way.

When I asked a participant more about what would make successful teacher education, s/he responded:

Well, a teacher education program, teacher training program? It would have to have the voice of the Elders, the voice of the community. But I think it would have to be done in a way that doesn't explicitly separate us. It's like, "Today we're going to have an Aboriginal person talk to us about Science." Instead of, "Today we're going to learn about nature, but first we're going to go for a walk, and a leader from the community is going to take us on that walk." The idea of maybe book-ending it with story and story, right? Here's a story to frame it. Here's what we're learning about today. Here's a story to end it. Even that idea of stories is a very powerful tool. But I think it's a thing that in Western society we're losing a lot of. People are losing their stories.

This response was highly congruent with the recommendations made by the participant for public education, creating a sense of continuity. Another participant spoke about the importance of teaching placements in developing future teachers:

I think they need to be exposed, during their practicums, to good teaching within some of these tougher settings.... I don't think we should have teachers coming out of post-secondary institutions without experiencing practicums in special ed placements and in placements where there's a higher – or an increased level of Aboriginal students and ELL learners. I think we're setting ourselves up for failure in the long-term and big-picture-wise if all we're doing is creating teachers who want to teach in [middle-upper-class neighbourhoods].

S/he supported this point by describing a handful of "phenomenal teachers" who served in such a setting – "people that enjoy what they do, despite the increased demands of the populations that they're serving," stating that "most of those teachers that I'm talking about have been exposed to it early in their careers and they've kind of fallen in love with it."

Another model for educating educators was learning from Indigenous colleagues.

Referring to the work of St. Denis (2010) on allies, one participant spoke of the importance of educators who "may not come from an Aboriginal perspective themselves" who

get to a point that they want to learn more. They want to know more. They want to have an authentic appreciation and understanding for not only history from an Indigenous

perspective here in Canada, but understanding where things are, why they are, and what can we do differently.

The participant spoke of the effectiveness of working with colleagues who took that stance. They showed tremendous growth and learning in multiple dimensions – “to understand not only in their head, but in their heart.” This growth depends on good relationships between Indigenous educators and Settler educators, and an openness of the latter to engage with the former, a necessity emphasized by two different participants and echoed in the literature (Oskineegish, 2013; St. Denis, 2010).

When discussing in-service teacher education, two different participants spoke about the idea of educators’ readiness to take on new perspectives, and the necessity of Indigenous specialists being *invited* into classrooms. One participant drew parallels to how students must be free to learn at their own pace; the education of educators must also be flexible, based on where they are at, responding in a relational way. Whether through initial teacher education or through inservicing, Settler educators need to become more prepared to teach Indigenous Education.



Educator attitudes. Attitude or disposition was seen as linked to acquiring knowledge, and of similarly high importance, which fits with the literature (e.g., Ottmann & Pritchard, 2010). “Knowing how to feel” was a new idea to me. It was presented by a participant who had observed educators’ responses when Indigenous students joined their school communities:

So we – some teachers, schools, get stressed out, ‘Oh my [goodness], this student’s Aboriginal, what are we going to do?’, because they know or they’ve heard that most of our Aboriginal kids aren’t doing well, and it’s true. They make an immediate referral to the advisor or the liaison, ‘Come and help us!’ Even though nothing has happened. ‘We don’t know this student, [but] we know that we’re going to need help!’ So typically what we do, is we begin this process in a negative way by seeing ‘Aboriginal’ as something that requires *help* and support instead of nurturing and guidance.

The participant spoke about the responsibility to address this response on a systemic level:

But that’s all they knew how to feel, so *our* job, as a system, is to ensure that we are educating all of our staff around a better way to do this work. Because looking at students in a negative way is the wrong way to start, right? But we do!... because that’s what we see – they need the help there first. So we look at all these barriers that they have instead

of looking at the strengths that they bring. We identify their barriers first almost always.... But we have to stop doing that.

This participant's emphasis on learning how to see strengths or "gifts" was a common thread in this study and is also found in the literature (Bazylak, 2002; Crooks, Chiodo, Thomas & Hughes, 2010; Goulet, 2001; Vizina 2008). Another participant spoke about finding and nurturing strengths as essential to an Indigenous worldview:

So when you're looking at developing and uncovering those gifts, as I mentioned earlier, you're looking at coming to see those things that help make who you are, but those gifts that you're going to help share... so that when they became old enough, then they had nurtured those skills, so that then they could go back and help their community survive. So it-goes back to reciprocity.... reciprocity [and] generosity are two *really* big pieces, and humility.

In addition to developing a strengths-based stance, participants spoke about an attitude of openness: "It's not about right or wrong, but it does come down to, 'Well this is the way it is so that's the way it has to be' versus, 'Okay, what can we learn, what are the pieces we can take?'" Another participant addressed openness by saying schools serving Indigenous students should hire people who

are open, their hearts are open, their minds are open. And that they are willing to put the energy into balancing themselves so that they can be a good educator for the students.... they need to be open to their own journey in order to facilitate the journey of these young people.

In addition to being open to our own journeys as educators, openness to possibilities in education is another attitude that was described as vital:

I think what it really comes down to is just: for us really opening our minds to all the possibilities that exist out there. 'Cause there's so many barriers that we can put up. And boy, when I was at [a particular school], I put them up myself.... And it came from a place of fear. I can see that now. I can see that now 'cause there is a huge pain body associated with the First Nations. And it's easy to get sucked into the drama of that. And I did. And in doing so, I didn't help anybody, including myself.

I believe that this reference to a "huge pain body" traces back to colonialism and its destructive and widespread effects in Canada. As Battiste (2013) emphasizes, colonialism's effects are not just personal, but permeate the school system. Battiste (2013) is clear about the fact that these painful realities must be acknowledged, a point poignantly made in the quotation above.



Hope. Several participants spoke about the views teachers have of their own impact, particularly when their teaching settings are highly challenging. One participant stated:

Are there still issues that arise that impact success? Completely. Because the reality is, there are factors that are out of our control. And many times, factors that are out of control of kids. And sometimes out of the control of parents. You know, it's life! But you still do what you can, when they come, when they're here, with what you're able to do. It doesn't mean you stop trying.

Another participant made a similar point by linking the idea of hope to what students can achieve, as well as to what teachers can achieve:

Sometimes it's just baby steps. You're going to do as much as you can within that school year for each of your students. They're all going to end up in different places based on where they were when they started with you. But if you can give each of them the same level of hope that they can continue to achieve success, that they can continue to do well, and they can continue to learn... if they had teachers with that same understanding and that same feeling of self-efficacy, then I think you can lessen that gap over time. But it's not easy. And it burns a lot of teachers out... what it comes down to is creating hope. Really. And I think that's going to look different in each setting. Based on what the needs are. So, creating hope for the students, and the teachers themselves *believing* that they can make a difference in what they're doing day-to-day. And if you have both of those, kids are going to be successful.

Success, once again, is positioned holistically. This theme ties into coming to a new understanding of the role of the educator.



Sharing educator successes. Some participants spoke of the importance of sharing success among educators. Gathering for a sharing circle to speak about practices that have been effective, or to learn new information was one idea that was proposed. A participant spoke about the “firsthand information” that is available to us if we take the time to ask – firsthand information about what is working in Indigenous education, firsthand information that is available within boards, between schools, and between educators. This sort of collaborative exchange of knowledge and experience hearkens back to the participant's statement at the

beginning of this section: “The intent of looking at the successes is to inform and to help serve for the greatest good of all the Aboriginal students.” The work of Bell (2004) and Fulford (2007) is an academic endeavor in the same vein – highlighting successful practices in order to build collective understanding, and Oskineegish (2013) explained how much could be learned by new EuroCanadian teachers from the wisdom of senior colleagues with experience teaching Indigenous students.



The educator’s role as guide. One participant put significant emphasis on the educator’s role as guide, contrasted with the need to be in control, an idea that was echoed by another participant as a need for equality within the classroom. The basis for this role fit into her/his traditional spiritual beliefs about roles given by the Creator, and were in contrast to the traditional Eurocentric ways that s/he saw as dominant. S/he described the role of guide in this way:

We don’t know or see everything. We’re not all-knowing, all-seeing, all-doing, and going back to that traditional perspective of – we are just one part on their journey. *Our job is about a guide.* Really, we are a guide supporting.

The implications of this stance were also stated: “It takes the power and control away from us as educators. And the power and control is actually where it should be, with our kids. And that’s that student agency piece.” This ties into creating the environment for student success through relationship: “And so it’s just a really different way of seeing it, right? But it’s how that filters in the classroom, and then what you’re able to get your students to do. Because you built those relationships.”

This idea of student-teacher relationship based less on control and more on balance and learning in community was described by Lipka and colleagues (2005), Lewthwaite and McMillan (2010) and Oskineegish (2013). Their studies are situated in Alaskan, Inuit and Anishinaabe settings respectively, suggesting fairly wide agreement on this.



Welcoming student voice. One participant explained that traditional teachings of reciprocity and equality underlie the idea that “Everybody has a right to a voice.” S/he explained that to live by this teaching, students need to be given the freedom to use their voices, and to be given the learning opportunities to do so respectfully.

These traditional teachings and their implications for teaching were also stated by another participant:

I feel like I’m doing the best teaching when kids are having fun, when they’re moving, when they’re breathing, when they feel honoured and important. But I do rely heavily on First Nations models in that.... For example, in First Nations culture, a child is no less important than an adult or an Elder or a baby. Everyone – wherever you are in the cycle of life, it is honoured for what it is, and you are perfect being from the time you are born. So I *really* try to treat children as equals. Even though, you know, I have this job to facilitate learning.... I don’t act like I’m above them. At least I try not to.

The participants spoke about the implications of this equitable view: “If we open our eyes, our students can also teach us. And again, there are then times to build those relationships, there are then times in which to allow that voice. Allow that student agency.” Through developing relationship and voice, the door is opened for learning: “When we have an opportunity to converse, that’s when learning, then, can transpire.” These findings relate directly to those of Desmoulins (2009) and remind me of the First Nations, Metis and Inuit models for lifelong learning presented by the Canadian Council on Learning (2007, 2009) that emphasize the importance of multiple influences feeding into learning and growth. Students are important, embedded in a multiplicity of sources of learning not limited to one-way transactions with formal educators (CCL 2007, 2009).



Learning from stories. Learning through story is another way to honour Indigenous ways of teaching and learning in public education. A participant said, “There are great stories around here so why not give them to them? Give people stories? Or encourage them to go out and investigate the story.” S/he went on to give an example of how street names, math, and local

Indigenous history could be easily linked in a lesson. S/he spoke about how a well-known road is named after a man who could run from a certain town to the students' city and back in the same day:

That's a lot of running. Well what does that look like?...Well OK, let's pace it out. Here. If this track represents... how many times would have you have to go around in order to get to [town] and back? Well there's your math, right? You know, so there's lots of neat ways to bring those in. The stories that exist in this area alone. And in other areas around Canada, bring lessons to life. Students can capture those and make them their own, right? So I think giving teachers those stories, giving them the voice to *use* their stories. Not just our Aboriginal stories, but their own stories and their own experiences, would help aid in that development of teachers.... And that's what stories are. It's a sharing of a person.

This emphasis on learning from Indigenous stories has been developed extensively by Dion (2009) and Archibald (2008), who brought Indigenous stories into school curriculum areas.

Learning from stories was also described as way to connect with Indigenous families. A participant contrasted this with the Eurocentric tendency to ask direct questions:

When we're working with our families, for example, instead of asking the parents, 'So why isn't Billy coming to school?', we might put it in the idea of, "What can I do to help Billy come to school more often?" So you're not putting in the emphasis on that need to answer a question, but more of a need to, even, "So Billy hasn't been coming to school a lot lately," and stopping there. And giving that time for a parent to think about it, and then to respond. 'Billy really likes to draw.' Pause. 'Yeah, he draws a lot at home.' 'Oh, what does he draw at home?' That leads into an opportunity for a story to happen.

An openness to families' stories was a pathway to Indigenous education that a few participants pointed out. Since each person is unique, coming to understand their story – including committing to the process of building trust with the family – is a way to understand Indigenous education specific to that student.



Learning from families. Many participants spoke of the importance of learning from families, and working in concert with them for the success of their children. One participant stated, "Typically the families have been excluded. You can't exclude families!" S/he noted their importance in positive change in schooling and a holistic view of education. Understanding differing views on family was also highlighted:

In a Westernized perspective, auntie, uncle, grandma, grandpa, that's extended family. We don't talk about extended family. That's just family. Family's family. And many times it might be auntie who's raising the student. It might be grandma or grandpa or it might be, you know, a cousin. So it's those pieces of – even the dynamics of understanding *family* is different. And then how that impacts what happens within the school. So when you're pulling those pieces in, again it helps to go back to an Indigenous pedagogy. Because it's that holistic perspective.

Just as gaining new perspectives on family dynamics is important, gaining perspective on family involvement in school is also pivotal. More than one participant spoke about the danger of measuring parental engagement solely by attendance at parent nights. Seeking the story behind parents' engagement (or lack thereof) at that particular event is important, as is a consideration of what other ways parents find to be involved. One participant said: "I don't care who says parents don't participate. *Our* parents do." S/he went on to describe some forms of family participation, including phoning the school and returning phone calls, sending in items for class projects, and attending cultural celebrations at the school. This view is consistent with Berger's (2008) findings that Inuit parents in one community "might support their children's schooling though they do not often... attend parent/teacher interviews" (p. 162). He and other researchers have found that some Settler teachers tended to interpret low attendance at parent/teacher interviews as indicative of low support for students' education (Berger, 2008; Fuzessy, 2003; Gibson, 1993).

Family history with formal schooling was referred to several times. Family members' experiences with education impact student success:

I think what it comes down to is at the family level, is education something that's valued? Is there a sense of purpose in it? And from family to family, I think it's different depending on what the parents' and grandparents' experiences have been.

Engaging with this question requires a holistic, relational stance.

Coming to know the stories of families was important to participants. This gave educators vital background information in relating to students, in considering options and consequences, and in better understanding their students' needs, and how those impact their learning. The importance of drawing on students' and families' funds of knowledge has been shown to be powerful in cross-cultural teaching (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) and in Indigenous education in particular (Berger, 2009; CCL, 2007, 2009).

Intake meetings. A formal way to build relationships with parents and to begin to hear their stories is intake meetings. Two participants spoke in depth about what an intake meeting would look like, and the purpose behind it. One opened with this description:

The first thing is meeting with the student and the family. ‘Tell me who you are. What is your story? Where do you come from? What language do you speak? Who are your people?’ All of those questions. We never dig into their stories. We only dig into their academics. Their [academic records], so we never get down to the core of who they are as human beings, when that really is what personalized learning is all about.... But if you don’t know who they are, then how do you even support their interests or the things that they value?

S/he went on to describe the setting for this meeting – sitting in an available space together, not bringing paper or holding an interview, but just talking to them.

And I say, ‘I want your children there too.’ ‘Cause I ask their kids, ‘What are things that you like to do? How was your old school? What was your favourite thing? Did you have any teachers that you really liked? What were their names?’ Like you know, trying to figure out who they are, so, and then I talk about our school, I share our own reality, and then I ask them if they still want to be here.

The other participant shared the goal of connecting personally with each student and family.

S/he found that this time spent was fruitful in terms of student success:

Some of the challenged students that I’ve dealt with in the past ten years – the kids that have been most successful are the ones whose families we’ve been able to engage in the process. And again, that’s regardless of cultural background. But it takes a lot of effort, it takes a lot of work to build the trust. And it takes a lot of work to get them to understand that they have a role to play in it. And it’s not about laying blame. And it’s not about pointing fingers, it’s about being collaborative and proactive, and involving them in it. And building that understanding of responsibility and accountability in a positive way.

When I asked how s/he goes about building that, the participant responded:

When kids are coming to our school, I sit down with them before they start, and I spend about an hour and a half talking to them about our program, talking to them about why kids are successful with us and their role in that. And I think that because we have smaller numbers, we’re able to do it. Now, I don’t see why you couldn’t do that in all school settings. From preschool through to grade 12. But again, it is time-consuming.

The participant tied the explanation of this process to the importance of educators’ views of students:

And I think it’s getting educators to understand that every single kid is coming to school to do the best that they can. They’re not all being successful *because* they’re not all

coming with the same skills and the same abilities and most of that is outside of their control.... They're all coming to school to do their best. They're going to do the best they can based on their skills and abilities and their experiences in life to that point.

By taking the time to get to know students and their families, educators build valuable relationships that will impact student success, and also give themselves the opportunity to see students with challenges in a different light.



Valuing student identities. Linked to the idea of being open to students' and families' stories is the idea of actively valuing them in schools. One participant said:

our students have told us that they don't want to be treated differently because they're Aboriginal, but they want that acknowledgement, right? They want to be able to say that it's OK to be Aboriginal. It's OK to be First Nations or Metis or Inuit. It's OK to be First Nations and [specific Indigenous group]. It's OK to be [specific Indigenous group]. It's OK to be those things. But I don't think they're getting that acknowledgement in our schools. I don't think they're getting it in a way that they're seeing anyway, right? And that's a very broad statement that I made. I'm sure it's happening in places and I'm sure that students do feel that way. But if we go by the stats, we're not.

Desmoulins (2009) also found that students did not feel their identities as Indigenous people were valued at school. The idea of creating opportunities for students to explore their identities was emphasized by participants, as seen in some of the examples below.

Exploring identity through story. Giving students the opportunity to consider their own identities and stories, and to document their own journeys, was discussed by several participants.

This process of discovery was explained by one participant:

Aboriginal perspectives and experiences is not about teaching our kids how to *be* Aboriginal. It's about providing opportunities for them to discover that for themselves. Providing opportunities for them to *explore* their identity, not tell them who they are!...If we provide opportunities for them to *explore* who they are on their own terms, so, give them a concept like 'Home.' What is your home like?...They're doing a book of themselves – of who – of what their story is, based on their home, their community, their family, things they eat. Like it seems really basic. But they don't connect those things to being Aboriginal. That's just their life. So, we need to not make distinctions for them, but to make sure that they understand, or provide them with opportunities to learn about what impact that has on who they are in the bigger world. Right? 'Cause it's all about survival.

The same participant described the need to move beyond a cultural approach to an exploration of identity:

We often see ‘Aboriginal Ed’ as this cultural entity. It’s not. It’s bigger than that. We need it – we need to think more holistically. We see it – it’s like a beads and feathers approach... But we need to go deeper with them. We need them to be able to nurture their self-identify, and not just *be* what other people see them as. They need to be themselves. And whatever that is, is up to them.

S/he gave an example of exploring this deeper identity through the lens of a discussion about Idle

No More:

‘Well what’s Idle No More?’ ‘Well’ – and that’s where they stop. They *don’t know*. They need to know those things, but they need to be able to understand and explore them on their own. I can’t tell them what Idle No More is. I can’t – I’m learning that myself. You know? I can’t teach them what I know, because that’s based on my own value system, my own opinions, how *I* see the world. They need to learn those things through their own experiences. We need to talk more about things that are going on in the real world.

This idea of developing identity on one’s own terms is resonant with the literature. Restoule (2000) states, “Let us identify as Aboriginal people from our inside place, from ourselves, our communities, our traditions. Let us not allow others to decide our identity for us” (p. 112).

Allowing space for students to explore identities is a significant finding of this study.

Story was a vehicle for exploring identity for many participants. Three of the participants spoke about current or potential projects where students would explore and organize their own stories and journeys through media such as visual art, journaling, filmmaking and music. The crucial process of coming to know oneself was eloquently stated by another participant:

Young people learn to come to know who they are, that they develop a sense of not only who they are from a traditional or cultural perspective, but just who they are as a human being and as a person, their role in life, so that when they become of-age, and they move forward, that they become productive members of society, that help advocate for their own people, but for people as a whole.

Addressing identity, including its cultural components, was presented as a rich, ongoing process, one in which educators have the opportunity to act as facilitators. The centrality of identity is established in the literature (e.g., Fryberg et al., 2013; Toulouse, 2006).



Learning environment. In discussing Indigenous student success, one participant emphasized environment:

Our environment is so super-friendly and warm. We have to be really loving and nurturing.... Who knows what [students are] coming in with. We have to make sure that when they come in, they feel loved or they feel safe.

S/he described this safe environment in a holistic way, including the physical dimension of providing food, as well as emotional, mental/intellectual and spiritual dimensions.

An element of creating a safe learning environment referenced by a few participants was trauma-informed practice. Participants spoke about the continuing effects of Residential Schools and intergenerational trauma, and the need for teachers to be aware of this, and even trained specifically to work with trauma. One goal of such learning, a participant stated, is “to get people to realize that these kids *can’t* learn unless they feel safe,” an idea well-supported in the literature (e.g., Horsman, 1999; Tompkins, in Berger, 2008).

Responding to “survival mode.” In creating safe learning environments for students, educators need to be aware of wider circumstances. One participant described it this way:

For many of the families, I think they’re in survival mode all of the time. When people are in survival mode, priority is meeting basic needs day to day. And you can’t get to [addressing] value and purpose for education when you’re struggling day-to-day with those questions. So, and I’ve – in my experiences so far, cultural background is less of a factor, and more of the factor is helping families – helping struggling families meet those basic needs.

This participant worked beyond awareness and into systemic solutions that could help to meet the basic needs of any family in the board. S/he focused on preschool level intervention to help students stay on par with literacy and numeracy, and also spoke about collaborative opportunities for government services to work in concert.

Another participant spoke about addressing these social realities at school with both educators and students, elements s/he believes are currently missing:

We need to rethink Aboriginal Education. And we need to pay equal attention to the complexities of the lives of our students, the wellness factor, you know? Look at all the poverty that our Aboriginal families are living in. Single parent families....Aboriginal youth are more likely to end up being incarcerated than any other cultural – whatever-ethnic youth in Canada. We have to think about that. You know, how could we not think about that? But most people don't know that! That more than 50% of people who are incarcerated are Aboriginal, and it's even higher for women? Like – how can we not think about that? Like lots of our kids' families have parents or moms or dads or brothers or aunts or uncles who are in jail. They know they're in jail. They know what they did. They saw! They were there when their mom or dad did that. Like how could we not think about that? We think that they just come to school and that's all erased? All we typically think about is culture and language. 'Let's teach 'em culture and language and we'll fix everything.'... Ask how much culture and language we teach now. Not a lot. 'Cause that's not what our kids need right now. What our kids need are strategies to help them deal with the [hard situations] in their lives. And they need people around them who they trust to teach them those things. That's who *we* are. And in the process, we're going to try to teach them how to read! And write. And have conversations. And take good care of their bodies.

With particular reference to students, the same participant said:

They need to understand their situation around poverty. They – they don't know they're poor! Right? Some – they kind of do, 'Well we don't have any money.' But they don't understand that – A) it's possible to come out of that. They think that they're stuck in that cycle forever. You know? How do we have conversations with them to help them begin to understand that it *is* possible? Who can we show? Who can we bring into the classroom to tell their story and to give them that internalized, you know, wanting and determination to work themselves out of that? 'Cause that's where it's going to come from....They have to *feel* that from other people. And they have to know and experience and see that that can really happen.

This participant also made sure to point out that the issues students face are not universal. S/he referenced places where Indigenous students were highly successful in typically-measured academic areas. Thus, addressing social realities is highly contextual, part of considering and responding to students' holistic needs. Goulet's (2001) work speaks about how educators' attitudes and responses to poverty can challenge the colonial forces that created such conditions. She gives practical examples of meeting students' needs while upholding high academic expectations.

Other participants reinforced the idea that each learner's circumstances are unique, and that schools and education systems must be responsive on a holistic level. These ideas tie back to the "creating hope" bead – the ability to recognize and respond to students' needs while persevering in the belief in a positive future.

Diverse learning communities. Participants spoke about the value of culturally diverse learning environments. They viewed this diversity as important for the development of Indigenous students, and also spoke about the benefits students of all backgrounds could accrue by being exposed to Indigenous influences. This diversity was actively highlighted by educators in their practice:

When I'm talking about one culture, or if there's a concept we're learning in music, I try to relate it to many different cultures so the kids feel that their culture is important and special. But not just First Nations – all cultures, right? So even though I do a First Nations unit, I also did an Arabic unit, and African unit. But I talk about ancient wisdoms, and what worked for people for thousands and thousands of years. And trying to honour everyone's culture and everyone's religion. I think that's what public education is about.

Diversity was seen to span beyond culture, including things like avoiding elitism and streaming in courses:

That goes back again, to that colonization, and Residential Schools... stifling and putting people into what other people perceive they should or could or need to do. Versus, you know, putting the supports in place that everybody has the same opportunities.

Diversity was not seen as an abstract ideal, but as an ideal that required specific support and investment:

I think the ideal is for [Indigenous students] to be no different than any other student, and that's to be in a diverse classroom, where not only the classroom teacher, but the school at large, and the district are aware, and help support their needs and their families' needs. Where it's a priority and where there are adequate resources to support all these important factors. I'm 100% positive that in order to be successful not only in any public board, but in life, they need to learn that way. They need to walk, again, in both worlds. And be able to receive the same education. But the curriculum would look different too. In terms of supporting them [it] would need to acknowledge and embed what's important to them and their values and their traditions and the history, but also the current reality into what they're learning to make it more meaningful.

This participant's focus on developing well-resourced, well-aware, diverse learning communities is representative of the general findings of this study. This is not a theme that I have found is emphasized in the literature on Indigenous student success. Perhaps it is a new avenue for exploration in the area of public education.



“Owning” our students. This idea of context and ownership hangs on a high degree of accountability to relationship and interconnectedness. When Indigenous students are known, valued members of the school community, their needs are owned and addressed within the school community instead of depending fully on the support of Indigenous specialists. The importance of in-school support for Indigenous students was addressed by several participants. One of these participants stated, “Supports and services should be immediate, it should be from within the school setting.” S/he directly contrasted this with a process of making outside referrals, which s/he saw as problematic because they lack qualities such as being gender-specific, described as “kind of reactive, and flying in, and then it’s taking away all the important relationship-building that should have been happening within the school in the first place.” Desmoulines (2009) presented similar views in her study of an urban high school with specific reference to addressing racism at the school site. Although Indigenous support people exist in their boards, several participants stated that they should not be the first go-to person but rather act in supporting roles to schools and teachers as they support their Indigenous students.

“Owning” students involves practical actions as described above. According to this participant, it is also an attitude that shows value for each student, regardless of cultural background:

[We do] the work that needs to be done in response to the immediate needs of our students.... Students come first. *Our* students. Not *Aboriginal* students. *Our* students.... We respond to their needs as learners, not as Aboriginal learners.

At the surface, there seems to be discontinuity between ideas such as hiring Indigenous staff members to support Indigenous students and this idea of responding to students as “our” students not “Aboriginal” students. I am content to sit with this tension because participants did not seem to see the two as incompatible.



Avoiding labels. In the pursuit of healthy relationships and a sense of interconnectedness and belonging to facilitate student success, some participants spoke about the danger of labeling. One participant said:

Sometimes it's simple little steps like changing – getting rid of an acronym like FNMI and saying, just say: 'First Nations, Metis and Inuit.' Nobody likes to be called an acronym. Like I don't walk around and say, 'Oh look at that ELL.' You know that person. Calling people an acronym is another way of perpetuating those systemic policies and discriminatory ways.

Another educator returned to the idea of labeling a few times throughout the interview. S/he recognized the administrative purpose of having families self-identify for funding purposes, but firmly believed that this information should not be used beyond this purpose. Speaking from experience, s/he noted that even without the intention of doing so, labeling could lead to negative generalizations:

'Oh, I didn't know that person was Aboriginal. That explains why'.... It leads them to this – usually stereotypical generalization about that student and that family. So it justifies their *own* assumptions about that family. Just that one word, 'Aboriginal.' Does a lot of harm.

S/he stated that even with good intentions, concentrating on labels instead of a holistic, personal view of each student can reinforce stereotypes, affecting both educators and students: "It's ended up not providing the opportunities for them to be successful, or for *us* to be successful in helping them learn. It's done the opposite." The concern that Indigenous students may be stereotyped by their teachers is found in the literature (Riley & Ungerleider, 2012). As an antidote, the same participant said: "If we truly believe in this whole notion of personalized learning, let's not label any students. But let's develop a process to learn that about them through a conversation." This statement is representative of many participants' views – that getting to know students and their families and responding effectively is the path to success in education, rather than generalizing and labeling. This approach recognizes that students' cultures and identities are complex, and that being "Aboriginal" can mean something different to different students. Thus, culture is not dismissed, but is considered within a holistic view of a student's life, values, circumstances, strengths and needs, as described in the "identity" bead and "holistic" strand.



Celebrating student successes. Several participants spoke about celebrating the success of students, acknowledging their achievements on a personal level. One participant explained:

How we measure success in our students is definitely personalized to every and each individual student. Students that have, for example – there could be a strong, capable academic student with less concerns and issues happening at home that we strive and have different expectations for a different student who may be living in a shelter, high transient rate. We have 250 students and I can give you 250 success stories. Depending on every student and where they are in their life and in their journey and what factors are working against them or with them.

Celebrating success was also described as acknowledging and building on the strengths of each student. These may be strengths that surface through school activities or strengths that shine outside of school, such as participating in powwow dance or a sport. Castagno and Brayboy (2008) also cited celebrating small successes as an important part of culturally responsive schooling in their review of the literature.

Linked to celebrating student success is having assessment practices in place to monitor each individual student's academic progress. One participant described a "student learner plan" process in place at her/his school:

So, identifying the goal, letting the student know what the goal is, like that they fully understand it, and the parent, and then planning accordingly... everyone knows when an assessment around the academic piece is going to take place. But part of that, too, impacts their well-being because they are participating in their own learning experience and they feel valued in that, they have a voice in that.

This individualized approach to tracking growth and success is linked to the structure of the learning environment, as discussed in the following section on relational work groups.



Establishing small, relational work groups. Some of the success stories shared by participants related to individual gains in small, targeted work groups. This example is illustrative of the intellectual and emotional factors attributed to the success:

For example, there was one boy last year, didn't know any letter sounds in Grade 1. Beginning of the year, didn't know really the alphabet, what sound they make. He went from not knowing that to being able to read at a grade level, and also read 80% of grade level sight words, which shows us that this is effective, that we've had successes because of this – more so of relationships. So everything's in Aboriginal culture very relational. So I think because we've created this small group environment and we've created

relationships with these students, they're able to trust and focus more, despite their varying needs. So that's success to me, it shows that they've progressed.

This small group academic focus was cited by another participant as well. A third participant spoke about the effectiveness of providing one-on-one culturally relevant learning opportunities for Indigenous students within the culturally diverse learning environment where s/he worked.



Mentorship. Mentorship was mentioned by participants as a way to build Indigenous student success. Some spoke of mentoring relationships between educators and students while others spoke of student-to-student mentorships. These supportive relationships were seen as particularly crucial in the Junior High and High School years when many Indigenous students become disengaged with school. Mentorship is an idea supported by Indigenous literature (Kovacs, 2009).

A related idea is that of having role models. One participant described a province where comprehensive programs are in place to support Indigenous students in pursuing career goals such as law, business and education. Because this program is in place, young students can have older students and professionals to look up to who have completed high levels of education, an idea resonant with the work of LaFrance (2000). This was seen as highly important for youth, and as the result of comprehensive cooperation at a systemic level developed by Indigenous organizations.



Funding. One participant argued that in order to create structures where Indigenous students can be supported at the school level, funding needs to be set aside to hire staff in Indigenous support roles. The practicality of this recommendation was discussed by the participant: If a high number of Indigenous students attend a school, setting aside funding for an Indigenous person to support them is a practical investment. Discrepancies between funding for students from reserves and students within the regular provincial school system was also brought forward as problematic by a participant.



School leadership. The importance of school-based leadership in setting a path for public Indigenous education was directly addressed by two participants. Another addressed the importance of this role by sharing a story that implicitly demonstrated the ability of school administrators to set the course for relationships with students and families. Participants recognized the importance of classroom teachers' interactions with students and families but also acknowledged the pivotal role of those in leadership roles. The role of school-based leadership in instigating change is documented in the mainstream literature (Melville, Bartley & Weinburgh, 2012), as well as in certain studies on Indigenous education (Bell, 2004; Fulford, 2007)..



Openness to possibility on a system level. Leadership in Indigenous education must also take place at a system level. This has many facets. One is the consideration of large-scale possibilities and change. For example, one participant spoke about setting up an Indigenous-centric school where Indigenous students could visit on a once every 10 days cycle. They would be personally enriched by cultural experiences and learning, and could also share some of this with their community schools the other nine days of the cycle. This school could house a variety of services, and also be a place where traditional Indigenous skills could be learned. It would also be a destination for classes from throughout the community to go and learn together for a full week. S/he made it clear that this is just one possibility, the point being that many possibilities exist, beyond those regularly drawn upon. Other such possibilities s/he described are more field trips and outdoor school, more flexible school hours, and programs that incorporate home schooling.

Another participant spoke about rethinking how education and other services are administered, and developing a “one-stop shopping” approach. At one location, parents could drop their children off for early learning, and could also access critical services such as healthcare. The participant believed that this model would be financially efficient and also increase engagement with services essential to well-being.

Timing was an area that participants saw as constraining and demanding of conformity. The inflexibility of school hours, and the requirements to graduate within a specific time frame and to move through the grades on a certain timeline were cited. System-level flexibility to acknowledge students' accomplishments outside of school was presented by a participant in the context of the need for balance between Eurocentric and Indigenous ways of knowing:

They have to find a way to live together in harmony with that balance. If that balance isn't there, then the student is the one that suffers. So if a school system isn't going to be flexible enough to acknowledge the fact that this student performs in these ceremonies or does this powwow dance, and that is a part of who that student is, how can I help that student bring that into the school and maybe earn credits, or find ways to have an outlet in our system? So that that child can say, 'This is my school. I see myself here. I belong here!'

By opening up the potential to redefine aspects of schooling and to consider the unique learning opportunities proposed, leaders and policymakers would be engaging in a more holistic way of thinking through relationship and openness to a variety of perspectives – a variety of worldviews, even. Without this type of engagement, the bead would not rest securely on the central strands. Certain Indigenous scholars call for a radical reconsideration of schooling. Kirkness (1998) and McPherson (2011) draw attention to major ideological and historical faults in the current system and pose the challenge of redefining it according to Indigenous priorities. Kirkness (1998), for example, emphasizes communities taking a deep look at what education has meant for them in the past and how they'd like it to look in the future, calling attention away from schooling as merely reading, writing and arithmetic through prescribed methods, and into a vision for schooling that includes self esteem, pride, culture, and connection with older generations. McPherson (2011), with reference to “restoring the hermeneutic circle,” (p. 200) writes about the necessity of Indigenous communities educating their own people. Both scholars open the door for major changes that would likely depart from Eurocentric schooling norms.

If the public school system is to truly honour Indigenous students and their families and communities, it must be open to Indigenous perspectives, even those that shake up the Eurocentric system. If ideas for radically restructuring are dismissed, the integrity of honouring Indigenous perspectives is also dismissed.

Chapter 5: Concluding Words

Conclusion

In closing, I conclude that success, according to the prevailing view in the public school system, privileges Eurocentric views of success which may exclude Indigenous students' personal views of success, as well as those of their families and communities. To change this, public educators can begin by seeking out multiple perspectives and stories, particularly those of their Indigenous students, their families, and the local community. Through being willing to consider perspectives that may be unfamiliar, educators can create an environment where success is viewed more holistically, and where knowledges and experiences outside of the Eurocentric are valued. Entwined with this, educators, and public school systems as a whole, can begin to reorient toward prioritizing relationships. When ongoing work is undertaken to build mutual, trusting, reciprocal relationships between students and educators, and families and educators, an environment more conducive to Indigenous students' attainment of their goals is created. Finally, being open to holistic considerations of success that include physical, emotional, mental/intellectual, and spiritual well-being is essential. When schools change to reflect these, not only are Indigenous students honoured, but students of all backgrounds are offered an enriched education.

Contribution to the Literature

The findings at the core of this study are firmly situated within existing literature on Indigenous education. This study's contribution to the literature is not to lay foundations – Indigenous educators and scholars have already done so in a thorough manner (e.g., CCL, 2007, 2009; NIB/AFN, 1972; RCAP, 1996; Toulouse, 2013). The contribution of this study is not to show that these core ideas are applicable in public education – Dion (2009), Kovach (2009) and Archibald (2008) have already led the way in implementing storytelling pedagogies and methodologies, relationship has been accepted as central to Indigenous education (Goulet, 2001; Oskineegish, 2013; RCAP, 1996), and holistic models by scholars like Brendtro and Brokenleg (1990) have been applied widely in programs such as the *Circle of Courage*.

What this study *does* offer is a vision of how core concepts in Indigenous education might inform student success through practical strategies and actions. Specific strategies – the beads – are adaptable and applicable at school and system levels if, as participants emphasized, they are applicable to that particular context. At the same time, they are not free-standing. They are held by the core strands drawn from a base of Indigenous knowledge and years of experience in public education shared by seven educators, strands that have been described as central in the theoretical literature as well (e.g., Battiste, 2013; CCL, 2007, 2009). Of utmost importance, represented by the *We* idea of the entwined strands, is that this vision for the success of Indigenous students is also a vision for the success of public education as a whole. By this I mean that the concepts and practices presented here are not meant to be exclusive to Indigenous students. As participants emphasized, these concepts and practices stand to enrich the education of all Canadian students.

Potential Applications of Findings

The connected beads model provides for two different levels of applicability. The strands, in my view, provide the opportunity for educators to do some theoretical thinking, further learning, and even soul-searching. As individual teachers, administrators and policymakers, the strands present the challenge to engage with stories and multiple perspectives, to enter, maintain, or examine relationships and interconnections, and to delve into an ever-broadening holistic way of thinking and being. I know that my interactions with the participants provoked this in me. This challenge extends beyond the individual to a group and systemic level. What would it look like for school staffs to make decisions and set up programming based on multiple perspectives, relationship and holism? What would it look like for a board to privilege the holistic over the compartmentalized, or to insist on seeking out multiple stories, Indigenous ones in particular, in the process of making decisions? How could a province structure a Ministry of Education in a way that was dependent on strong, positive relationships across diverse cultures, worldviews, ages, income levels, geographies and ideologies? The specific strategies presented as beads invite a different sort of application. They invite jumping in with both feet and trying it, dependent on the strengths of Indigenous students, colleagues, Elders and family members to guide that process. They involve doing things differently in order to honour the underlying principles of multiple perspectives, relationship, and holism.

Opportunities for Further Study

While the findings of this study certainly invite immediate application, they also invite further study. Thanks to the incredible insight and diverse, deep perspectives offered by the participants in this study, there are many areas of study to further pursue.

One is a systemic consideration of how students' and families' needs can be met, with education being one part of a larger system. This could include major restructuring to create meaningful cross-ministry and cross-organization work. A systemic consideration of the education system itself is also alluded to by participants. On what premise is the current system structured, and how could it be improved, or even remade?

Another opportunity is to pursue storytelling and the sharing of multiple perspectives in classrooms and schools. This pursuit would make students' and families' knowledge and experience foundational with the intention of enriching the education of all students, Indigenous and Settler alike. Implicit in this is the opportunity to build meaningful relationships in school communities that can support trust, collaboration, and new perspectives and practices in education.

The opportunities are near-endless when the many ideas presented by the participants are considered. What about studying the effects of large-scale mentoring? What about looking at widespread, accessible early intervention in numeracy and literacy? How about cross-cultural work on poverty and resource access? Or an exploration of how food security, culture, and educational success correspond? Why not create opportunities for Settler students to attend Indigenous-centric schools and study the effects? How about the cascading effects of teacher attitudes and knowledge of Indigenous people on teaching behavior, its effects on Settler students, their relationships with Indigenous peers, and the effect of this on Indigenous student self-view? The possibilities raised by participants are extensive and remarkable.

Sincere Thanks

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Appendices

Appendix A: Description and Consent Form

What does Aboriginal Student Success Mean?

Aboriginal Educator Interviews: Description & Consent Form

Dear Potential Participant,

I invite you to take part in an interview that will help me to understand your perspective on Aboriginal student success as both an Aboriginal person and an educator. If you choose to participate, after the completion of this interview, you will receive further invitations to review and critique the transcripts and drafts of the findings as well as an invitation to participate in a follow-up interview, phone call, or emails. Participation is voluntary and you could withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

Description of the project: This master's study is focused in on one particular group of Aboriginal people: educators. It is hoped that by bringing your professional, personal, and family perspectives, an idea of what "success" looks like for Aboriginal students in the public schools can be developed. Aboriginal educators have advised the researchers in the development of the research question and methods.

Interviews: Interviews are estimated to last about 60 to 75 minutes. The length and direction of the interview is up to your discretion since it is a semi-structured interview, meant for you to be able to share what you think is most important. Participation is voluntary and you are under no obligation to be interviewed. If you choose to be interviewed you may refuse to answer any question, and you may stop at any time without penalty.

I will ask you a general question about what success looks like for an Aboriginal student in public school. There are several follow-up questions we can use or we can continue in an open-ended way. If you agree, I will audio-record the interviews.

Risks & Benefits : No known risk is associated with participation in the research. You will receive a small token of my thanks for participating in the interview.

Harm: Some educators may feel discomfort when discussing the subject matter.

Confidentiality & Data Storage: Pseudonyms or general statements will be used when I present your views if you choose to keep your name confidential. Due to the small number (seven) of participants, it may be possible for people who know you or the [name of urban centre] Aboriginal Education community well to identify you; however, I will do my best to limit identifying information being linked to your views and will invite you to review the thesis paper before it is published to make sure you are satisfied. This can be done via email or by mail, based on your preferences. All interview data will be password-protected and/or encrypted

during the study, accessed by only Martha Moon and Paul Berger, and then safely stored at Lakehead University for a period of five years.

Research Results: Research results will be shared in various forms including a Master's of Education thesis at Lakehead University, academic and non-academic journals and conferences, a report to [school board] and other organizations such as [Ministry of Education], Canada Council on Learning, and [Indigenous organization in province], and through teaching magazines, newspapers and online networks.

You will be invited to look over the transcripts, key findings, and thesis before it is submitted so that you have the opportunity to ensure that your views are represented accurately. Other reports, presentations, and articles will be summaries of the thesis in various forms, so I will not ask you to review each of these!

Researcher Information: The research is being conducted by:

Martha Moon Master's Student, Faculty of Education
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Under the supervision of

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 email: paul.berger@lakeheadu.ca_tel: 807-343-8708 fax: 807-344-6807

This research study has been approved by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions related to the ethics of the research and would like to speak to someone other than the researchers, please contact Sue Wright at the Research Ethics Board at tel: 807-343-8283 or research@lakeheadu.ca.

This research study has been approved by the [school board].
 tel: [contact info for school board personnel]

I, _____, have been fully informed of the objectives of the research. I understand these objectives and consent to being interviewed for the project. I understand that I do not have to answer any question and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without any repercussions.

I consent to the interview being audio-recorded

Yes No

 Signature of the participant

 Date

Appendix B: Initial interview guide

Main Question: How would you describe success for an Aboriginal student in the public school board?

Elaborations on the Main Question:

As an educator of Aboriginal students who is not Aboriginal myself, what should I know about ‘success’ for Aboriginal students in the public board?

Can you help me understand what we are aiming for when we speak of Aboriginal students’ success?

What do you see in a successful Aboriginal student?

Potential Follow-Up Questions:

Could you tell me the story of an Aboriginal student’s success in the public board? Are there some characteristics in this story that could be applied broadly?

Would you describe success for an Aboriginal student differently answering from your perspective as a family member/community member/former student/Elder (if applicable)?

Is success the right word to use? Is there a better word?

What might the ideal learning environment be like for an Aboriginal student? (Ideal could be defined as “best” or “most effective”, or feel free to provide another definition).

How would the student know s/he was successful?

How would the teacher know the student was successful?

How would the family know the student was successful?

How would the community know the student was successful?

How would stakeholders such as the school board and [Ministry of Education] know the student was successful?

How might teachers contribute to the student’s success?

What do you see as important for non-Aboriginal teachers to know about Aboriginal people? For instance: are First Nation names important? How might curriculum, tasks, and ways of learning contribute to the student’s success?

How might school structure, school culture, board policies, and [Ministry of Education] contribute to the student’s success?

Would success for an Aboriginal student look the same as success for a student of a different background? How might success look the same?

Could success be measured? Should it be? How would it be?

Can success for Aboriginal students be defined broadly, or is it different for each person?

Are there certain common characteristics of success in the public school system? Would those characteristics apply to all Aboriginal students?

Would they also apply to students of different backgrounds?

Would success be different based on whether the student's experiences were reserve, rural, or all urban?

Would success be different if the student was in an Aboriginal school vs. a school with students of various backgrounds?

Appendix C: Canadian Council on Learning Holistic Lifelong Learning Models

Figure 7: **First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model**

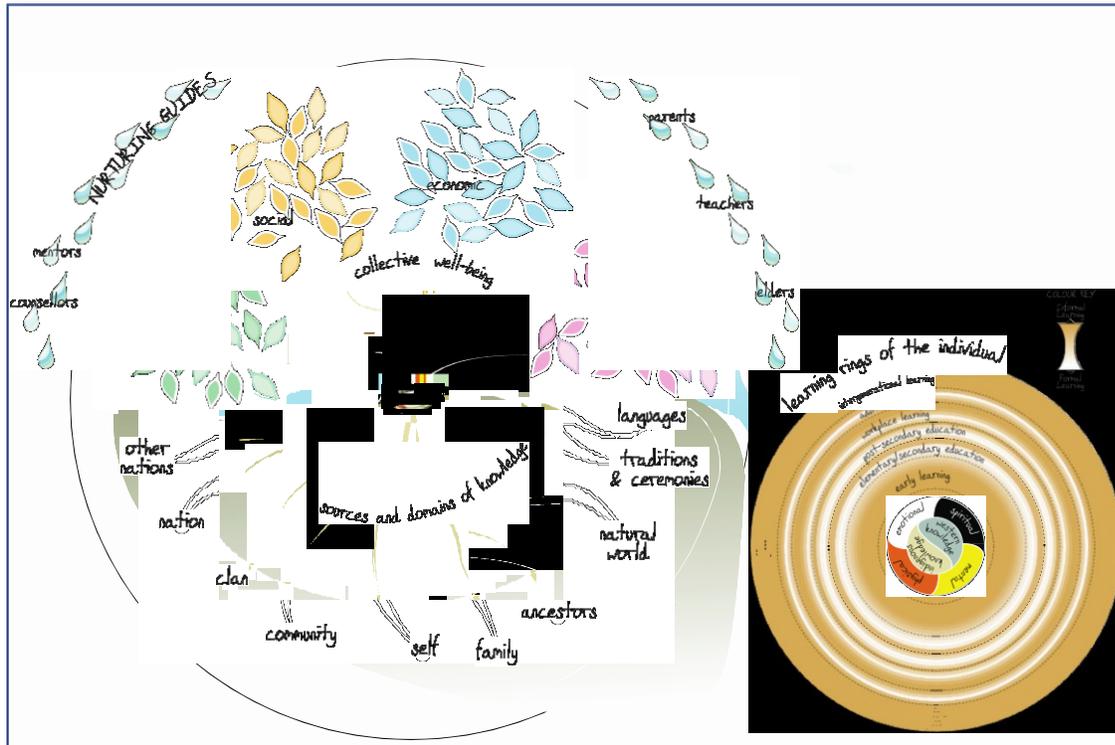


Figure 9: **Métis Holistic Lifelong Learning Model**

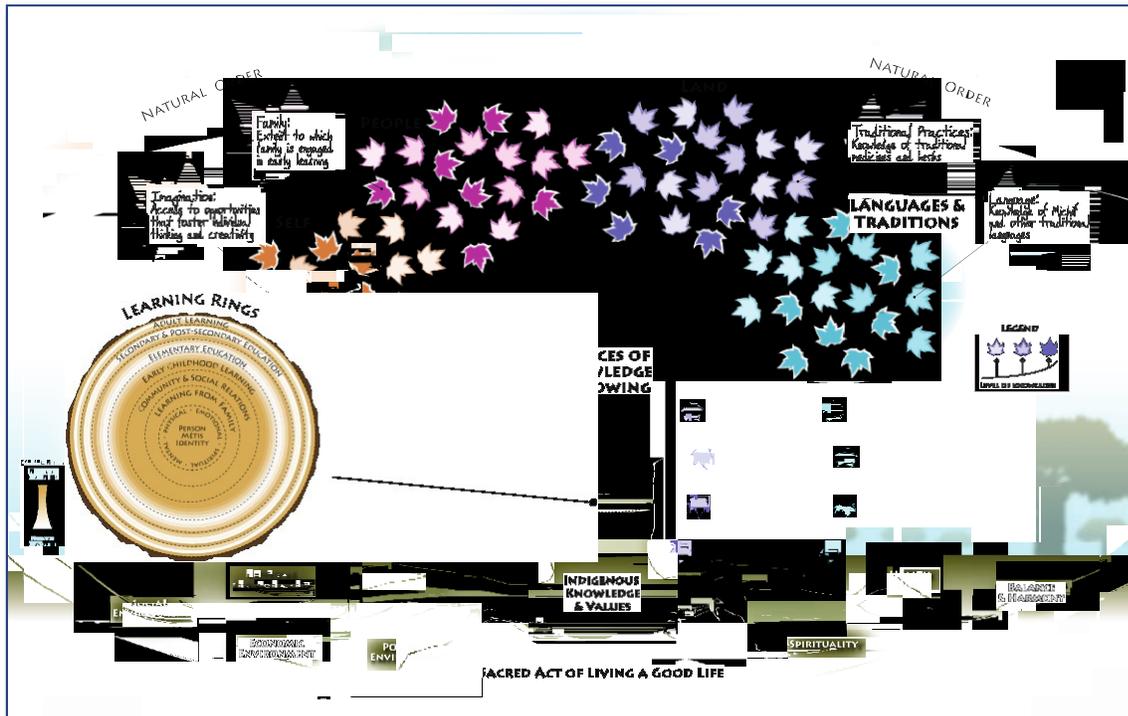
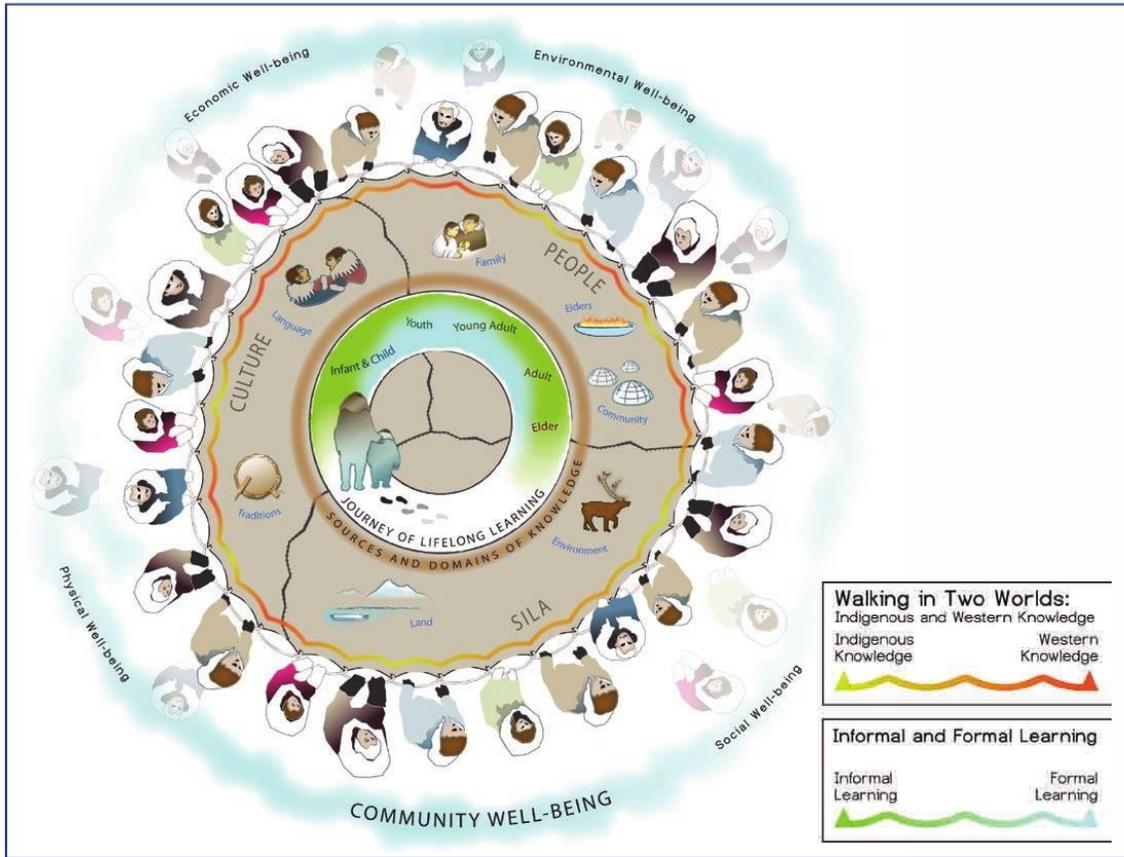


Figure 8: **Inuit Holistic Lifelong Learning Model**



Appendix D: Toulouse (2013) thematic diagram from *Beyond Shadows*

Figure 1 – Themes in *Beyond Shadows*

This figure identifies the topics that will be pursued in this paper.

