

ABORIGINAL EDUCATION FOR NON-ABORIGINAL LEARNERS:
ENGAGING TEACHER CANDIDATES IN AN IMMERSIVE
CULTURAL EXPERIENCE

by

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for the degree of Doctor of Education
Graduate Department of Social Justice Education
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ABSTRACT

It is the expectation of this thesis that Aboriginal Education ought to be considered education for all learners, that is initiated, developed, facilitated and evaluated by Aboriginal people. In order to demonstrate this, this dissertation describes a weekend-long land-based Immersive Cultural Experience facilitated by two Anishinaabe Elders, involving six non-Aboriginal Teacher Candidates from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education's Bachelor of Education program. The research was proposed and carried out respecting Indigenous Knowledge and the standards set out in the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres' *Utility, Self-Voicing, Access, Inter-Relationality Research Framework*.

Experience was the principal method through which an expanded approach to Aboriginal Education was validated, however the main form of data collection for the Immersive Cultural Experience was twelve participant interviews. The analytical approach was interpretive and inductive, asking questions that related to experience, focusing on the improvement of professional teaching practice and ultimately how the participants perceived their experiences. The data outlined in this dissertation reflects the comments and reflections of the Teacher Candidates, drawn from a pre-experience interview, sharing circle that closed the Immersive Cultural Experience, debrief session in Toronto, post-experience interview, as well as correspondence. The interviews were structured to gather a range of information from reflection on Canadian identity, personal responsibility, spirituality, new styles of teaching and learning, and the utility of cultural immersion and experiential education.

This dissertation contributes to theory development for Allyship and provides a best practices framework for intercultural engagement and experiential learning, outlining: a) knowing one's history; b) seeking local Knowledge Holders; c) understanding Aboriginal ethics protocols; d) collaborative planning; e) preparing participants; f) community-driven facilitation; g) debriefing the experience; and h) maintaining relationships. In following this framework, the participants were challenged to reflect on what they believed to be true about Aboriginal people, knowledges and cultures, and create a new understanding based on respect, engagement and relationship. The changes observed in the Teacher Candidates proved that the experience of being on the land, and learning directly from Aboriginal Elders has a significant impact on teachers' thinking about how to approach Aboriginal Education.

There are many people who have seen the way things are,
And have asked almost in despair,
But what can I do?
And the only answer has been,
You have to do something about *You*
– Arthur Solomon (excerpt, 1990; 67 – emphasis original)

Transforming educational contexts requires
 daring thoughts
 challenging what we know
 thought we knew
 need to know to face the dawning of a new day.
If people can be acculturated to hold dominant views
 people can also be un-acculturated
 reculturated to Traditional views.
– Fyre Jean Graveline (2002; 13)

What I'm convinced of is this... the tension of the fast-moving river through
your paddle, the radiant heat in the moose's rib cage as you reach your arm
to cut out its heart, the sound of Canada geese honking as they stretch their
necks for the south, the tug of the pickerel as it takes your hook, the
sickening grind of the outboard's prop as it touches submerged river rock –
it's these simple experiences that contain medicine strong enough to start
some healing.
– Joseph Boyden (2010)

How are you working towards a culture of peace?
– Anne Goodman (2002, in Regan, 2010; 236)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY	1
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	2
INTRODUCTION	5
OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS	9
PART I – CONTEXTUALIZING THE ABORIGINAL/NON-ABORIGINAL RELATIONSHIP	13
Chapter One – HISTORIES OF PARTNERSHIP, CHALLENGES AND CHANGE	13
Treaties and the Making of Nation: Two Families	16
Apology, Truth and Reconciliation	22
Building Relationships.....	27
Chapter Two – ONTARIO’S APPROACH TO ABORIGINAL EDUCATION	33
Introduction.....	33
a. Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework (2007)	39
b. Building Bridges to Success for First Nation, Métis and Inuit Students (2007).....	41
c. Sound Foundations for the Road Ahead: Fall 2009 Progress Report on Implementation of the Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework (2009).....	44
d. Aboriginal Perspectives: A Guide to the Teacher’s Toolkit – Teaching Resources and Strategies for Elementary and Secondary Classrooms (2009) and Aboriginal Perspectives: The Teacher’s Toolkit... 46	
e. Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training Policy Framework (2011)	52
f. Continuing the Journey: Preliminary Report on the Implementation of the Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework (2012).....	55
g. A Solid Foundation: Second Progress Report on Implementation of the Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework (2013)	56
h. Auditor General of Ontario Report – Education of Aboriginal Students (2012).....	59
Chapter Three – THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF TEACHER EDUCATION IN ONTARIO	62
The Accord on Indigenous Education	65
PART II – IMMERSIVE CULTURAL EXPERIENCE	68
Chapter Four – SUPPLEMENTING ONTARIO’S ABORIGINAL EDUCATION POLICY AND PROGRAMMING	70
Aboriginal Education for Non-Aboriginal Teachers.....	72
Investing in Experiential, Land-Based Education	75
Knowing What We Don’t Know – The Role of Spirituality in Aboriginal Education.....	78
Training Requirements for Teacher Candidates	81
Chapter Five – TRAINING FOR TEACHER CANDIDATES – OISE	84
Rationale	85
Objectives	89
Methodology.....	93
Chapter Six – OUTCOMES AND REFLECTIONS	100
Pre-Interview.....	102
<i>Identity</i>	102
<i>Personal Responsibility</i>	108

<i>Knowledge and Comfort Level</i>	110
<i>Importance of Aboriginal Education</i>	113
<i>Aboriginal Education at OISE</i>	117
Closing the Immersive Cultural Experience	119
<i>Gaining Perspective</i>	121
<i>The Need to Build</i>	123
<i>Self-Reflection</i>	125
<i>Connections</i>	126
<i>New Styles of Teaching and Learning</i>	128
Debrief	130
<i>Explaining the Unexplainable</i>	131
<i>Emotional Attachments</i>	133
<i>Personal Changes</i>	133
Post-Interview.....	135
<i>The Impact of the ICE</i>	135
<i>Elders as Facilitators</i>	139
<i>Doing Ceremony</i>	144
<i>Feeling Wanted</i>	146
<i>The Utility of the ICE</i>	147
<i>Debriefing with Friends and Family</i>	153
<i>Identity</i>	156
Correspondence.....	159
PART III – A FRAMEWORK FOR ONTARIO FACULTIES AND SCHOOLS OF EDUCATION.....	162
Chapter Seven – BECOMING AN ALLY	164
Characteristics of an Ally: Beyond Empathy	164
Knowing That We Don’t Know	168
Journeying Forward, Making Mistakes.....	170
Walking Our Talk: The Role of a Teacher in Aboriginal Education	172
Chapter Eight – GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR AN IMMERSIVE CULTURAL PROGRAM	176
Consolidating the Dissertation.....	176
a. Knowing Your History	180
b. Seeking Local Knowledge Holders	182
c. Ethics and the Traditional Contract.....	183
d. Planning the Experience.....	186
e. Preparation and Training.....	187
f. Facilitating the Experience	188
g. Debrief: Gathering Knowledge.....	190
h. Maintaining Relationships.....	191
CONCLUSION	193
Lessons Learned	193
Implications	197
Who I Am is Where I’ve Come From	197
Moving Forward, Together	199
WORKS CITED	202

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

As a writer I acknowledge that words have power, and structures of (mis)understanding can be built up around the names that are given to people and things. The first and most important consideration about terminology and language needs to be centred on the notion that I identify and am identified by others as a male Settler of European ancestry. Much like my use of the word Settler – itself a contentious term – some terms will be capitalized herein where they otherwise might not, to denote greater emphasis and to support the inherent spirit of this dissertation. The second consideration to address is that I identify as non-Aboriginal in order to acknowledge that I am not Aboriginal, a critical distinction to note for the work that I do and have outlined in this thesis. In locating myself in such a way I am perpetuating a problematic binary, but rather than produce further difference it is my goal to achieve and recognize cultural distinctiveness, not only between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people but also for Settler people to recognize the diversity embedded in the term Aboriginal.

In relation to the multitude of names and labels that have been accorded to or forced upon the Original Peoples of this land called Canada, I believe firmly that people should be referred to by a name of their choosing that is meaningful to them (www.sabar.ca/keyterms). As a willing participant in perpetuating this Aboriginalism, however, I would like to encourage critical reflection on the following statement from Kanien'kehaka scholar Taiaiake Alfred:

Aboriginalism obscures everything that is historically true and meaningful about Onkwehonwe – our origins, languages, and names; our land, our heritage, and our rights – and puts in their place views of history and of ourselves and our futures that are nothing more than the self-justifying myths and fantasies of the Settler (2005; 127).

I acknowledge that these words have power and in many regards this naming constitutes an act of violence. In undertaking this thesis it is my hope that we can come to a better collective understanding on why and how these names have come about, what (mis)uses we have for them, and how to mitigate the damages that they have and will continue to cause while also coming to know ourselves better.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Understanding my role as a non-Aboriginal researcher working with and for Aboriginal people, it is my intention that this research be carried out and expressed with the utmost care and integrity while retaining my personal voice and not infringing on the voice and vision of those Aboriginal Elders, teachers, and friends who have shared their time with me. While I believe this to be the bare minimum expectation of me as an Ally, the concept of appropriation will undoubtedly be front-of-mind for the reader of this thesis, as it should be. Appropriation can be understood as the conscious or subconscious re-transmission of information, knowledge, identity or culture that is not originally one's own and that one was not given permission to adopt and/or share (Haig-Brown, 2010). In response to the notion of appropriation, I can only acknowledge who I am, where I come from and the limitations of my knowledge and lack of authority that I possess to discuss Aboriginal traditional and cultural knowledges. Rather than position myself as a Knowledge-Holder, I defer to the wisdom and authority of my Aboriginal teachers at all times.

I have had the unbelievable good fortune to be surrounded by numerous trusted and respected Aboriginal Elders, Traditional Teachers, title-holders and knowledge-keepers during my lengthy time at the University of Toronto. For the purposes of this dissertation, and the project described herein, I have relied exclusively on the endless patience and extensive knowledge of Anishinaabe Elders Wendy and Mark Phillips. As I will explain later and in much more detail, the entirety of this thesis was conceived through their guidance and I have endeavoured to maintain the spirit and integrity of their teachings and perspectives. I cannot be thankful enough for their knowledge and wisdom, and the opportunities that they have provided for me.

I would also like to acknowledge the committee of people who supervised and counseled me in writing this thesis, Jean-Paul Restoule, Sandra Styres, Wendy and Mark Phillips and Jo-ann Archibald. Their comments, reflections and advice have contributed greatly to this document being readable and

useful for those that hope to implement Aboriginal Education approaches in their contexts and communities. As through the many iterations of this dissertation that I have produced, during countless drafting and revision processes, I believe wholeheartedly that this is a living document that requires further and deeper thought than what I can provide here. In relation to the research project that informs this dissertation, the Immersive Cultural Experience (ICE), I am incredibly thankful and indebted to OISE's Deepening Knowledge Project for their financial contribution that allowed me to coordinate the ICE when other funders would not. The majority of their assistance went to providing Wendy and Mark with an appropriate honorarium, and transporting and feeding the participants. I also wish to thank the Teacher Candidates who volunteered their time and thoughts to the ICE: Adam, Christie, Darcey, Jaclyn, Josh and Nadine (who have consented to have their names and comments used in this document). I hope that they find the portions of this dissertation that involved them to be reflective of their thoughts and experiences.

Acknowledging my positionality, social location and the subject area that I have chosen, I have relied upon the OFIFC's 'Utility, Self-Voicing, Access, Inter-Relationality (USAI) Research Framework' (www.ofifc.org). This Framework lays out an Indigenous and community-based perspective on research with/for/about Indigenous people. I believe that I am responsible to follow the principles and recommendations of the USAI Framework, and have done so to the best of my abilities.

I also take direction from countless Aboriginal scholars, and most notably the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, which has in part suggested that non-Aboriginal people in Canada – and in our case, Ontario – will not truly know themselves until they know the story of Anishinaabek or Haudenosaunee or Omushkegowuk, as told by those people themselves. Where possible, I have attempted to locate authors by their heritage and use their true names when citing them.

The most direct route to a shared future is the acknowledgement of a shared past. While the history of contact between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people has been fraught with colonial violence and

cultural loss, it is the aim of this work to be critical but not condemning, honest but not alienating. In discussing these difficult issues, I look to anti-colonial scholar Albert Memmi when he says that:

I am unconditionally opposed to all forms of oppression. For me, oppression is the greatest calamity of humanity. It diverts and pollutes the best energies of man – of oppressed and oppressor alike. For if colonization destroys the colonized, it also rots the colonizer (1965; xvi).

Further, in relation to the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relationship, I am inspired by non-Aboriginal scholar Paulette Regan, who suggests that rather than Canada having an “Indian problem” as has been expressed in the past, what we really have is a “Settler problem” (2010; x). This dissertation is my attempt to address that problem, to accept responsibility to counteract the historical and ongoing oppression of Aboriginal peoples by promoting a more thorough and accountable system of education and self-reflection for non-Aboriginal people, and to seek change slowly, patiently and if necessary, one person at a time.

INTRODUCTION

In the introduction to Ontario's New Approach to Aboriginal Affairs (2005), the provincial government suggested that: "Aboriginal leaders said they want improved relationships with Ontario and more control over a range of matters that affect their communities, now and for the future. They stressed the paramount importance of finding *Aboriginal solutions to Aboriginal concerns*" (Ontario Native Affairs Secretariat, 2005; 1 – emphasis added). This statement contributes to and fits within their overarching vision for Aboriginal Affairs: "prosperous and healthy Aboriginal communities create a better future for Aboriginal children and youth" (Ontario Native Affairs Secretariat; 2). These two concepts are inextricably linked – healthy Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal control over Aboriginal concerns. At the outset, however, a number of critical issues need to be unpacked in order to comprehend just how difficult this vision will be and has been to achieve. On paper, this New Approach is an enlightened one, and represents a clear and promising departure from past policy and procedure concerning relationships between government and Aboriginal peoples. A brief scan of the genesis of and historical changes to the Indian Act will quickly confirm this fact.

In regard to education, the New Approach to Aboriginal Affairs is bookended by two prescriptive statements by Aboriginal governing bodies concerning Aboriginal Education. The National Indian Brotherhood's (now the Assembly of First Nations) seminal "Indian Control of Indian Education" (1972) and this 2013 statement of the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations:

The residential schools were an attack on First Nations cultures and the sites of assaults, abuse and experiments on our children, none of which would have happened had First Nations been in control of education for our young people... As we conclude the events of Reconciliation Week, we move forward reaffirming our clear vision that First Nations control of First Nation education must be our shared goal. Now is the time to turn our efforts to action, consistent with commitments made in the statement of apology by the Prime Minister on behalf of all of Canada. There is a profound requirement to establish new relationships founded on mutual recognition and respect that will forge a stronger and brighter future (NationTalk, 2013).

Critical to understanding any government policy concerning Aboriginal people in Ontario is the unique demographic situation of Aboriginal people in this province. As of 2011, greater than 21 per cent of Aboriginal people (Status/non-Status First Nation, Métis and Inuit) in Canada resided in Ontario,¹ however, unlike every other province and territory in Canada, 84.1 per cent of Aboriginal people in Ontario live in communities that are not First Nation reserves² - which are politically designated segments of land governed by Band Councils set out in the Indian Act, that may or may not relate to the traditional land-base of its inhabitants. Despite Ontario having a general population of over 13 million, the demographic realities of Aboriginal people are of significant importance when discussing the issue of education, particularly because the federal government relinquishes jurisdiction and fiduciary responsibility of education for Status First Nations learners when they reside and attend school off-reserve. So it was, with this overrepresentative Aboriginal population, whose standardized educational achievement was significantly lower in comparison to non-Aboriginal learners, that Ontario's Ministry of Education (EDU) adopted a policy, the *Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (FNMI Framework), aimed at eliminating that achievement gap. This non-legislatively binding policy represented the greatest investment Ontario has ever made in education for Aboriginal people, a multi-year commitment to reduce and eliminate the gap in educational success that Aboriginal learners experience in relationship to their non-Aboriginal peers and Canadian society. The FNMI Framework is not really Aboriginal Education however. It is education for Aboriginal people within the provincial education system.

This is not to unfairly target the FNMI Framework, but rather to reconsider the entirety of Ontario's approach to education for, with, and about Aboriginal people. Both the FNMI Framework and the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities' (TCU) *Aboriginal Postsecondary Education*

¹ Statistics Canada (2013) Table 2: Number and distribution of the population reporting an Aboriginal identity and percentage of Aboriginal people in the population, Canada, provinces and territories, 2011. National Household Survey.

² Statistics Canada (2013) National Household Survey, Topics – Aboriginal People.

and Training Policy Framework (PSE Framework) dedicate little space in their policy documents to the myriad reasons why Aboriginal learners' educational achievement is not on par with their non-Aboriginal peers, such as issues of historical trauma, racism, and systemic oppression. Both policy documents suggest that non-Aboriginal learners, faculty, staff and government administrators require a comprehension and sensitivity to Aboriginal knowledges, cultures and histories, however these notions take a disproportionately small place in text and spirit. Consequently, however, if issues such as historical trauma, racism and systemic oppression were remedied, would Aboriginal Education policies such as these be needed? Perhaps our worldview of Aboriginal Education needs to be expanded, and looked at with 'two sets of eyes' as Carl Urion suggests – as “for well over 300 years there has been a written discourse about First Nations people, formal education, and schooling in Canada” (1999; 6). The achievement gap is real, but so too is colonialism and the production of racism in schools and society. Unfortunately, education policies for Aboriginal people are required, and they have contributed a great deal to how non-Aboriginal educators and institutions approach Aboriginal people and their learning needs, however this cannot be the end result.

It is the aim of this thesis to suggest that Aboriginal Education ought to be considered education for everyone, and that it should be initiated, developed, facilitated and evaluated by Aboriginal people. Invariably, this dissertation seeks to answer the question: What is Aboriginal Education without Aboriginal people being involved? This is akin to teaching about the forest from a classroom when the woods are visible just outside; we know the trees are there, but we do not engage them in order to enhance our understanding. For the same reasons that the AFN asserts Indian/First Nations control over Indian/First Nations education, Aboriginal people need to control the education of non-Aboriginal people on topics that relate to Aboriginality. This is needed to address a wholly different achievement gap, that of the non-Aboriginal Canadian, in truthfully knowing about the Original People of this place.

Eliminating the non-Aboriginal achievement gap requires an understanding that Aboriginal knowledges and cultures are not static, but “are continually in construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction as specific ecological, political-economic and ideological processes impact on them” (Graveline, 1998; 36). Not only are Aboriginal people and cultures constantly changing – Aboriginality itself is a globalizing concept and term that is not representative of the diversity of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people in this country. There are “over 500 distinct Indigenous communities in North America. Each belongs to a specific language group and recognizes and practices cultural traditions in combinations that distinguish communities from one another” (Warner, 2006; 149). Herein lies the complexity of implementing genuine Aboriginal Education for the Learning Ministries (EDU, TCU), colleges and universities, district school boards, schools, teachers and/or learners. Community-driven, localized and culturally-informed Aboriginal Education cannot be standardized. This diversity, more than anything, is reason enough to defer to the wisdom and authority of Aboriginal people concerning Aboriginal Education; non-Aboriginal policy makers and educators cannot properly define what Aboriginal cultures are, nor should they try. Rather than be perceived as a barrier, attempting to understand the dynamic nature and multiplicity of Aboriginal identities should be seen as an exciting opportunity. This cultural and social diversity provides infinite possibilities for non-Aboriginal learners, and educational institutions to grasp what Aboriginal Education can truly mean.

On the eve of the 2013 Summer Solstice, or National Aboriginal Day, Ontario Minister of Aboriginal Affairs David Zimmer had the following to say: “it is our responsibility as government, and I would suggest the responsibility of all Ontarians, to better understand our shared history and relationship with aboriginal peoples” (Zimmer, 2013). This statement, or invitation, speaks in relation to the findings of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP, 1996):

[The] Commissioners also concluded that most Canadians are simply unaware of the history of the Aboriginal presence in what is now Canada and that there is little understanding of the origins and evolution of the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people that have led us to the present moment. Lack of historical awareness has been combined with a

lack of understanding on the part of most Canadians of the substantial cultural differences that still exist between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Together these factors have created fissures in relations between the original inhabitants of North America and generations of newcomers (Volume 1, Part 1:3).

While this statement was made nearly 20 years ago, a lack of appropriate knowledge of Aboriginal cultures, knowledges, histories and Canadians' intercultural responsibilities – particularly those outlined in treaty and concession agreements in some parts of the country – still pervades. The issue goes much deeper than simply a lack of knowing however, as 'many Canadians are not only ignorant of Aboriginal cultures and histories, they are also ignorant of their ignorance' (Warry, 2007; 16). This dissertation is an attempt to explain that ignorance, to root it in the shared history and experience of this place we call Canada, and to move forward with a new vision for what it means for all of us to participate in Aboriginal Education.

OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS

With the community-based orientation to Aboriginal Education that I have proposed, representing a significant departure from mainstream thinking on the matter, the onus is upon me to leave no doubt as to the necessity of altering our course. This thesis is broken up into three aspects (past, present, and future) but also three Parts which, as a warning to the reader, are not exclusive to each other. While I have attempted to present these ideas in a linear fashion that can be easily digested by the reader, there is significant overlap and relationality between nearly all of the topics discussed in this thesis.

In Part I: *Contextualizing the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal Relationship*, an explication of both the past and present, the topic of Aboriginal Education is brought into context via the larger systems and processes of partnership, challenges and change that have impacted Aboriginal people in the Canadian historical remembering. Chapter One begins with an orientation to what we perceive history to be, and questioning from whose perspective is history told and understood. This necessitates a discussion of the origins of this nation called Canada, a theoretical joining of 'two families' (Johnson, 2007) through

treaty. Returning to a shared understanding of the primacy of treaty, particularly as a precursor to policy, represents a significant opportunity to re-contextualize or re-orient ourselves in the matter of Aboriginal Education. Indigenous nations and communities have exceptionally long histories of treaty-making, pre-European contact, that establish the notion that treaty cannot simply be used for land title and transfer (RCAP, 1996). This narrow definition of treaty does not implicate treaty signatories in the moral, ethical, emotional aspect of treaty agreement. Chapter One continues with the understanding that part of the shared process of recognizing treaty needs to come through the combined efforts of apology, telling truths and approaching reconciliation. Only then will new and sustainable relationships be built. Chapter Two leads us into the present, detailing Ontario's current approach to and definition of Aboriginal Education, including an evaluation of seven Aboriginal Education policy documents prepared by the Learning Ministries from 2007-2013. It is my contention that Ontario's current approach to Aboriginal Education is ineffective because it is rooted in a Eurocentric design, and furthermore does not appropriately address the needs of non-Aboriginal learners. Through the reading of Chapter One, it is my hope that these issues addressed in Chapter Two will become clear to the reader, and the need for an expanded definition of Aboriginal Education even clearer.

Most topically important here is perhaps Chapter Three: *The Changing Landscape of Teacher Education in Ontario*. At the time of the defence of this thesis, Ontario will be partway through an evaluation and implementation of new standards of practice for Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs, including expanding the Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree from one to two years and significantly reducing enrolment. With Ontario making such drastic renovations at Faculties and Schools of Education, the time to make changes to Aboriginal Education is now. With such a significant shift occurring on the BEd landscape, implementing a new approach to Aboriginal Education would at once require thorough reflexivity and necessitate new relationships created with Aboriginal communities that are founded upon respect.

Part II: *Immersive Cultural Experience* outlines the research project that contributes to and informs this dissertation. If First Nations, Métis or Inuit people are going to have control over Aboriginal Education, and determine the parameters of *what* non-Aboriginal people should know about Indigenous knowledges, cultures and histories, they should also determine *how* non-Aboriginal people come to this information. Part II begins with my reframing of Aboriginal Education that starts with teacher education, and then goes on to present an evaluation of a community-based experiential learning trip that saw six Teacher Candidates from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto, the majority of whom are non-Aboriginal, spend a weekend visiting with and learning from two venerated Anishinaabe Elders on their land, at their direction. By taking education out of the classroom, and eliminating textbooks in favour of lived experience, it was the objective of the trip to provide Teacher Candidates with an opportunity to see, feel and do learning differently, to engage in Aboriginal Education.

Where Chapter Five outlines aspects of the Immersive Cultural Experience such as rationale and methodology, Chapter Six delves into the comments and reflections of the Teacher Candidates who participated in the project. Their testimonials have not only validated their own experiences but also the viability of replicating such immersive, land-based experiential learning trips as a supplement to traditional coursework on Aboriginal content at Faculties and Schools of Education in Ontario and Canada. These experiences and perspectives will inform Part III, which orients itself in the future direction, where I will recommend a framework for the application of experiential Aboriginal Education policy, program and practice at Ontario Faculties and Schools of Education. Where Ontario's current Aboriginal Education policy has focused a great deal on Aboriginal learners, I believe that the population who demonstrates the greatest need for intervention at this time is teachers. Culturally-informed and confident teachers make the application of Aboriginal Education easier but also more meaningful, respectful and relevant.

Engaging in Aboriginal Education as a learner, educator, faculty or administrator is a deeply personal process. As we have seen, it requires consideration of historical challenges, establishment of partnerships and a healthy dose of self-reflection. For the non-Aboriginal participant in Aboriginal Education this means learning to be an Ally. Allyship is the exclusive focus of Chapter Seven, acting as a threshold of sorts before the framework is outlined. There is a great deal of responsibility in working towards social justice in education, as well as a great deal of personal and social risk involved. As scholar Kevin Kumashiro relates: “an anti-oppressive teacher is not something that someone is. Rather it is something that someone is always becoming” (2009; 15). In Chapter Eight, the framework is outlined as a set of guiding principles for an immersive cultural program. In following a discussion of Allyship, these principles, and all principles of Aboriginal Education carry with them a sense of responsibility to ethical conduct. The University of Toronto for example has a thorough research ethics policy, however in bringing Aboriginal people and perspectives into the education system, a collaborative approach to personal and professional ethics is also required.

This thesis concludes with a reflection on the complete narrative of Aboriginal Education from past to present to future, acknowledging the need to understand the past, to be informed. With that information, we interact in the present, sharing and gathering strength in a spirit of collaboration. If our past and present visions are achieved, there is no other future than one where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people understand each other, engage respectfully, and contribute to a viable and meaningful nation state while maintaining and celebrating cultural distinctiveness. A new orientation to Aboriginal Education is needed to achieve these visions, in our classrooms, boardrooms and town halls – Aboriginal Education needs to be for everyone.

PART I – CONTEXTUALIZING THE ABORIGINAL/NON-ABORIGINAL RELATIONSHIP

Chapter One – HISTORIES OF PARTNERSHIP, CHALLENGES AND CHANGE

The only way to understand where we are is to know where we have been. This section of the thesis is intended to serve two purposes: demonstrating the need for a new approach to Aboriginal Education, and also providing a primer of requisite knowledge for the non-Aboriginal administrator, educator or learner. This first part deals with the entirety of the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relationship in Canada and aims to ‘set the record straight’ (RCAP, 1996; Volume 1, Part 1:4), however, I leave the responsibility with educators and administrators to take in this information, be critical of it, and decide what parts can and should be incorporated into their personal and professional lives. These are the highest hopes of this thesis, that it be seen as a relevant document that piques the interest of the reader and addresses what RCAP calls a “vacuum of consciousness” among non-Aboriginal people that is created by a “pervasive lack of knowledge and perhaps even of interest” (RCAP; Volume 5, Part 4). This all makes me wonder though, as Paulette Regan pleads, “how is it that we know nothing about this history?” (2010; 6). She goes on to suggest that we need to

conceptualize history not simply as the intellectual study of the past – the facts and interpretations through which we gain knowledge about our social world – but as a critical learning practice, an experiential strategy that invites us to learn how to listen differently to the testimonies of Indigenous people (Regan; 50).

In order to facilitate this change a number of things should be uncovered and challenged. Conceptualizing history as a shared project with sometimes diametrically opposed perspectives and remembrances leads us to a point of tremendous personal and national conflict. The lack of knowing, caring and fundamental ignorance that many Canadians experience and hold onto reveals what Taiaiake Alfred calls an “emphatic refusal to look inward” (2011; 3). This, more than anything, is what needs challenging in this Part of the thesis. We cannot be afraid to look inside ourselves, but we also should not be disappointed if we do not like the view. As Settler scholar Adam Barker implores:

There can be no ‘sacred cows’ in Western society; rather, we must question literally everything we do, all of the assumptions which underpin our personal lives and larger societies, and the myths which inform our very identities (2010; 321).

This questioning requires an attempt to see history and our current relations from another perspective, particularly because that history has been so injurious for Aboriginal people on this continent. This also means reading and hearing things that we do not necessarily want to hear or agree with. As influential Settler historian J.R. Miller suggests of his work, “if these pages succeed in persuading some people that the Native peoples have always been active, assertive contributors to the unfolding of Canadian history, they will have achieved their primary objective” (2000; xiii); so too is it my goal to help reframe our understanding of contact, treaty, apology and reconciliation and the building of intercultural relationships.

However, once we have opened ourselves up to this new knowledge and understanding of the history of Canada, “there is a danger in allowing colonization to be the only story of Indigenous lives” (Alfred and Corntassel, 2005; 601). Much like the cultural erasure and historicization of Aboriginal peoples in school texts (Snowball, 2009), there has been a persistent obscuring of Canada’s identity as both a colony and colonizer. Adam Barker relates, “it is clear that the nature of Canada as a colony, a place of active expansion of imperial power, has remained nearly unchanged for centuries” (2006; 2). This obscuring, or forgetting, is critical to the surviving and thriving of the Canadian social project. Former Canadian Liberal Party Leader Michael Ignatieff posits that Canada, among all nations, “depend on forgetting: on forging myths of unity and identity that allow a society to forget its founding crimes, its hidden injuries and divisions, its unhealed wounds” (Epp, 2005; 232). In the Canadian context, this forgetting can be both personal and public, and take the form of denial or apology. In 2008, the Prime Minister of Canada, Right Honourable Stephen Harper, performed such an Apology for the government’s creation and execution of Indian Residential Schools (IRS), which all but excluded any mention of colonialism or the systemic racism that created Residential Schools. With no admission of

these issues, there was a clear subtext of denial in the Statement of Apology, for just fifteen short months later – in front of the world’s most powerful leaders – the Prime Minister offered this controversial statement about Canada:

We also have no history of colonialism.

Where the Prime Minister’s Statement of Apology did not address colonialism directly, it would appear that this statement is a calculated act of denial. However, as the Prime Minister’s Office rightfully explains, this quote was taken out of context and instead fits within a much larger statement; a statement that I would suggest is even more inflammatory and damaging than the Prime Minister’s original quote:

We are a very large country, with a well-established, you know, we have one of the longest-standing democratic regimes, unbroken democratic regimes, in history. We are one of the most stable regimes in history. There are very few countries that can say for nearly 150 years they’ve had the same political system without any social breakdown, political upheaval or invasion. We are unique in that regard. We also have no history of colonialism. So we have all of the things that many people admire about the great powers, but none of the things that threaten or bother them about the great powers.

We also are a country, obviously beginning with our two major cultures, but also a country formed by people from all over the world that is able to speak cross-culturally in a way few other countries are able to do at international forums (Wherry, 2009).

More troubling than these denials is the compounding perpetuation of misinformation evident in the Prime Minister’s statement. While it is true that Canada as a ‘regime’ has not experienced social breakdown or upheaval, it does not tell the whole story of this place that we call Canada. History is a shared narrative, and if well-intentioned non-Aboriginal historians, scholars and educators appropriate Aboriginal histories, knowledges, cultures and voice, the denial continues. “The history of ‘Indian’ and white relations, commonly referred to as ‘fact’ in the textbooks, is socially constructed as an act of colonial privilege and power and must be challenged and reconstructed in the voices of Aboriginal peoples” (Graveline, 1998; 38). Who is allowed to tell the story, and how they tell it, is of critical importance. “Canadians grow up believing that the history of their country is a story of the cooperative

venture between people who came from elsewhere to make a better life and those who were already here, who welcomed and embraced them” (Alfred in Regan, 2010; ix). Because Canada’s history is largely a narrative of settlement, many Canadians only recall memories of Aboriginal people as historical fragments; contact, fur trade, War of 1812, Residential Schools, Oka.

For many Canadians, “Oka” was the first time they encountered Indigenous anger, resistance and standoff, and the resistance was quickly dubbed the “Oka Crisis” and the “Oka Crises” by the mainstream media. But to the Kanien’kehaka (Mohawk) people of Kanehsatà:ke, who were living up to their responsibilities to take care of their lands, this was neither a “crisis” at Oka, nor was it about the non-Native town of “Oka.” This was about 400 years of colonial injustice (Simpson and Ladner, 2010; 1).

The unfortunate truth in all of this is that colonialism has worked. It has adapted and altered its methods in order to secure its overarching goal: the elimination of resistance to Euro-Canadian culture, norms and governance – its main adversary being Aboriginal people and their primacy in this place.

When one indigenous language slips away, it is as if heavy doors, once open and giving us access to a particular understanding of this place, have slammed shut, shutting us out forever. Part of our shared understanding is gone. That most of us do not speak these languages is irrelevant. Each of them is a passageway into the meaning of this place. Each one lost is a loss of meaning and possible understanding (Saul, 2008; 106).

Ignorance pervades for many Settlers, but it does not prevail; it is not too late to bring about the type of change that is needed. Philosopher and Nobel Laureate Jean-Paul Sartre rightly notes that “oppression justifies itself through oppression” (Memmi, 1965; xxvi). I believe that, in the context of a new approach to Aboriginal Education, truth will justify itself through truth.

Treaties and the Making of Nation: Two Families

Critical to reasserting Aboriginal cultural and national distinctiveness in the Canadian consciousness is a respect for and understanding of treaty. For most Canadians, treaty likely does not feel relevant, at once perceived as both an antiquated document but also ‘finished business,’ something the Canadian government agreed to in order to take ownership of land. “Canada and many Canadians, regard treaties as an extinguishment of rights, and acceptance of the supremacy of the crown, and a

generous gift of land to the Indians so they might have land of their own” (Mackey, 2009; 7). This is not and was not the purpose of treaty, for “in a very real way, most Canadians exercise a treaty right simply by living where they do” (Epp, 2003; 234). In the establishment of relationships at contact between European and Indigenous people, before treaty, there was an understanding by the Indigenous signatories that each group represented not just different peoples, but different families that needed to learn to live together on the same lands.

Kiciwamanawak, my cousin: that is what my Elders said to call you. When your family came here and asked to live with us on this territory, we agreed. We adopted you in a ceremony that your family and mine call treaty. In Cree law, the treaties were adoptions of one nation by another (Johnson, 2007; 13 – emphasis original).

This perspective on treaty mirror’s this dissertation’s perspective on Aboriginal Education. Treaties, much like Aboriginal Education practice and policy, have meant fundamentally different things to different people. There is a modern significance for treaty beyond the Aboriginal context, as “treaties are paradigms for multicultural connections that are expressed metaphorically through story, ceremony and ritual” (Regan, 2010; 153). The treaty-making process, of two families coming together in a spirit of sharing and cooperation is a significant event and can be replicated in all other social areas and disciplines such as education.

To understand the value of creating new treaties however, the meaning and intent of the original treaties needs to be understood. “Treaty was and is a sacred covenant made between sovereign nations in which they agree to *ongoing* relationships of respect, friendship, and peace, and thus recognition of the *ongoing sovereignty* and rights of Aboriginal nations” (Mackey, 2009; 7 – emphasis original). The format and protocols used in early treaty-making were ceremonially meaningless to the Europeans, but were significant to the Indigenous signatories, often replicating ceremonial processes (Miller, 2009; 38) and representing 1) cooperation over resistance, and 2) a solemn spiritual bond consecrated with the pipe, only to be broken under the most dire circumstances (Miller, 2000; 230). The most important treaty in Canadian history and prehistory did not involve land, but rather signified peace, friendship, and non-

interference between the Huron/Wendat and the British, signed at a conference in 1764 and recorded in a Two-Row Wampum (Miller, 2000; 90). Wampum, a belt of coloured shells strung together, had many forms and uses: “It was a mnemonic, or memory-assisting device, a First Nations’ archives in effect. Wampum belts recorded important discussions and agreements between nations, especially matters of peace and war” (Miller, 2009; 41). The Two-Row Wampum embodies

an unchanging relationship between the Iroquois and their European partners, beginning with the Dutch and carrying on with the English and later Canadians. The belt, believed to represent twin sovereignties, is composed of two parallel lines of dark purple shells separated by a field of white shells. The two lines are said to symbolize two water craft, a canoe and a ship, that sail peacefully and harmoniously without interfering with each other (Miller, 2009; 50).

The Two-Row Wampum has often been cited in discussions of relationships between Indigenous people and successive lines of European and non-Indigenous visitors and Settlers. In the context of Aboriginal Education, the values of peace, friendship, respect, and non-interference are just as important. Policy can become like treaty, but only if produced and agreed upon in such a way that benefits all parties. This has been the critical issue with both treaty and policy, recognizing that despite their suggested purposes, they were not implemented for the benefit of Aboriginal people but rather provided an opportunity for non-Aboriginal people to be rid of the ‘Indian problem’.

Land-based treaties were critical to the creation of the Canadian state, as Indian Superintendent J.A.N. Provencher suggested in 1873 that: “treaties may be made with them simply with a view to the extinction of their rights, by agreeing to pay them a sum, and afterwards abandon them to themselves” (Mackey, 2009; 7). We know that Aboriginal people and communities were not abandoned however, but rather subjected to an overwhelmingly oppressive and forceful inculcation of European language, culture and values. While this was addressed in a small part in the Statement of Apology, “the words ‘land’, ‘territory’, or ‘treaty’ simply do not appear in the text of the Harper Apology. The focus is on the loss of culture, and the family and community problems that resulted for individual Aboriginal peoples and their families and communities” (Mackey; 8). This upheaval destabilized Aboriginal people to such a degree

that it allowed for “the development of official national culture that disregards the central role that treaties had in the legitimizing of Canada, fails to acknowledge all Canadians as treaty beneficiaries, and does not recognize the ongoing sovereignty of Aboriginal peoples” (Mackey; 6).

With the over 250 years of treaty making history on these lands, a number of myths have developed and persisted in the Canadian consciousness concerning treaty. One is that because treaties involved money, and since the British/Canadian signatories have ostensibly broken promises, that there will be a significant financial cost for Canadians in rectifying these past wrongs. William Johnson, Cree scholar, dismisses this narrow-minded approach to reconciliation: “I suggest that, if you were to keep the promises made at treaty, the costs to you, and to us, would be far less. It is far more costly to your family, in terms of money, effort, and frustration, to keep on trying to renege on the treaty promises than if your family would accept and abide by the terms it agreed to” (2007; 29). A financial settlement could represent reparation, but also performs an extinguishment of responsibility. What is really needed with treaty is the reassertion of its modern implications, its relevance to every Canadian’s day-to-day lives, and finally becoming the foundation for balanced and meaningful relationships.

Treaty and our past relationships are an integral part of our history, not something to be hidden nor to be celebrated, but rather accepted simply as who we are. “We have no idea what the colonized would have been without colonization, but we certainly see what has happened as a result of it” (Memmi, 1965; 114). Colonialism is real and it has been hugely destructive to the very existence and well-being of Aboriginal nations, communities, families and people, to deny its importance is as one-sided as signing a treaty without the intent of honouring it. Canadian history cannot exist without Aboriginal people, and it is not complete without Aboriginal perspectives. “If what we know about ourselves – our history, our culture, our national identity – is deformed by absences, denials, and incompleteness, then our identity – both as individuals and as [Canadians] – is fractured. This fractured self is also a repressed self; elements

of itself are split off and denied. Such a self lacks access to both itself and to the world” (Pinar and Castenell, 1993; 4).

What does it mean to be a non-Indigenous citizen of a colonial nation? Even further, what does it mean to be a citizen of a colonial nation that denies its past? As Benedict Anderson suggests, “nations are communities of imagination” (Thobani, 2007; 5), conferred upon by whomever has access to the greatest amount of power and privilege. “The irony of our society is that the values of tolerance and multicultural diversity are accepted and heralded as part of a national ethic even as Aboriginal peoples are marginalized and their cultures denigrated” (Warry, 2007; 13).

Leroy Little Bear, Nitsitapi scholar and teacher, offers a succinct evaluation of how colonialism has succeeded in North America:

The arrival of the Europeans on this continent changed [Native American culture]. They are the interference. They are a people, we have come to discover, with no collective ethos. In other words, they have no common spirit and beliefs that hold them together. What is common to them is a very strong belief in individuality and the pursuit of individual material gain. The British people who were the main colonizers of this continent are acultural in an indigenous sense because the history of Britain is one of successive takeovers by foreigners. The effect of these successive takeovers is to erase any semblance of indigeneity to the land from which they came. A lack of culture results in unrestrained freedom (Alfred, 2005; 10).

It is this fundamental difference between European and Indigenous sensibilities that has both created our current state, but that also needs to be understood and mitigated in order to undo the many colonial harms that have and continue to be perpetrated against Aboriginal people. This process can start with problematizing the concept of *Aboriginal*.

Indigenous peoples became Indians under a legal classification that did not distinguish between their linguistic and cultural differences, or the multiplicity of Indigenous nations at the time. People became Indians so that the state could delimit the occupation of lands to Indians alone. It was through these sorting out of lands that the concretization of race as a social construct took place in Canada. Prior to colonization, Indigenous peoples defined themselves as distinct nations with their own socio-economic and political systems. Under settler colonialism, the Canadian state treated all Indigenous nations as one ‘Indian race’; their oneness constructed by virtue of otherness (Cannon, 2011; xvi).

Despite being collectivized, Aboriginal people also became historicized where now “at best we manage a pro forma phrase about Aboriginals as one of our founding peoples” (Saul, 2008; 4). History cannot be a matter of form however; it cannot reside in textbooks or sit in museum displays. History is alive and constantly created in a minute-by-minute process that we each have responsibility for.

Provincial Aboriginal Affairs Minister David Zimmer offered this thoughts on the passage of time since the Royal Proclamation of 1763: “the relationship between aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples in this country has had its challenges since those promising beginnings of treaty relations in 1763. Many of these challenges still exist for the more than 300,000 aboriginal people in Ontario today” (Zimmer, 2013). This statement is pregnant with meaning, leading one to question what challenges occurred to cause those promising beginnings to be so tarnished, and what those challenges are that still exist.

Restitution is not going to come solely through common monetary approaches or the more far-fetched and complex one of sending Settler people back to where they came from. Taiaiake Alfred offers: “When I say to a settler, ‘Give it back’, am I talking about them giving up the country and moving away? No. Irredentism has never been in the vision of our peoples. When I say ‘Give it back’, I am talking about settlers demonstrating respect for what we share” (2009; 182). What is most productive for this discussion, is rather than asking ‘whether Aboriginal peoples can ever truly be Canadian citizens, perhaps we should ask whether Canadians will ever truly consider themselves visitors’ (Warry, 2007; 192). The basis for our intercultural relationships can be found in treaty; our treaties are not going away, they are waiting to be remembered, consulted and made a part of our lives. In this way treaties are alive, much like history. Until such time, Canadian history is not really Canadian at all, for Canada is nothing at all without Aboriginal people.

Apology, Truth and Reconciliation

Canadian history and treaty have largely been written and remembered from only one perspective, that of the colonizer. It becomes critical then that apology, truth and reconciliation become a shared process that is informed, performed, and accepted by both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people. However, what does it mean to apologize? What is entailed in telling our collective truths? It is imperative that reconciliation be achieved in a meaningful and appropriate manner for all people. The Canadian government has already attempted to apologize (recall that there were a number of critical issues with the Statement of Apology) to Aboriginal people concerning Residential Schools, which then spurred a process of seeking truth and reconciliation.

What *is* an apology? What does it *do*? Specifically, what does apology *do* for the apologizers? How is it possible that a few highly symbolic words of regret and apology (even if well-phrased, official, earnest, or truly remorseful) could be expected to erase or even begin to address over two hundred years of colonial violence? (Mackey, 2009; 2 – emphasis original)

This quotation, from Eva Mackey’s ‘The Apologizer’s Apology’ in Reconciling Canada: Historical Injustices and the Contemporary Culture of Redress (2009) represents perhaps the most complete and compelling reading on the ethics, politics, and process of the Statement of Apology, and I would encourage the reader to encounter it for themselves.

As Mackey suggests, it is important to explore what apologizers get from apologizing (2009; 3) and to consider that the Statement of Apology was perhaps actually a “one-way communication that was not part of a dialogic exchange nor one that required a response” (Mackey; 11). This is the principal flaw in apology, that it can be a performative act that does not necessarily require acceptance in order to be perceived complete by the apologizer, and accepted by the general public. “It is notable that Harper, as well as the mainstream media, appeared to predetermine that the apology would be accepted” (Mackey; 11), as newspapers ran stories heralding the Apology as historic and complete before it was even performed.

The most pressing question surrounding the Apology is not why and how it was done, but rather why it took so long. Beverly Jacobs, President of the Native Women's Association of Canada at the time of the Statement, had this to say: "it shouldn't have taken until the year 2008 for most Canadians to be educated about the residential school system" (2008; 225). Since 2008 there has been an exponentially greater amount of information and exposure concerning Residential Schools available to Canadians, however very little of the exposed narrative concerns the systems of racism, oppression and paternalism that made Residential Schools possible. "The apology was articulated in very particular ways that limit the definition of wrongdoing or crime that was the subject of the apology and therefore also limit responsibility for it" (Mackey, 2009; 2). Instead, the Apology was framed as an expression of contrition for well-meaning but misguided educational systems and policies that were only ever intended to help Aboriginal people. There was an overarching belief from the colonizers that they knew what was good for the Aboriginal learner, and Residential Schools were the product of that. There are no longer any Residential Schools, however the ethic of control and paternalism pervades. It can be seen in the way the Apology was constructed and performed and also in Ontario's current approach to Aboriginal Education.

Beverly Jacobs, Phil Fontaine (former National Chief) and the other official speakers knew the Apology was not complete, and therefore never said that they accepted the Apology but rather 'bore witness to it' (Mackey; 13). So, if apology is going to be the means by which Settler society articulates wrongdoing and seeks reconciliation, it ought to instead follow sociologist Nicholas Tavuchis' definition:

A true apology, then, is a 'remedial ritual' – an 'enacted story' that is performed with a humility that must be *spoken* – an act by which we seek readmittance to a moral community of human decency whose bounds we have transgressed (Regan, 2010; 179 – emphasis original)

On the one end we can perceive the Apology as being incomplete, requiring further dialogue and action, and on the other end it represents a calculated act that sought to apologize for past wrongs as a method to deny the continuation of wrongs in the present (Barker, 2006; 64). Likely, the truth is

somewhere in the middle, with public education being critical to uncover that truth; however, it is clear that we have a great deal further to travel. In this way it is also critical that we expand our notion of Aboriginal Education, to provide guidance for non-Aboriginal people not only in what they learn, but how and why they learn about historical and contemporary oppression, while asking ourselves the question: what will we do with this new information?

For every story of abuse that Canadians hear, and every colonial stone unturned, feelings of guilt and shame will invariably be produced. Much like an apology, what is the productive value of guilt? Apology borne from guilt is understandable, however activist scholar Audrey Lorde reminds us “guilt is just another name for impotence” (Alfred, 2011; 4). In the context of the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relationship, we can strive to “extend our ethical language and sense of possibilities beyond a reductive model of guilt vs. innocence” (Boler, 1999; 176). What comes after guilt? Often when Canadians express sympathy, regret and guilt they can end up ‘feeling good about feeling bad’ which confirms “their own humanitarian character” (Simon, 2009; 6). With the Apology, and Canadians’ reactions to it, “the desire to feel good or better can involve the erasure of relations of violence” (Ahmed, 2005; 83). Apology is related to guilt in this way, as “feeling bad about racism or white privilege can function as a form of self-centeredness” (Ahmed; 82). No matter how guilty one feels being the beneficiary of genocide, it cannot possibly measure to the experience of the victims of that genocide. Or, as Susan Dion suggests: ‘are stories of colonialism hard to listen to? Try surviving them’ (2009; 57).

Ethical reconciliation requires more than words of regret. Such words must be spoken in conjunction with monetary and cultural reparations that support Indigenous self-determination along with a demythification of settler history – a questioning of the moral foundation of settler societies (Regan, 2010; 58).

Remembering our shared history provides the opportunity to deconstruct our identities as Canadians. We resist this questioning as Canada is a construct that not only protects those identities, but also enforces the many privileges that are denied to Aboriginal people, particularly those with Status or who reside in First Nations communities. Even in the federal government’s Speech From the Throne in

2013, the erasure of Canada's colonial past and identity is carried out, where Governor General David Johnston declared that in Canada, pioneers forged a country "where none would otherwise have existed" (Canada, 2013). Upon learning about histories of genocide, hearing such declarations could certainly confuse the listener, stirring up mixed feelings. "In order for Canada to have a viable national identity, the histories of Indigenous nations, in all their diversity and longevity" (Lawrence, 2011; 68) as well as the historical record of how the land was acquired, must be erased.

Something was stolen, lies were told, and they have never been made right. That is the crux of the problem. If we do not shift away from the pacifying discourse of reconciliation and begin to reframe people's perceptions of the problem so that it is not a question of how to reconcile with colonialism that faces us but instead how to use restitution as the first step towards creating justice and a moral society, we will be advancing colonialism, not decolonization (Alfred, 2009; 182).

One of the fundamental challenges of attempting to achieve decolonization, if such a thing is even possible, is navigating misinformation and its related denials. Ignorance is resistant to change however; there is a stifling amount of our history, identity and power invested in keeping this state of unknowing intact. "Ignorance... is not a passive state of absence – a simple lack of information: it is an active dynamic of negation, an active refusal of information" (Dion, 2009; 56). One hopeful aspect of this reality is that children at the earliest ages do not choose ignorance, however they also do not necessarily seek truth.

Much like with the subjectivity and one-sidedness of history, "truth...is not singular, objective, or absolute: it is multiple, subjective, and power-differentiated" (Regan, 2010; 62). RCAP, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) are two examples of the parsing out of the truth of history and our shared past. As John Ralston Saul questions, "how often do countries offer to themselves the privilege of a great intellectual and human re-examination of themselves? How much more irresponsible of those with power not to find the courage to pick it up openly and engage? (2008; 25). What reasons are there for the many meaningful recommendations of the RCAP to not be implemented some 18 years later? While many Canadians know that they have a moral/ethical responsibility, the economic/material

reality is ‘too disquieting and difficult to resolve’ (Thobani, 2007; 71). Perhaps it is because “those in charge are frightened to act because real action can only be presented as a cost” (Saul, 2008; 319), to Canadians and the Canadian mythology.

The convenient way to deal with the founding injustice of Canada is to allow colonialism to continue by ignoring the truth, to erase it from our memory, ban it from the schools, and suppress it in public. Canadians can continue to glorify their country’s criminality, from Cartier to Caledonia, and force those who suffered the fraud, abuses, and violence to accommodate the denial and artifice of justice that has been set up. But as the original people of this land, as the blood and spiritual descendents of the people who lived on the land and fought and died to preserve the loving relationship they had with this continent, we cannot forget what has been done to create the myth of the country now called Canada (Alfred in Regan, 2010; ix).

Whose work is the truth-telling? Whose work is reconciliation (Epp, 2003; 227) and what would reconciliation even look like? Chiricahua Apache legal scholar William Bradford suggests that demanding “reparations [alone] would miss a key opportunity to employ moral argument... Morally central to the Indian claim for redress is the idea that treaties impose upon the parties the ongoing moral obligation to act in fairness and good faith” (Regan, 2010; 57). These reparations need to be approached from a moral/ethical place rather than one solely focused on land, goods, money, and materials, for “much of what has been stolen – lands, childhoods, families, cultures, and languages – can never be fully restored” (Regan; 62). This leads us to consider education as reparation.

How we experience our education becomes critical, for “if justice for Aboriginal people lies in remembering, but forgetting serves the Canadian nation, where will justice come from?” (Dion, 2009; 3). Where Aboriginal Education is one side of the reciprocal teaching-learning process, the other side is the acceptance of responsibility – by the non-Aboriginal learner, and all Canadians. Paulette Regan finally reminds us that we inherit moral as well as legal obligations in our intercultural relationship, and “just as we bind our successors to treaties and agreements that we make today, so too are we bound by those made, and sometimes broken, by our ancestors” (Regan, 2010; 44). We cannot expect or rely on laws to

change or land and treaty claims to be resolved before we choose to change our own perspective. It is our choice to accept a new truth – to apologize if need be, but to follow through on that apology with action.

Building Relationships

For government, policy and curriculum makers – those with power – the only acceptable “starting point for renewing the relationship... must be deliberate action to set the record straight” (RCAP, 1996; Volume 1, Part 1:4). For non-Aboriginal Canadians, especially those in educational contexts, the overriding responsibility is simply to be respectful. Many people view respect as a foundational value in our day-to-day relationships, why should it not pervade in the many ways in which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people relate to and interact with one another? Taiaiake Alfred acknowledges “the kind of justice that indigenous people seek in their relations with the state has to do with restoring a regime of respect” (1999; 62). Much like other words and concepts, respect can mean and look completely different to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. In antiracism or anti-oppressive education it is difficult to use words such as respect and equality because they have become co-opted by exploiters and are now just words (Bishop, 2001; 18). As with apology, respect loses its meaning if it does not consider the thoughts, feelings and needs of Aboriginal people in conjunction with one’s own values.

If the word *respect* is broken down as it is defined but not necessarily used in English, from the Latin word *respectus*, derived from a verb, *respicere*, which means to look back on or re-regard something or someone. A simple search for the word respect in English turns up five definitions, where that same search in Anishinaabemowin turns up 55 different ways in which the word respect can be conjugated and used in conversation. Perhaps a better way of being respectful is to see things in two ways, or from two perspectives.

This requires us to not only shake ourselves loose from our defined ideas and values, but also from the apathy that comes along with being consistently confronted with negative information and imagery

concerning Aboriginal people and our intercultural relationship. Simply by believing that “this is the way it is” makes it difficult to ‘appreciate alternative ways of thinking’ (Little Bear, 2000; 83). In addition to finding new ways of seeing our selves and our values, we can also find a new, complementary reason for interacting (Miller, 2000; 403). Historical relationships were based on complimentary and competing needs, however Aboriginal people were not simply victims of colonization, nor were Settler people unaffected. Colonization is a shared experience where both oppressors and oppressed need healing (Daes, 2000; 6), albeit different healing, and sometimes achieved separately. Keeping Aboriginal people and perspectives separate is very different from maintaining distinctiveness, for the future of Canada cannot lie in the separation of Aboriginal and Canadian peoples and governments; we cannot promote separatism (Warry, 2007; 184). This unity includes, and begins with education policy and practice.

No longer can Canadians claim that they have no relationship to Aboriginal people, knowledges, cultures or histories. Many Canadians claim they are “perfect strangers” to Aboriginal people and “there is an ease with which they claim this position” (Dion, 2009; 179). To address this, political scientist Alan Cairns rightly acknowledges the notion that “those who share space together must share more than space” (Epp, 2003; 238). This provides the basis to (re)imagine our relationship, to become unified and strengthen our collective identity through the sharing and celebrating of our unique cultural gifts.

Aboriginal peoples have had to wait centuries for settler societies and waves of immigrants to catch up with them in dealing respectfully with all life forms, especially the ones on which our very survival depends. Unfortunately, far too many non-Aboriginals have been educated to see dependency as an insult or an embarrassment or something to be managed hierarchically... (Findlay, 2000; xiii).

This dependency is inextricably tied to relationship for human beings. Okanagan scholar Jeannette Armstrong speaks about connections: “You are always born with a connection, and unless you understand and are responsible to that connection, you become not a part of that community. You become disjointed. And to be disjointed means to not be whole” (2003; 292). That wholeness cannot be achieved if we perceive ourselves to be separate from nature, from each other. “Human beings are part of

a community, the collective, humanity, the natural world, the earth. We are pieces of earth; our bodies are chemistry from the earth. That's what we are and that's what we go back to" (Armstrong; 295). Everything in creation can be a teacher, and there are values embedded in all things, if your perspective is such to view things that way. "Values are understood as relationships; humility is important because even a mole can teach us a lot about respect and power" (Harder, 2005; 344). If we do not have respect for, learn from, and have relationship with the natural world (of which humans are but a part), how will we ever respect each other and ourselves?

The provincial government has consistently acknowledged the importance of relationship. Going back to the New Approach to Aboriginal Affairs, there is agreement that "relationship building will take time and require mutual effort and goodwill... [that the government is] looking for ways to make established processes work better, and will introduce new processes where needed" (2005; 1). If our current 'new' approach is not working, are we not responsible to fundamentally re-think our direction? The New Approach contains in its preamble that Aboriginal solutions should be sought and applied to Aboriginal concerns; perhaps relationship building can now be approached from an Aboriginal perspective. There is a tacit acknowledgement that the government operates for the benefit of the people, however it has built up policies, laws and language that are resistant to change, mono-cultural in appearance and application and often operate at the expense of Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal peoples have always been, and continue to be, a diverse and vital presence in the culture and social fabric of Ontario. The McGuinty government honours that presence, and our new approach to Aboriginal affairs signals the start of real, positive change (Ontario Native Affairs Secretariat, 2005; 29).

In 2005 this message was promising, however the 'real, positive change' is still forthcoming after nearly 10 years. The Ontario government has suggested that relationship building takes time, however engaging in a meaningful relationship and consultation means listening with the intent of seriously considering what is being said with an open mind (Miller, 2000; 406). Consultation itself is not a relationship, though it can lead to relationships, so it is imperative that we get it right.

Drawing back to the notion of connection and the multiplicities of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal identities in Canada, educational scholar Peter Taubman relates: “how can we look at and through these identities so that we can begin to see ourselves in one another and one another in ourselves, so that we can hold unity and differentiation in a tension that holds us all together?” (Pinar and Castenell, 1993; 305). The differentiation that is its own tension, that keeps us apart, is racism. If you asked someone what it meant to be White, they might be able to list their many earned and unearned privileges (McIntosh, 1988), though what exists beyond that narrative of Whiteness? The reductionist approach that is applied to all other cultures by Whiteness ends up leaving White people with little culture to claim as their own. Kincheloe and Steinberg, Whiteness scholars, suggest that in order to counteract racism and privilege there is “the necessity of creating a positive, proud, attractive antiracist white identity” (Ahmed, 2005; 82). The key barrier to achieving this is that in a very real way, many White non-Aboriginal people in Canada do not know where they come from, beyond acknowledging three or even eight generations of family living in this place called Canada.

The racial tension that keeps us apart is not just limited to our physical appearance, it also supports the notion that Aboriginal identities, languages and cultures are the same or static, and that non-Aboriginal beliefs and values are diametrically opposed to Indigenous Knowledges. It is convenient that the argument persists about how very different our beliefs and values are, intimating that it would be extremely difficult to reconcile our disparate ways of knowing and being. American activist and author Jerry Mander posits that part of the reason for this lies in the ways non-Aboriginal society has taken advantage of the natural environment, however it goes beyond such a simplistic evaluation, we are not so far away from each other as some would have you believe.

Western societies fear, hate, destroy, and also revere Indians, precisely because they express the parts of our personal and cultural psyches that we must suppress in order to function in the world as we do. How could present-day America possibly exist if great numbers of people believed that the minerals in the ground, the trees and the rocks, and the earth itself were all alive? (Barker, 2006; 56)

Resisting the binary of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal can allow us to also resist the binary of nature-connected vs. nature-opposed beliefs as well as the many other ways in which we are purported to be different from each other. Common ground, in a literal and figurative sense needs to be found. Aboriginal people and Canadians do not and should not have conflict with each other in general. If we gathered together, it would become clear that we are not resisting our difference but rather the knowledge systems and structures of the oppressor (Dei, Karumanchery and Karumanchery-Liuk, 2004; 15), in this case Canada and the province of Ontario. Taiaiake Alfred suggests that a new language is needed to address relationship, one that does not place Indigenous people at a deficit or in needing to catch-up to Settler society. “Regeneration is the answer instead of recovery, restitution instead of reconciliation, resurgence instead of resolution” (2011; 8). A fundamental shift or inversion in perspective is needed, concerning the ways that we approach each other and the issues that both keep us together and push us apart.

Those aspects of ‘unity, differentiation and tension’ do not only move in one direction. “History teaches us that, despite cries of ‘never again,’ societies are quite capable of replicating in new forms the harmful societal attitudes and governmental policies of the past” (Regan, 2010; 2). To say never again should be a commitment rather than a declaration, for relationship is a journey rather than a destination. To recognize and remember this, we can take direction from the Iroquoian view of Alliance as being “naturally in a state of constant deterioration and in need of attention” (Regan; 154). This is the approach and perspective that we require from the government concerning Aboriginal Education policy. There is a significant opportunity – and space – for the government to adjust their perspective, in response to the explosive demographic realities of Aboriginal people in Canada. “Our leaders would be better to think of the Aboriginal population growth as a remarkable second chance for the country” (Saul, 2008; 100). This second chance can be built upon the perspective that Aboriginal Education is not just for Aboriginal

learners, and that bringing about any significant change in the learning and living outcomes of Aboriginal people will invariably be expedited by the education of non-Aboriginal people.

To know who and where we are, we need to know where we have been; without an acknowledgement of our shared history and relationships, we will only see one side of the story and find ourselves continually out of balance.

Chapter Two – ONTARIO’S APPROACH TO ABORIGINAL EDUCATION

Introduction

There is no singular way to perform Aboriginal Education. Quite the contrary, Aboriginal Education presents the most diverse set of educational pathways and possibilities to be found anywhere in Canada. The method suggested in this dissertation is not the most ideal way to approach Aboriginal Education policy and practice; it is simply the way that I believe to be most appropriate, respectful and effective given our current infrastructure and institutions. Similarly, Ontario’s approach to Aboriginal Education was designed with the goal in mind of reaching the greatest amount of Aboriginal learners through the utilization of a standardized Framework. We cannot assume that standardization is produced by or produces objectivism however. “What is implied in the application of objectivism is that there is one correct way of understanding the dynamics of Indian education, one correct methodology, and one correct policy for Indian education” (Cajete, 1994; 20). Aboriginal Education cannot be standardized, in policy or practice. The two things that make Aboriginal Education truly inclusive, that the government currently does not focus well enough on, are having a focus on the non-Aboriginal learner and relinquishing control over the design and application of Aboriginal Education policies and practices to Aboriginal people. The diversity of Aboriginal ways of knowing creates a complete lack of standardization that makes Aboriginal Education difficult for the government, but also hugely effective for the learner. This is not to say that there should be no Canadian or Eurocentric perspective in these policies, however it should be infused within Aboriginal perspective and governance philosophy rather than the other way around. As Gregory Cajete, Tewa scholar and author of perhaps the most significant text on Aboriginal Education, Look to the Mountain: An Ecology of Indigenous Education, explains: “It is possible to evolve learning and teaching models that build on shared ideas while honoring unique differences” (1994; 137).

It is this reversal of inclusion that is needed, and is at the root of this dissertation. Too often Aboriginal issues are placed within a pluralist framework (Lawrence and Dua, 2011; 23), however this

model “leaves no room for the legitimacy of First Nations’ discourse except as exotic” (Urion, 1999; 9). To even define Aboriginality ignores the diversity and multiplicities of identity, culture and knowledge that exist in this province alone. With policy, “broad characterizations can be either instructive and explanatory, or they can be reductionist and simplistic” (Urion; 8). If Ontario’s Aboriginal Education policy is meant to distill the ways in which one could and should approach the needs of Aboriginal learners, their families and communities (which I believe is the aim), it perpetuates an assumption of sameness in Aboriginal people, and that a common approach is both appropriate and desired.

Any policy regarding Aboriginal people drafted by non-Aboriginal people should at the very least have an anti-racist foundation and focus. In order to be effective, this basis of anti-racism must also be preventative (Dei et al, 2004; 4). The Aboriginal achievement gap would not exist if not for the historical and current conditions of racism and racial inequity targeted at Aboriginal people. If not for these issues, Aboriginal Education policy might not exist – should not exist. Policy is not the issue however, but rather the reasons why such policies exist and what their intentions are. Similar to the way we currently do Aboriginal Education, we need to be careful in how we approach anti-racism, as it can end up being a colonial project (Lawrence and Dua, 2011; 19), which is to say it is created, enforced and evaluated by those who perpetuate and benefit from colonialism. That is what makes it so important that we do Aboriginal Education right, and if we are going to have a policy we have to go beyond the simplistic and reductionist pan-Aboriginal approach that largely absolves non-Aboriginal people, institutions and governments of a responsibility to be informed and engaged. If we are going to take on the responsibility of anti-racism, we first have to acknowledge the complexity of race and Aboriginality, for “one cannot understand racial inequality by studying race alone” (McCarthy and Crichlow, 1993; xxvii). We can learn a great deal from education scholar Roxana Ng when she says:

I want to move away from treating race, gender, and class as *categories* designating different and separate domains of social life to *discovering* how they are *relations* that organize our productive and reproductive activities, located in time and space (McCarthy and Crichlow; 50 – emphasis original).

Despite one's best intentions, Bengali-Canadian sociologist Himani Bannerji shares that "it is entirely possible to be critical of racism at the level of ideology, politics, and institutions... yet possess a great quantity of common sense racism" (McCarthy and Crichlow; 52). Which is to say that we can claim to be opposed to racism in its many incarnations, yet still say, think and feel racist things. We must be mindful of how our words, thoughts and even non-verbal actions are both intended and interpreted. Herein lies the importance of self-reflexivity in antiracist teaching, as "teachers, like other agents in the educative process, are bound by cultural location, history and experience" (Dillabough in Dion, 2009; 78). We cannot assume that the classroom is a safe, positive or neutral space where all students come in equal and leave well informed. "Academic space is not culturally, politically and ideologically neutral and to regard it as such and to uncritically integrate Indigenous knowledge into this framework subjects Indigenous knowledge to these frameworks" (Dumbrill and Green, 2008; 493). This false neutrality is truly a barrier to creating Aboriginal Education policy and practice that is 'inclusive' of Indigenous perspectives and knowledges. Inclusive schooling

should not be seen as a threat to European traditions and knowledge, but rather as a means of expanding the limits of conventional knowledge and creating multiple centres of knowledge that allow the representation of other histories, world views and ways of knowing and acting in the world (Dei et al, in Dumbrill and Green, 2008; 498).

If students are to learn about other people and cultures, they ought to do that learning in fundamentally different ways. As scholars, educators and policy people there is a need for us to be honest, self-reflexive and aware of our limitations. Very simply, 'we cannot be the cure if we are the disease' (Battiste, 2000; xvii). Ontario's current Aboriginal Education policies, as well as nearly every educational institution in this province are seamlessly embedded with a Eurocentric perspective. In a racial context, Eurocentricity relates to Whiteness, a concept that goes beyond the colour of one's skin and speaks to the ascription of privilege. Whether one chooses to be seen as White or not, "whiteness seems to be invisible even while being the necessary standard against which otherness is marked"

(Schick and St. Denis, 2005; 298). Partly due to its contentiousness and complexity, “whiteness in public schools is not usually talked about, it is consequently recentred as an invisible standard of success” (Schick and St. Denis; 307).

Canadian curriculum ideologies are Eurocentric in that they: 1) privilege individualism rather than collectivism, 2) legitimate subjectivity of inclusion of Aboriginal people and content as meritocratic, 3) homogenize ‘lived cultural differences’, 4) exclude or disorganize forms of Aboriginal knowledge, and 5) collude in perpetuation of institutionalized racist expression (Battiste and Barman, 1995; 183). If one were to invert each of those five points, it would much closer resemble an Indigenous-infused curriculum. In order for policy, schooling and curriculum to be inclusive it has to be predicated on Indigenous Knowledge and perspectives legitimated by Indigenous Knowledge-Holders, for “the goal of inclusive schooling is not to displace Eurocentrism, but to de-centre it and make room for other marginalized knowledges that should be equally validated and taken up in schools as legitimate ways of knowing” (Dumbrill and Green, 2008; 498).

In our current approach to teaching and learning, curriculum can be like a checklist with no concept of structure or context (Bishop, 2001; 128). It is not realistic that we aim to teach for understanding when content standards and tests accelerate the learning process (Wiggins and McTighe, 2005; 4). Textbooks alone lack context and conceal a great deal in that they simplify and distil the mass of scholarship in an effort to make information accessible for students (Wiggins and McTighe; 230). If educators go ‘off’ or beyond curriculum and textbooks, such as discussing Aboriginal topics or issues, there is a need to justify the time spent on those materials in place of what is set out in their guiding documents, lest they be seen as interfering with ‘legitimate’ curriculum (Dion, 2009; 101).

Carol Schick and Verna St.Denis share that “perhaps the greatest challenge in the planning and theorizing for curricular practices in Canadian schools is the discovery of *how* and *why* race matters” (2005; 296 – emphasis original). Why should Canadians care about Aboriginal people at all? How

should Canadians come to know about racial difference and cultural distinctiveness? For the average teacher, unless otherwise trained and prepared, these questions can be overwhelming. In the absence of such preparations, teachers and students must learn to be critical.

It is important, therefore, for teachers and communities not only to equip students with the general critical skills that might help them to deconstruct representations of popular racism, but also to unmask those institutional practices that sustain racist ideologies, with a view to dismantling them (Fazal Rizvi in McCarthy and Crichlow, 1993; 138).

The learning and talking about racism cannot come under the purview of multiculturalism, as would be many of our first instincts, for multiculturalism can serve to obscure rather than clarify issues of racism and othering. Multiculturalism is a state of affairs, not a path or process of engagement, reconciliation and discussion. “Although multicultural education programs have increased in number, the current review of the efficacy of these programs remains mixed” (Wright and Tolan, 2009; 138). These programs could be leading us further from our desired educational goals: “the multiculturalist strategy of adding diversity to the dominant school curriculum serves, paradoxically, to legitimize the dominance of Western culture in educational arrangements” (McCarthy and Crichlow, 1993; 294). When discussing multiculturalism, it is critical that we interrogate whether or not each cultural or de-marginalized group has an equitable voice.

Merely moving beyond simplistic models of cultural relativism is not enough to ‘invert the hegemony’ of Eurocentrism in the curriculum... a critical approach to the transformation of school knowledge requires... the generalized diffusion throughout the whole system of schooling of counter-hegemonic knowledge based on the experiences and perspectives of the disadvantaged (McCarthy and Crichlow, 300).

Such a transformation is needed to fully realize the promise of multiculturalism. Further, to achieve the diffusion of Aboriginal perspectives, knowledges, and cultures, change needs to begin with the attitudes and values of the largely non-Aboriginal public servants, policymakers, bureaucrats and politicians who produce Aboriginal Education policy. Until such a time, we can focus on the policies that they have produced, and discover the ways that these policies help or hinder the realization of a

more inclusive and holistic Aboriginal Education process whose goal is anti-racism, anti-colonialism and social justice.

The real agents of change in Aboriginal Education need to continue to be the Deans of the Faculties and Schools of Education across the province who have already signed on to the Association of Canadian Deans of Education's *Accord on Indigenous Education*. This dissertation is as much a response to that Accord and a challenge for Ontario teacher education programs to go one step further. We cannot force the provincial government to intervene and mandate that Aboriginal Education become a compulsory component of teacher training, which may never happen. The change that we can control starts on the ground, on the land and within the Faculties and Schools of Education in this province who commit themselves to intercultural relationships and a collaborative vision for Aboriginal Education.

Despite the forthcoming challenges directed at the FNMI Framework and Ontario's Aboriginal Education policies, it should be said that the FNMI Framework is the product of many peoples' long and hard work, often pushing against bureaucratic and political forces, working towards the best possible outcomes for all students. I am led to think about people who work their whole careers pushing against the system, making small and incremental changes. When I worked briefly in the Ontario government as a policy analyst, I asked one of my supervisors how one could keep their ethics and values about them when being constantly asked to conform in creating policy recommendations. A Director, who had rose to his position through a great deal of hard work but also undoubtedly conformity and compromise, responded that you could only produce the best recommendations possible for your superiors, and expect that it would get chopped up, revised and reformed into something you could only hope resembled your original recommendation. This was a sobering realization for me, which now leads me to think about what the original FNMI Framework might have looked like, and if non-Aboriginal learners could have played a larger role in its original vision.

My position on and understanding of Ontario's Aboriginal Education policies was initiated during the researching and writing of my Masters of Social Work thesis in 2008, carried on through my professional work as a policy analyst responsible for evaluating Aboriginal Education policy and practice, and concretized in writing this dissertation. I sought guidance on the genesis of the FNMI Framework from a former Ministry of Education policy worker who is Aboriginal and was largely responsible for developing Ontario's Aboriginal Education policies for decades. While this feedback was useful, it did not significantly alter or add to my own understanding of these policies, or what is written here. While I cannot consider myself an expert on the application and implications of these policies, reports and toolkits, I can say with certainty that insofar as they relate to the needs of non-Aboriginal learners I have not found anywhere an analysis or retrospective as fulsome as what I have provided below.

a. Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework (2007)

The First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework (FNMI Framework) was developed to address the needs of the estimated 50,312 Aboriginal students who attend provincially funded elementary and secondary schools in Ontario (18,300 First Nations, 26,200 Métis, and 600 Inuit students who live in the jurisdictions of school boards) (EDU, 2007a; 5). The FNMI Framework necessitates itself by the achievement gap that Aboriginal students experience, which it partly attributes to “a lack of awareness among teachers of the particular learning styles of Aboriginal students, and a lack of understanding within schools and school boards of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit cultures, histories, and perspectives” (EDU, 2007a; 6). Further, in its Vision, the FNMI Framework aspires that “all students in Ontario will have knowledge and appreciation of contemporary and traditional First Nation, Métis, and Inuit traditions, cultures, and perspectives” (EDU, 2007a; 7). These sentiments are all very promising – an admission of lack of understanding in schools and a focus on building knowledge and appreciation of

Aboriginal people and issues. However, the root causes of this lack of understanding, knowledge and appreciation are not addressed in the entirety of the document.

The Government of Ontario creates and supports an academic environment that fosters First Nation, Métis, and Inuit languages and cultures. It acknowledges the diversity found in First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities and endorses learning about First Nation, Métis, and Inuit cultures, histories, and perspectives in the public education system (EDU, 2007a; 8).

How can a safe and respectful environment be fostered if the cause of unsafe and disrespectful environments is not addressed? The solution cannot come through simply opening a book or the sharing of a new perspective, there are issues, real issues, of racism, discrimination and systemic oppression at work in our education system. Granted, the only way to start to counteract those systems is to raise awareness, however we need to be honest and explicit about why we are doing this work.

Strategy 1.1 of the FNMI Framework focuses on building capacity for effective teaching, assessment and evaluation, where EDU commits to “encourage more faculties of education and colleges to further enhance the knowledge and skills of Teacher Candidates and teachers in the field to better prepare them to work with First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students” (EDU, 2007a; 11).

Strategy 3.2 suggests that school boards will strive to “offer training for teachers about First Nation, Métis, and Inuit histories, cultures, and perspectives” as well as “develop and implement programs and services that are supportive and reflective of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit cultures and languages” in addition to increasing “access to Native language and Native studies programming for all students” that will “facilitate intercultural dialogue throughout school communities” (EDU, 2007a; 19).

There is a great deal within these statements that requires deconstruction. First, we cannot wait for teachers to be hired into school boards in order to receive training, those resources should be directed to incumbent teachers without a comprehension of Aboriginality, and to updating or maintaining what knowledge and training that all teachers possess. Second, who are going to be the ones developing and implementing programs that are reflective of Aboriginal perspectives? What will these programs be used for? Third, we cannot assume that any non-Aboriginal students will want to take the elective Native

languages and studies courses, if they are even offered at their school in the first place. Intercultural dialogue can only occur when there are Aboriginal people present in positions of authority, whether they are school employees, visitors, or community members – and having a consistent place in the institution and students’ lives exponentially increases their effectiveness. Dialogue and relationship are inefficient when introduced through an isolated curricular unit, or through the provision of elective courses. While these three issues need to be addressed, they are only in reference to a single Strategy, and only involve school boards. The responsibilities of EDU, schools, and teachers themselves are addressed in their own policy points, strategies and recommendations, each of which need to be troubled.

In actuality, teachers may have the *equipment* to integrate Aboriginal content in the form of policy, procedures and curriculum resources, but being *equipped* is an entirely different matter. To be equipped is to have adequate training, experience and engagement with Aboriginal people and perspectives. If a teacher never encounters Aboriginal perspectives from Aboriginal people themselves, misunderstanding, appropriation and resistance become much more likely. There needs to be an acknowledgement that what teaching methods and supports that are good for some Aboriginal students may in fact also be good for other non-Aboriginal students.

b. Building Bridges to Success for First Nation, Métis and Inuit Students (2007)

A companion document for the FNMI Framework, *Building Bridges for Success* lays out information about Aboriginal-specific services, supports and curricular content. One of the keys aspects of the FNMI Framework was the introduction of a voluntary self-identification process for Aboriginal children, youth and their families in order to target specific academic and social services for those learners that needed them. *Building Bridges* supports this initiative by citing the Ontario Human Rights Commission’s ‘Guidelines for Collecting Data on Enumerated Grounds Under the Code,’ which states that:

A data collection program should clearly set out a Code-legitimate purpose: to monitor and evaluate potential discrimination, identify and **remove systemic barriers**, ameliorate or **prevent disadvantage** and/or **promote substantive equality** for individuals identified by enumerated grounds. Regardless of the method of data collection, the individuals on whom data is being collected, or the broader public in general, must be informed why such information is being collected and how the collection and use of such data will assist to relieve disadvantage or discrimination and achieve equal opportunity (EDU, 2007b; 10 – emphasis added)

‘Remove systemic barriers, prevent disadvantage, and/or promote substantive equality’ looks a great deal like Aboriginal Education as I have defined it, however these goals were not explicitly addressed in the FNMI Framework, nor were the issues that cause such barriers – disadvantage and inequality. Self-identification (self-ID) is a highly contentious issue, necessitating that it be designed and implemented in the most collaborative and transparent fashion possible. This is the value of the second half of the statement from the Human Rights Commission’s Guideline – what is this data going to be used for? EDU supports Aboriginal people learning and earning at a higher level, they suggest that a self-ID policy is the best way to achieve this, though will identifying yourself as Aboriginal eliminate or enhance the racism that is foundational to much of the disadvantage leveled against Aboriginal people? As will become clearer in analysis of the FNMI Framework progress reports and the Auditor General of Ontario’s 2012 Report, self-ID has not been as effective a tool as EDU might have liked, not having significantly improved Aboriginal learners’ achievement outcomes or the building of relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners.

Building Bridges outlines that there is no lack of Native language and Native studies courses for secondary students to take, in order to enhance their knowledge and relationship with Aboriginal issues. The provision of Native language and studies courses in secondary school only leads one to question what students learn before then, and whether or not they will be interested in enrolling in Native studies at all. “Ontario’s secondary school curriculum includes Native language courses in Cayuga, Cree, Delaware, Mohawk, Ojibwe, Oji-Cree, and Oneida. Students can take a Native language course in place of compulsory French” (EDU, 2007b; 22). Learners are required to choose a Native language course

over compulsory French, however it is unclear what resources and information are required for that youth to successfully learn an Aboriginal language. How many Cayuga language teachers are available in Sioux Lookout, ON? Should we expect or assume that these languages be available to be offered in any school in the province, for any learner? Localizing language and culture requires us to find Aboriginal language and Traditional Teachers in every area of the province, and have school boards approach them to offer their distinct knowledges, languages, and teachings in a respectful and appropriate manner. Cultural distinctiveness is apparent in the offering of seven different Aboriginal languages, however we have to be conscious that such diversity is not lost in the Native studies curriculum for secondary students.

Building Bridges suggested that there were 10 elective courses available in the Native studies Curriculum, including:

- a) Expressing Aboriginal Cultures, Grade 9;
- b) Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, Grade 10;
- c) English: Contemporary Aboriginal Voices, Grade 11, University Preparation;
- d) Current Aboriginal Issues in Canada, Grade 11;
- e) Aboriginal Beliefs, Values, and Aspirations in Contemporary Society, Grade 11, College Preparation;
- f) English: Contemporary Aboriginal Voices, Grade 11, College Preparation;
- g) Aboriginal Beliefs, Values, and Aspirations in Contemporary Society, Grade 11, Workplace Preparation;
- h) English: Contemporary Aboriginal Voices, Grade 11, Workplace Preparation;
- i) Aboriginal Governance: Emerging Directions, Grade 12;
- j) Issues of Indigenous Peoples in a Global Context, Grade 12 (EDU, 2007b; 22).

There is not enough space here to break each of these courses down, however ‘Aboriginal Beliefs, Values, and Aspirations in Contemporary Society’ might appear trivializing, as well as serving to historicize Aboriginal people. Additionally, what different information would students learn about Aboriginal beliefs and values if they were headed to university rather than the ‘workplace’? It is critical also that we consider who exactly is teaching those in Grade 11 about Aboriginal beliefs and values. Most importantly, we should question why Aboriginal people have ‘aspirations’ worth studying, and how those aspirations may be different in a ‘contemporary society’.

In its Appendix, *Building Bridges* lists the contact information for First Nations Organizations, Provincial/Territorial Organizations (PTO), Tribal Councils/District Chiefs, Métis Organizations, MNO Community Councils, Inuit Organizations, and Friendship Centres (EDU, 2007b), which is tremendously useful for schools and school boards in order to make contact with community members, teachers and guest speakers for classroom activities and coursework. Additionally, those communities and organizations listed can and should inform any Aboriginal Education policy, program and/or initiative. Everything must start and end with them.

c. Sound Foundations for the Road Ahead: Fall 2009 Progress Report on Implementation of the Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework (2009)

Pathway is an appropriate metaphor since, in every learning process we metaphorically travel an internal, and many times external, landscape. In traveling a Pathway, we make stops; encounter and overcome obstacles, recognize and interpret signs, seek answers, and follow the tracks of those entities that have something to teach us. We create ourselves anew. Path denotes a structure; Way implies a process (Cajete, 1994; 55).

Following the pathway metaphor, this first FNMI Framework progress report elicits images of obstacles to be overcome. In addition to their combined efforts with school boards, schools and educators, EDU solicited feedback from community members and organizations on the successful implementation of the Framework. **“Many respondents viewed the framework as an important tool in supporting First Nation, Métis, and Inuit student achievement, but few acknowledged or commented on the role the framework plays in addressing the needs of non-Aboriginal students”** (EDU, 2009a; 18 – emphasis added). This is a critically important statement to come from EDU considering their lack of emphasis on non-Aboriginal learners in the Framework. Non-Aboriginal students’ needs are not prioritized, however they are not unimportant to the enactment of Aboriginal Education policy and practice.

While EDU has expanded programming and enhanced policy since the release of the 2007 Framework, *Sound Foundations* may not be wholly representative of the outcomes of two years of

implementation. In a number of areas, EDU's efforts yielded decidedly mixed results. In regards to Native studies and language course offerings, EDU shares:

The significant increase in enrolment in Native studies and Native language courses has occurred in part because of the increase in the number of boards offering these course options. In 2007–08, 35 boards offered Native studies and/or Native language courses, a significant increase from the 18 boards that offered these courses in 2005–06” (EDU, 2009a; 7).

However, having said that, EDU explains that there are significant issues regarding the expansion of these courses.

Access to Native studies and Native language courses was identified as an area of concern for some students and parents – 61.8 per cent of students stated that they did not have the opportunity to take Native studies or Native language courses at their schools. The qualifications or expertise of teachers to instruct students in these subject areas was also identified as an area of concern. Community members and, to a lesser extent, educators mentioned the need to ensure that Native language and Native studies teachers have a high degree of proficiency in Native languages and a strong knowledge of Native studies (EDU, 2009a; 18).

A high degree of proficiency in Indigenous languages and a strong knowledge of Indigenous cultures and Knowledges should be the starting point. In regards to the representativeness of the above statement, 61.8 per cent of a group cannot be considered ‘some’. This demonstrates that the majority of respondents, over 60 per cent of students, cannot access Native languages and studies in their school.

EDU acknowledges that awareness-raising is an important aspect of the work they propose. “Raising awareness among all students is as fundamental to the successful implementation of the framework as are those activities specifically intended for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit learners. This is especially true with regard to understanding the plurality of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit perspectives” (EDU, 2009a; 19). Learning about the plurality of Aboriginal identities and cultures will be especially difficult if there are no educators proficient in teaching about this diversity, and that there are no opportunities for this learning in over 60 per cent of schools.

EDU offers two very telling statements on the matter: “Additional work is required to reinforce the relevance and importance of raising awareness of Aboriginal perspectives among all students, regardless

of the proportion of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students enrolled in a school” (2009a; 18). They also note that “encouraging all students to consider the benefits of taking Native studies and Native language courses *may be* a positive step forward in building awareness” (2009a; 15 – emphasis added).

Those two statements, enhancing Aboriginal Education outcomes regardless of the disclosure or enrolment of Aboriginal students, and encouraging all students to take Native studies and languages, are clearly in support of the guiding vision of this dissertation – however there has clearly been a gap between vision and action. The additional awareness-raising work that EDU proposes is clearly ongoing, though to perceive that all students taking Native studies and languages *may be* a positive step does not take a strong enough stance on the issue. Rather than questioning whether or not non-Aboriginal students should be taking these courses, EDU should instead consider how challenging such a proposition would actually be. If every eligible student chose to enroll in Native studies this year, what would that look like? Further, what type of outcome could such an investment provide?

d. Aboriginal Perspectives: A Guide to the Teacher’s Toolkit – Teaching Resources and Strategies for Elementary and Secondary Classrooms (2009) and Aboriginal Perspectives: The Teacher’s Toolkit

‘Aboriginal perspectives bring the curriculum to life!’ is the tagline for EDU’s FNMI policy, however there is a lack of focus on defining what constitutes an Aboriginal perspective and who can offer such a perspective. EDU does suggest that FNMI perspectives add a “rich, new dimension” for non-Aboriginal learners and educators, and opportunities to “explore, understand, and appreciate the contributions of Ontario’s Aboriginal communities to the social and cultural fabric of our province” (2009b; 4). This, to me, appears reductionist and could serve to romanticize Aboriginality. The Toolkit is broken down into two parts, Part I: Great Ideas for Teaching and Learning (expectations in the curriculum that contain Aboriginal perspectives) and Part II: Practical Teaching Strategies (fulfilling the curriculum while incorporating Aboriginal perspectives) (EDU, 2009b; 5). The Aboriginal Education

Office (AEO) that resides within and advises both EDU and TCU, suggests that the revised curriculum that is a part of the Toolkit will “help foster a strong sense of identity and positive self-image” for Aboriginal learners (AEO; undated). As an example, in Part II, the Guide explains that there are six geographic regions in Ontario populated by Aboriginal people of common cultures that ‘existed’ at contact, where people ‘lived’ (EDU, 2009b; 7). Where this statement serves to historicize and essentialize Aboriginal people, the Guide also trivializes Aboriginal cultures and spiritualities: promoting facilitation of talking circles with an object – stick, stone, feather – that “symbolizes connectedness to the land” (EDU, 2009b; 8). There is a critical issue here concerning the representation of Aboriginal people and beliefs.

Regarding the relationship between Aboriginal people and the media, a significant gateway for non-Aboriginal people to encounter and learn about Aboriginal people, the Guide suggests that: “*In the past*, mainstream media have often misrepresented Aboriginal peoples” (EDU, 2009b; 9 – emphasis added). This notion needs to be reconciled with the reality that negative and hateful representations of Aboriginal people and their cultures are a very current issue that persists unabated across Canada.

The value in analyzing things such as the Guide to the Teacher’s Toolkit is not necessarily in what it says, but how it says it. One word can change the meaning of a statement or mislead the reader. An example is the use of the phrase ‘our Aboriginal peoples’, which can denote both patriarchal ownership and/or relationality. This ambiguity can confuse the reader, much like saying that past representations in media have been negative; yes, this is true, but what about the present? As mentioned in the previous sections of this dissertation, denial can still exist in not telling the whole truth. Aboriginal people are routinely negatively editorialized in all forms of media, an issue that deserves critical attention. Additionally, the curriculum’s statement about items being connected to the land could be viewed as reductionist and romanticizing Aboriginal spiritualities.

It is not the intent of this section or this dissertation to comb through curricula and its guiding principles, however, the Teacher’s Toolkit provides a useful snapshot into the ways in which EDU proposes that teachers can ‘bring the curriculum to life’ through “First Nation, Métis and Inuit histories, cultures and perspectives” (EDU, 2009b). They propose that

for Aboriginal students, the revised curriculum will help foster a strong sense of identity and a positive self-image. For all Ontario students, and educators, the new expectations add a rich new dimension to Ontario’s curriculum, and strengthen opportunities to explore, appreciate, understand, and value the contributions of Ontario’s Aboriginal communities to the social and cultural fabric of our province (EDU, 2009c; 1).

The Teacher’s Toolkit is broken down into two parts, curriculum expectations and teaching strategies – however, the general ineffectiveness of the Toolkit lies not in its provision of topics, themes and information, but rather the complete absence of inviting Aboriginal people and perspectives into educational contexts. Certainly, Aboriginal people are the focus here, but Métis Traditional Teachers or storytellers would likely be better prepared to talk about Métis history than a non-Aboriginal teacher. Inviting Indigenous Knowledge-Holders into the classroom, and taking students out of their educational contexts provides teachers with an opportunity to learn but also an opportunity to not be viewed as the context expert. This is not to say that those non-Aboriginal educators should not be as informed as possible, and comfortable discussing all manner of issues that relate to Aboriginal people in both historical and contemporary contexts. What we need is less of a focus on paper resources and facts, and more focus on people, feelings and experiences – for the teacher and the student.

Part I: Great Ideas for Teaching and Learning

Curriculum Expectations: Elementary

There is very little here to analyze in regard to actual Aboriginal Education content. It appears as though the mainstream curriculum serves as the basis and is punctuated with Aboriginal words and concepts. Each grade successively includes more content and increasingly more opportunities for critical

thought, but this cannot be the most efficient and effective way to teach non-Aboriginal students about Aboriginality. In Grade 1, there is a discussion of civic responsibilities and our personal relationships. These are fundamental associations, however they lack any context and connection to Aboriginal Education for teachers and learners. In Grade 2, there is mention of a ‘First Nation powwow’ and an expectation that teachers will be prepared to talk about it in reference to cultural and religious traditions.

Grade 3 provides opportunities for more engagement with Aboriginal content, where students are expected to “describe the communities of early settlers and First Nation peoples in Upper Canada around 1800” (EDU, 2009c; Expectations – Grade 3). This curricular document is settler-focused however; except for asking students to describe the Ojibway and Iroquois Confederacy territories and lifestyles in 1800, as well as requiring students to compare life back then to life in Aboriginal communities today. There are numerous ways in which these expectations are problematic. Each of these expectations require a base of knowledge from the teacher that is not informed by romanticized, essentialized, reductionistic, and stereotypical notions of Aboriginality. By asking an eight-year-old to compare the 1800 version of an Anishinaabe community to how those communities function contemporarily would undoubtedly leave a few holes that need filling in.

In Grade 4 students learn that various regions in Canada export their natural resources to Ontario; potatoes from PEI, fish from BC, grain from Saskatchewan and... Inuit art from Nunavut. One of these items does not belong. Grade 5 does not fair much better, as the curriculum asks learners to dissect and describe ancient civilizations, of which Aboriginal communities are included in a plurality of groups from across the world. In Grade 6 students are asked to take a more in-depth look at pre-contact and contact Aboriginal peoples and their relationships with the environment and European explorers. There is the examination of various *theories* of how Aboriginal people got to North America, and explanations of differing *opinions* on the positive and negative impacts of the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relationship.

Providing students with *theories* and *opinions* – which may or may not be informed by an Indigenous perspective – results in ambiguity at best, and a cultural and historical dissonance at worst.

In Grade 7 there is some discussion on conflict and cooperation between Aboriginal people and Settlers as well as a largely watered down description of the impact of the Catholic Church and reserve system on Aboriginal people. The Grade 7 document also mentions that there are *conflicting points of view* in Canada on agreements and documents such as the Indian Act. All of these curricular expectations presuppose that teachers have a base understanding of the issues and the history associated with them – and that teachers feel capable and comfortable presenting this information from an Aboriginal perspective. *Theories* serves to delegitimize Indigenous creationism, *opinions* eliminates histories of colonialism and genocide, and *conflicting points of view* demonstrates that there is a correct position in the remembering of history. Where are the Aboriginal perspectives here?

Grade 8 takes us into more critical territory however, looking into the impacts of treaties and the Indian Act, and asking students to analyze aspects of the British North America Act that relate to Aboriginal people. We have waited until Grade 8 for students to analyze our intercultural relationship, but once again, their receipt of a critical and balanced education is predicated on teachers' ability to teach in a critical and balanced manner. However, at 13 years old, the majority of a student's knowledge and focus will concern Aboriginal people only up to 1867. The either/or proposition that informs our curriculum is insufficient, that Aboriginal people are either of the past, or that they exist 'today'. It is critical to get students interested in history, and to create a foundational understanding of how Canada came to be as it is today. However, if we do not provide a balanced perspective on the matter and only bring them along so slowly – as the curriculum advises – we run the risk of alienating them and their capacity to be both empathic and truly critical.

Part II: Practical Teaching Strategies

These strategies are too numerous to explore and analyze, however I would encourage the reader to consider each one separately and as a stage in the planned knowledge progression of the average student in Ontario. One might recognize a lot of the same issues that I have addressed in this dissertation (respect, treaties, exchanges between communities, media portrayal and Aboriginal rights), however upon further review I am certain that one would also find that these subjects are largely glossed over and reduced – almost entirely taught from a Eurocentric perspective. For a more fulsome analysis of these issues I would direct you to my Masters of Social Work thesis (Snowball, 2009). Offering ‘Practical Teaching Strategies’ in Aboriginal Education for teachers is critically important, even more so than providing ‘inclusive content’.

Teaching Strategies: Elementary

- Grade 1 – Language (Circle Traditions – Talking Circle; Respect; Treaties); Social Studies (Responsibility; Respecting Mother Earth; The Things We Need)
- Grade 2 – Social Studies (Naming Ceremony; Social Celebrations: Remembrance Day; Seasonal Traditions)
- Grade 3 – Social Studies (7th Generation Stewardship; Feasts of Thanksgiving; What Settlers Learned from Aboriginal People: Food Preservation and Technology)
- Grade 4 – Language (Comparing Media Texts: Who Says?); Social Studies (Exchanges Between Communities; Walking in Someone Else’s Shoes)
- Grade 5 – Language (Aboriginal Heroes; Creation Stories: Where We All Come From; Stereotypes: Learning to Unlearn; Talking Circle); Social Studies (Celebrating National Aboriginal Day; Using and Making Maps)
- Grade 6 – Social Studies (Achievements of Aboriginal People in Canada; Current Aboriginal Perspectives; Different but Similar: Comparing Algonquian and Iroquoian Nations; Issues Concerning First Nations Today)
- Grade 7 – Language (Aboriginal Poetry; Gestures and Movements in Aboriginal Dance; Viewpoints in Aboriginal and Mainstream Media); History (Cross-Cultural Perspectives; Exploring Cultural Differences)
- Grade 8 – Language (Perspectives in Aboriginal Media); History (Important Aboriginal Women; Lives of Métis and First Nations Peoples in Western Canada in the 1890s; The Red River Rebellion; Treaties 1 to 8; Treaties and Legislation – Transforming Lifestyles)

Teaching Strategies: Secondary

- Grade 10 – Career Studies (Language as a Career Asset); History (Cultural and Historical Contributions)

Grade 11 – English (Media Portrayal); Geography (Geotechnologies); Law (Aboriginal Rights);
Politics (Political Landscape)

Grade 12 – Business (Culture and Leadership Style); Economics (Resource Development)

e. Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training Policy Framework (2011)

The Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training Policy Framework (PSE Framework), is grounded in the same understanding as the FNMI Framework, which is that Aboriginal learners are not achieving at the highest levels possible. This Framework is perhaps more relevant to this dissertation in that teacher education programs are under the purview of postsecondary institutions, and that systems and institutions of higher education have a significant role to play in both undoing oppression and challenging the ways in which Aboriginal Education is performed in all educational contexts in Canada. Much like the FNMI Framework, it is *not* the purpose of the PSE Framework to address the needs of non-Aboriginal learners or to explicitly and honestly explain why Aboriginal learners are so disadvantaged in comparison to their non-Aboriginal peers.

Having said that, it is clear that the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (TCU) closely observed the implementation of EDU's FNMI Framework – TCU engaged in a much more comprehensive consultation process with Aboriginal communities regarding the needs of the PSE Framework in order to avoid some of the difficulties experienced in the Kindergarten-Grade 12 sector.

TCU shares that “this framework recognizes that existing socio-economic gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people cannot be addressed without dealing with gaps in educational attainment and achievement” (2011; 5). This is true, though it certainly does not tell the whole story. TCU does offer the following, however:

In addition to more obvious factors, such as poverty, lack of high school completion and academic preparedness, **discrimination**, and the difficulty and expense of relocation that is often necessary to pursue training or postsecondary studies, a large segment of the Aboriginal population may also face other less overt barriers, such as the challenge of entering into the postsecondary education system as an adult learner, the absence of Aboriginal role models, and **institutional insensitivity to Aboriginal histories, cultures, world views, values, and knowledge systems** (TCU, 2011; 9 – emphasis added).

The PSE Framework actually does a great deal to address the responsibility of academic institutions to become safer spaces for Aboriginal students and more accommodating for multiple ways of knowing – absolutely requisite for Aboriginal Education – however, alike the FNMI Framework, the root causes of insecurity and lack of accommodation need to be addressed. TCU suggests that it is the intention that the PSE Framework be used to: “influence attitudes and approaches of the postsecondary education and training sectors so that these sectors become increasingly aware of, and responsive to, the unique needs, circumstances, perspectives, and knowledge systems of a wide spectrum of Aboriginal learners” (TCU, 2011; 11). Being aware of and responsive to Aboriginal knowledges and perspectives are rather nebulous concepts however – how do PSE institutions actually project to achieve these things?

The PSE Framework is not solely focused on education however. The support and consideration of Aboriginal values and beliefs in educational contexts is balanced with a pointed focus on assisting Aboriginal learners’ entry into the labour market. While it is logical that one will follow the other, TCU displays its aspirations in the following statement.

For many Aboriginal people, education is holistic and includes physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of life. By recognizing the unique and diverse perspectives of Aboriginal learners, and building them into the vision of this policy framework, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities seeks to balance positive social, cultural, and academic outcomes with sustainable results in the labour market (TCU, 2011; 12).

The PSE Framework should be education, not employment policy. TCU’s focus on preparing learners for the labour market, albeit in a culturally informed way, avoids the significant changes to its own philosophy and practice that must precede such goals. One of the key focal points of the PSE Framework is relationships, however there need to be clear outcomes from and expectations of these relationships. The vision of the PSE Framework is that:

Ontario’s postsecondary education institutions – the public institutions of higher learning in the province – working in partnership with First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities to support the revitalization of Aboriginal cultures, languages, and identities through the development and delivery of education in these areas for both Aboriginal and non-

Aboriginal learners and communities, as well as through the encouragement of a broader recognition and inclusion of Aboriginal knowledge (TCU, 2011; 12).

The recognition and inclusion of Aboriginal knowledge is a thoroughly difficult process that must be informed by Aboriginal peoples and communities. TCU acknowledges that “inclusiveness and respect must be integral to the postsecondary education and training environment and experience for all learners” (2011; 14), however these concepts must also be integral to the relationships processes that TCU proposes to engage in with Aboriginal communities.

In the context of mainstream Aboriginal Education, we have been operating under the assumption that respect means bringing in an Aboriginal perspective, however this can be too limiting. Just like respect, perspective can also be co-opted. What is needed instead is Aboriginal consciousness, which can only be the contribution of an Aboriginal person.

TCU suggests such a contribution would be ideal: “the interchange of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ways of knowing the world enriches the education of all Ontarians” (2011; 15). What we have principally struggled with thus far is exactly how to achieve that interchange. The PSE Framework does not provide a solution; TCU notes that the PSE Framework is a building block, a foundational document, acknowledging the need for further relationship and consultation. It is those relationships that will animate TCU’s vision, that will build structures of awareness and recognition for all learners, however at some point those tools must be handed over to Aboriginal people and communities. TCU has attempted this with the formation of Aboriginal Education Councils/Circles (AEC), that are required at each PSE institution in order to observe, direct and approve Aboriginal Education policy, procedure and expenditures. There are seats on AECs for external community members, however these councils are still internal bodies that are accountable to the PSE institution.

The PSE Framework is relevant to the topics discussed in this dissertation, as teacher education programs are the most appropriate spaces for the education system to enact an Aboriginal Education approach for the majority non-Aboriginal people who enroll in and graduate to become educators in this

province and beyond. If EDU and TCU's Policy Frameworks were to achieve their visions, it would operate as a cyclical process of bringing informed teachers into schools to create informed learners in spaces that are safe for Aboriginal learners and informed by Aboriginal perspectives and consciousnesses. The change would be completed in one generation. However, as currently implemented, Ontario's Aboriginal Education lacks the consultation and coordination with Aboriginal people that is critical to not only uncover the social and systemic issues that precipitate disparate student achievement, but also to provide invaluable opportunities for intercultural engagement.

f. Continuing the Journey: Preliminary Report on the Implementation of the Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework (2012)

In *Continuing the Journey*, EDU reflects on five years of the FNMI Framework, presenting their preliminary report “as a tool for dialogue” (2012; 1) and articulating a continued commitment to “achieving excellence in education for all students” (2012; 1). They also note that since 2009, relationships between themselves and FNMI learners, families, organizations and communities have strengthened, and that “understanding and awareness about First Nation, Métis, and Inuit people, histories and perspectives have increased throughout the provincial education system” (EDU, 2012; 2). EDU claims to have achieved this through the creation of ‘new classroom resources’ and professional development opportunities, where teachers are “better equipped to integrate Aboriginal perspectives into the classroom” (EDU, 2012; 2). One of the report's performance measures was the “integration of educational opportunities to significantly improve the knowledge of all students and educators in Ontario about the rich cultures and histories of First Nation, Métis and Inuit peoples” (EDU, 2012; 7). While there are no advanced statistics available for those that did enroll, *Continuing the Journey* relates that enrolment has increased in Native language courses: 5,943 in 2010-11 compared to 4,522 in 2005-06 as well as Native studies courses: 10,598 in 2010-11 compared to 1,016 in 2005-06 (EDU, 2012; 2). Due to its specific, and admittedly challenging nature, it is understandable that fewer people would be drawn to

Indigenous language courses, however even the 10,598 learners in Native studies would account for only half of the 23,000 Aboriginal students who self-identified as of 2011 (EDU, 2012; 2), not to mention any non-Aboriginal learners.

In regards to teacher training, EDU suggests that the most critical professional development opportunities provided were training on the *Aboriginal Perspectives: A Teacher's Toolkit and User's Guide* (350 teachers in 2011-12) and the three Circle of Light Conferences that have collectively included more than 2,000 participants (EDU, 2012). Other than these preceding statistics and quotations, *Continuing the Journey* is largely devoid of any mention of non-Aboriginal students or their learning outcomes, especially any mention of the myriad causes of the academic, social, and standard of living gaps that exist between Aboriginal people and their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

g. A Solid Foundation: Second Progress Report on Implementation of the Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework (2013)

After considering the FNMI Framework, and the preliminary and progress reports, it appears as though EDU has not actually built *A Solid Foundation*. Six years of implementation should have produced more than a solid foundation; in actuality, a solid foundation may be the key thing that EDU is missing.

While the six years since the launch of the Aboriginal Education Strategy (the Strategy) and the Framework have seen many accomplishments, the ministry acknowledges that there is much more work to be done in the next phase of implementation (EDU, 2013a; 4).

One of the key areas of focus during that six year period, from 2007-2013, was Board Capacity Building which constituted the “continuing development of curriculum resources on Aboriginal perspectives and related training; supporting educators’ and school leaders’ professional development” (EDU, 2013a; 4). Additionally, one of the FNMI Framework’s guiding principles is Inclusiveness, Cooperation and Shared Responsibility, which is characterized by

cooperation among governments, ministries, educational institutions (including the Ontario College of Teachers and faculties of education), and First Nation, Métis and Inuit families, communities, and organizations is essential for the implementation of education programs and services designed to meet the specific needs of First Nation, Métis and Inuit students, regardless of where they live (EDU, 2013a; 5).

This collaboration and focus on shared responsibility is critical in preparing teachers to practice Aboriginal Education, however that cooperative approach must also be directed towards providing Teacher Candidates with a *solid foundation* of their own from which to operate – something that cannot be achieved simply through a single conference or elective course on Aboriginal issues in education.

EDU provides that their goals were indeed met during Phase II of the implementation of the FNMI Framework (2009-2012), which focused on teacher training. “Through additional supports, including classroom resources and professional development opportunities, teachers are also better equipped to embed Aboriginal perspectives into the classroom” (EDU, 2013a; 6). However, as we saw earlier, having the equipment is one thing, but knowing how to use it is altogether another issue – that this Progress Report and the FNMI Framework do not adequately address. Following that analogy, teachers need to be trained to identify what the appropriate tool is for the job – when to invite Elders into the classroom, or to take the students out of the classroom.

In the last three years, many teachers and non-teaching staff across the province have participated in a wide range of professional development activities focused specifically on First Nation, Métis and Inuit students, and on increasing knowledge of Aboriginal histories, cultures and perspectives for Aboriginal students and all students. In addition, various new resources have been developed to support the same goal (EDU, 2013a; 37).

The Progress Report lists some examples of schools exploring external relationships and experiences to supplement their internal Aboriginal Education content and resources.

The Conseil scolaire catholique Franco-Nord appointed a francophone Métis Elder – a member of the Métis Nation of Ontario – as a consultant for Aboriginal education in the board’s elementary schools. Workshops delivered by the Elder have enabled students and teaching staff to discover Métis cultural heritage and have provided new direction for the integration of Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum. The workshops have addressed the spirituality, customs and traditions of particular Aboriginal communities in Canada (EDU, 2013a; 38).

This approach is ideal for schools and school boards, having a recognized Elder placed in a position of authority on Aboriginal Education, whose purpose is to build and maintain relationships, enhance educational content, and promote intercultural understanding in the school system. Similarly, school boards locating and hiring Aboriginal Education Leads (at 64 school boards as of 2012) will provide greater accountability to the needs of Aboriginal students, but also provide teachers and administrators with a channel through which relationships with external community members can be sought and built.

“Our Aboriginal Education Lead has been essential in providing access to resources (e.g., books, films, music, websites, Teacher’s Toolkit), teaching strategies (e.g., talking circles), and authentic voices from the local Aboriginal community” – Durham District School Board (2013) survey respondent (EDU, 2013a; 40).

Despite it only being a small aspect of the FNMI Framework, the learning needs of non-Aboriginal students and staff require constant attention. While it may not be direct or intentional, the knowledge-level and actions of non-Aboriginal students and the general public have a significant impact on Aboriginal students’ academic outcomes. The Progress Report does address the notion that more non-Aboriginal learners are engaging in Aboriginal Education, and that there is an increase in comprehension concerning Aboriginal content in schools.

A majority of First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities and organizations that responded to the 2013 Progress Report survey agreed that there has been an increase in understanding of First Nation, Métis and Inuit cultures among students in local schools and boards (EDU, 2013a; 41).

While this is promising, it is extremely difficult to quantify something such as this. EDU shares with us that there were a *majority* of respondents who *agree* that an *increase* has occurred. It is worth noting that this is the only mention of such increases in understanding throughout the entirety of the Progress Report’s 52 pages. The education of non-Aboriginal students relates to only one of ten Performance Measures from the FNMI Framework – this issue is not as noteworthy – however it

certainly is an issue that deserves more critical thought, and demonstrates that students require still more exposure.

At the École secondaire publique De La Salle, in the Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario, students participated in a project lead by Christian Pilon, a Franco-Ontarian Métis voyageur, that enabled them to experience the stages of building a birch bark canoe using the same methods and resources as their ancestors did. On June 4, 2013, students and staff members launched the canoe on the Ottawa River during the Aventure Champlain à l'Île Petrie event. Christian Pilon spoke in tribute to his ancestors: The canoe ... symbolizes living in harmony with nature... (EDU, 2013a; 43).

h. Auditor General of Ontario Report – Education of Aboriginal Students (2012)

After evaluating the Learning Ministries' Aboriginal Education policy documents, it is clear that their various principles, strategies and methods of integrating and infusing Aboriginal perspectives into a Eurocentric education system largely fell short. To address this we have an objective, external commentary from the Auditor General of Ontario. For instance, at the beginning of their section on Aboriginal Education the Auditor General acknowledges that many Aboriginal students are in fact extremely disadvantaged: “research indicates that many Aboriginal students are faced with significant challenges that impact that achievement levels in school, such as high rates of poverty, substandard housing and poor nutrition” (Auditor General, 2012; 130). Despite not including this information in their policies, EDU and TCU must know about these issues. They likely also know that poverty, housing and food security – not to mention racism and systemic oppression – have a significant effect on those learning outcomes that they hope to rectify. Regardless of who publishes this information, if these issues are not addressed and their root causes acknowledged, they will persist.

In regard to the cost of Aboriginal Education, the Auditor reports that since 2006, EDU has committed \$170 M towards reducing the achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners, with the added hope to “increase awareness of Aboriginal cultures for all students” by 2016 (Auditor General; 129). “The Ministry wanted all students to have an appreciation of Aboriginal cultures” however “five years after the release of the Framework, the Ministry has not quantified any of

the 10 performance indicators so that progress could be objectively measured, nor has it required that the school boards individually evaluate and report on these performance measures” (Auditor General; 131). \$170 M is a great deal of money to be disbursed with no real metrics of accountability or measurability. Regarding self-ID, the hallmark policy process and backbone for EDU to apply the FNMI Framework, the Auditor General states that less than half of the estimated Aboriginal student population in Ontario has self-identified (Auditor General; 131). As of May 2012, even though 68 of 72 boards had self-ID policies, only 23,000 of an estimated 52,400 Aboriginal students had self-identified (Auditor General; 136). This is a critical issue, but unsurprising. The way in which self-ID policies are developed, explained and offered to Aboriginal learners and their families is extremely important – honesty and transparency are integral components of any policy or procedure directed towards intercultural understanding.

The Auditor General also addresses the expenditures for Native studies and languages programming in the province: from 2006/07 to 2011/12, of \$170 M, \$38 M was expended on Native studies and \$30.8 M for Native languages programming. Without year-to-year enrolment statistics between 2005-06 and 2010-11 it is difficult to know who exactly was enrolling in which courses, however we do know that fewer than 6,000 students enrolled in Native languages courses in any given year during that span. Such a low enrolment rate might not necessitate a \$30.8 M investment, particularly compared to Native studies, who has demonstrated roughly 1.5 times the number of students enrolled. Conversely, if less than 20,000 students are taking one or the other course (which is not to assume that someone would take both at once), there was only \$102 M going towards the rest of the Ontario student population over the course of five years. \$20 M/yr for the remainder of Aboriginal Education seems a meager amount compared to the \$60 M/yr that EDU receives through the 166 federal-provincial tuition transfer agreements with First Nations for the roughly 5,700 students who live on reserves but attend provincial schools (Auditor General; 144). The Auditor General does not explicitly

address where these funds are directed or expended, however it is critical to acknowledge that there is a significant amount of money being transferred from the federal to provincial governments for the benefit of Aboriginal learners and comparably very little for the learning needs of non-Aboriginal students. In the ‘Overall Ministry Response’, EDU’s opportunity to reflect on the findings of the Auditor General, there is no mention of non-Aboriginal learners or their learning outcomes.

Chapter Three – THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF TEACHER EDUCATION IN ONTARIO

There has never been a more fertile time to implement equity-based and respectful Aboriginal Education policies and practices in Ontario than right now, and no better place than teacher education. The government of Ontario has determined that Bachelor of Education (BEd) programs should be expanded from one to two years in order to line up with other provincial jurisdictions, whose BEd programs have consistently been two years. This is not the case in Prince Edward Island (PEI), where their two-year program is being reduced to one year in order to address the opposite issue of Ontario, not enough teachers are enrolling and graduating. However, like Ontario, they hope that their renewed approach to the BEd program will include “expanded student experience” with a focus on preparing for diverse classroom environments (Ross, 2013).

Central to the discussion of teacher education, particularly mandating the acquisition of Aboriginal Education experience and competencies for Teacher Candidates, is the Ontario College of Teachers:

In 1997, the Ontario College of Teachers was established to regulate and govern the teaching profession, including its certification and standards. The college sets teacher education requirements by regulation under the Ontario College of Teachers Act. It has accredited more than 50 full- and part-time teacher education programs in 18 university faculties of education in the province (EDU, 2013b).

Ontario Faculties and Schools of Education currently graduate approximately 9,000 BEd students each year, so with enrolment processes remaining static, the yearly graduation rate will essentially be cut in half (Alphonso, Morrow and Bradshaw, 2013). “Students will have four semesters of coursework, which will include a minimum of 80 days of practicum work in a classroom” (EDU, 2013b). This simple change will have a tremendous impact on pre-service teachers finding employment, as there is a “growing glut of would-be teachers who cannot find work in their field – not only in Ontario, but in several other regions of the country” (Alphonso et al, 2013). EDU also relates that the “curriculum for teacher education will also be enhanced and updated to provide new teachers with additional expertise in

tailoring teaching methods to diverse student needs and working with students who have mental health and addictions issues” (EDU, 2013c).

Set to take effect in 2015, provincial Aboriginal Affairs Minister David Zimmer suggests that the changes to BEd training will mean “Aboriginal perspectives and knowledge in classrooms will be strengthened” (Zimmer, 2013). However, there has yet to be any public indication from EDU or TCU concerning ways in which the new two-year BEd will incorporate more Aboriginal knowledge or perspectives. It is true that this new format, and more time in classrooms will allow Teacher Candidates to “acquire skills that are important in addressing the needs of our kids” (Alphonso et al, 2013), however where is the information concerning Aboriginal Education that Minister Zimmer refers to?

Internal and inter-Ministerial dialogue on this topic has likely occurred, if for no other reason than there are scores of Aboriginal communities and organizations consistently advocating for and putting pressure on the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs (MAA), EDU and TCU to enhance Aboriginal Education across all sectors. It does not appear that enhanced Aboriginal Education components are on the landscape however, as EDU states that funding for the BEd program will also be reduced.

Currently, teacher education has high per-student funding compared to other programs, such as social work and law. To bring it more in line with other programs, government funding for the program will be reduced.

The government recognizes that the funding change will affect each institution differently. To help manage the implementation, the government will work with individual institutions to finalize enrolment limits and provide one-time funding where needed (EDU, 2013b).

This is common practice; a measured and meditated approach is the hallmark of government, for they must take into account the needs and perspectives of all people in their constituency, evaluate what social and financial cost that any changes would incur, and make policy decisions based on identifiable issues, their severity and the identified need of target populations. In the case of Aboriginal Education, however, the general public will not place a great deal of pressure on government for they know very little at all about Aboriginal people (Dion, 2009; 9). Additionally, Aboriginal Education cannot be tied directly to jobs and labour market outcomes, unlike other subject areas, that is not its purpose. It is clear,

however, that more Canadians need to know more about Aboriginal people. With the government-led differentiation process taking place at postsecondary institutions, and the streaming processes that occur in secondary schools, it is critical that we do not lose focus on why Aboriginal Education matters, and stay committed to enhancing our approach. While there is a bureaucratic hierarchy within the government that needs to be recognized and navigated, public education also provides its own set of unique and troublesome challenges. Depending on one's age, what is the average Ontarian's interaction with Aboriginality – Our families? School curriculum? News media?

If the two-year Ontario BEd program does not acknowledge or incorporate Aboriginal people, perspectives, knowledges, cultures and histories in concrete and explicit ways, it would be a great loss and missed opportunity for not only Teacher Candidates but also a generation of learners in Ontario schools who come into contact with those educators. Teachers are still the primary conduit of knowledge transfer and experience for children and youth from approximately age 5-17. That is a significant aspect of a person's young life, a space of time where one's knowledge and experience with Aboriginality can be solidified.

Given the complexities of Aboriginal Education and postsecondary education in general, there is a great deal at stake in both informing and keeping Ontarians uninformed. Realistically however, it is difficult to surmise a justifiable reason why ignorance pervades concerning Aboriginal people in this country. As Sunera Thobani suggested earlier, perhaps our reality is just too 'disquieting and difficult to resolve' – we have an enormous challenge ahead of us and we likely do not know where or how to start. The logic of needing to perpetuate ignorance lest we lose something – socially, materially, financially – is a great myth of our time however; nobody loses by learning more, nothing is sacrificed if we come closer together.

The Accord on Indigenous Education

The Association of Canadian Deans of Education (ACDE) has addressed many of the challenges that I have advanced in this dissertation through the *Accord on Indigenous Education* (2010). They note that “establishing mechanisms and priorities for increased Indigenous educational engagement, establishing partnerships with Indigenous organizations and communities, and using educational frameworks based on Indigenous knowledge are trends that have important implications for the Association of Canadian Deans of Education” (2010; 1).

The Accord also articulates that Faculties and Schools of Education are committed to moving beyond the status quo that has characterized much of our approach to Aboriginal Education. “The time is right for a concerted and cooperative effort that creates transformational education by rejecting the ‘status quo’, moving beyond ‘closing the gap’ discourse, and contributing to the well-being of Indigenous peoples and their communities” (ACDE, 2010; 2). One of the ways in which ACDE aims to achieve this outcome is through bringing more Indigenous knowledges and perspectives into the academy, however that approach should also be problematized. “A major concern with teacher education and graduate education is that Indigenous education and Indigenous knowledge systems are marginalized and have limited application to students in general. ACDE believes it can enhance the profile and benefits of Indigenous education within its member institutions and to the public at large” (2010; 4). Signing the Accord has also cultivated a responsibility for signatories to uphold the spirit and values of the agreement:

All institutions signing the Accord on Indigenous Education are expected to aspire to its vision, principles, and goals in their education programs and research initiatives. Signatories will use this Accord to guide program review and transformation, working collaboratively to prioritize the educational purposes and values of Indigenous communities and people (ACDE, 2010; 4).

The Vision of the Accord is that “Indigenous identities, cultures, languages, values, ways of knowing, and knowledge systems will flourish in all Canadian learning settings” (ACDE, 2010; 4),

which the objectives of this dissertation wholly complements. However, I believe that Indigenous identities, cultures and languages will only flourish in educational settings when they are lived and expressed by Indigenous people themselves. The goals of the Accord are far more expansive than what I have space and can address here however. The authors of the Accord address the entirety of the Aboriginal Education process, from the perspective of Indigenous learners and their needs, however their last two goals are more closely aligned with my research and the ways in which non-Aboriginal people are implicated in Aboriginal Education systems and practice.

- 1) Respectful and Welcoming Learning Environments;
- 2) Respectful and Inclusive Curricula;
- 3) Culturally Responsive Pedagogy;
- 4) Mechanisms for Valuing and Promoting Indigeneity in Education;
- 5) Culturally Responsive Assessment;
- 6) Affirming and Revitalizing Indigenous Languages;
- 7) Indigenous Education Leadership;
- 8) Non-Indigenous Learners and Indigeneity; and
- 9) Culturally Respectful Indigenous Research.

Under goal #8, the ACDE signatories have committed to support Teacher Candidates' commitment to the political and politicized aspects of Indigenous education, such that they can move beyond simply awareness towards action within their own spheres of influence as well as "providing opportunities within all teacher education programs for candidates to have authentic experiences in a variety of Indigenous learning settings" (ACDE, 2010; 7).

Aligned with many of the aspects of this dissertation, the Accord also commits to have non-Aboriginal "students, teacher candidates, and graduate students to explore and question their own sense of power and privilege (or lack thereof) within Canadian society as compared with others in that society" (ACDE, 2010; 7). This objective is also reflected in goal #9 of the Accord, in relation to research, where the Deans have committed to "create and mobilize research knowledge, including Indigenous epistemologies, in order to transform Aboriginal education, teacher education, continuing professional education, and graduate programs" (ACDE, 2010; 8). The foundation for this mobilization is based on

respectful relationships that produce partnerships with “Indigenous communities at all levels in ethically based and respectful research processes” (ACDE, 2010; 8). The recommendations that I have made regarding a new approach to Aboriginal Education clearly align with what the ACDE have proposed in their Accord on Indigenous Education. In a 2011 Progress Report, the ACDE described some of the ways in which the Accord has been implemented, and some of the challenges that it has faced.

Since the launch of the Accord, ACDE members have worked to advance its principles within their own institutions. There are many positive developments stemming from the Accord, focusing on research, hiring of faculty and staff, curricular initiatives in new and existing courses, new infrastructure, and scholarships for Aboriginal learners. In addition to working within their own institutions, ACDE has considered how it might advance the goals of the Accord more broadly (ACDE, 2011; 2).

In its review of Ontario’s progress with implementation of the Accord, it is noted that there are some institutions that have the established infrastructure and relationships with community, where others do not. Trent University in Peterborough offers an elective 75-hour alternative practicum for Teacher Candidates entitled “Learning from the Land and Indigenous People” (ACDE, 2011; 5) which closely resembles the type of land-based Immersive Cultural Experience that this dissertation envisions all Teacher Candidates taking part in. At the Faculty of Education, Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, all Teacher Candidates take a mandatory course on Aboriginal Education, as well as have Aboriginal content infused into other course offerings (ACDE, 2011; 11). With the vision, goals and outcomes of the Accord, there needs to be more space/spaces for experiential learning for non-Aboriginal Teacher Candidates. There is mention of students having ‘authentic experiences in a variety of Indigenous educational settings’ and the document speaks at length about bringing Indigenous knowledges into the academy, however it does not delve into many useful learning opportunities for students outside of the academy. Coursework is important, film screenings pique our critical minds, but sitting next to the fire, hearing drum songs and listening to Indigenous creation stories is something else entirely.

PART II – IMMERSIVE CULTURAL EXPERIENCE

Aboriginal Education is fundamentally about relationships, between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, but also between non-Aboriginal learners and the natural environment, with each other, and with themselves. Regardless of my definition of Aboriginal Education, it is clear that what we have been doing has not been working, and that “moving beyond critique is crucial because simply critiquing European dominance is by its nature another exercise in Eurocentrism” (Dumbrill and Green, 2008; 499). In response, what will yield the greatest amount of positive and sustainable change in the field of Aboriginal Education for teachers is non-standardized experiential learning from Aboriginal Elders and Traditional Teachers. While this dissertation is focused on critique, the Immersive Cultural Experience detailed herein was exclusively focused on action and relationship.

The type of experiential learning that I propose is both immersive and cultural, encompassing the teacher and providing them with holistic tactile and sensory engagement with Aboriginality from the only acceptable source – Aboriginal people themselves. This should not be a special performance, or a passing unit of study. Those approaches have not worked, and have not yielded a widespread, systemic impact on the Canadian public. The responsibility of teachers in making space for Aboriginal Education in their classrooms and schools is to light a spark in the youngest learner, and keep that fire burning throughout their time in the formal education system. In order to achieve this vision for every single learner in the province of Ontario, Aboriginal Education needs to first be conceived as learning *from*, rather than *about* Aboriginal people (Dion, 2009; 58 – emphasis added) for Teacher Candidates.

The current curriculum and its supplementary resources are not truly Aboriginal Education, they do not require engagement with Aboriginal people, and Aboriginal perspectives are largely kept on the periphery. We cannot hope that at their current state, individual schools and school boards will take on projects, programs or human resources that embody acceptable, appropriate and respectful Aboriginal Education principles. Native studies and Native languages programs, as they are currently offered, are

not the answer either. Ideally, Teacher Candidates require Immersive Cultural Experiences facilitated by venerated Aboriginal Elders and Traditional Teachers. We are operating from a deficit that will require a more involved investment in order to rectify. In making this investment, EDU and TCU need to take responsibility in cooperation with the Ontario College of Teachers, to mandate that any educator who is to receive their credentials in this province will be able to demonstrate that they have a legitimate comprehension of Aboriginality, not only for the benefit of Aboriginal learners, but all students.

Aboriginal Education is not an Additional Qualification that Teacher Candidates should be able to specialize in, usable only when the word Aboriginal, Native, Indian, Métis, Inuit or Eskimo is uttered in their classrooms. We tend to hide behind our qualifications, credentials and certificates as demonstrable proof that we understand a certain topic. However, we cannot always make discussions concerning Aboriginal Education in our classrooms neat and pretty; learning is a messy enterprise. Teachers do not always need to have the answers, but they do need to know where to look for them. An Immersive Cultural Experience is a direct way for Teacher Candidates to gather the competencies and confidence to address issues in Aboriginal Education and invite students to gain firsthand experiences for themselves.

Chapter Four – SUPPLEMENTING ONTARIO’S ABORIGINAL EDUCATION POLICY AND PROGRAMMING

The facts are important; I want to make that clear. What I propose is not an elimination of teaching the facts, or absolving teachers of their responsibility to know and teach about Aboriginal peoples, cultures and histories. Rather, what we need is a supplement – a way to boost those facts – to bring them off the page and into the minds and hearts of teachers. Ontario’s current approach should not be eliminated but rather built upon and improved, for “the Mayan practice of building one pyramidal structure by encasing a previous one provides an appropriate metaphor for the developmental building process of Indigenous education” (Cajete, 1994; 28). We also need to be realistic; any Aboriginal Education approaches will mostly involve non-Aboriginal teachers and learners, and will be located within the public education system. As such, a cooperative approach is essential.

This cooperative approach will not be without its challenges, but the inversion of learning *from* rather than *about* can be understood through the concept of Qallunology. Nunavik journalist Zebedee Nungak refers to such a perspective reversal in the Inuit context as Qallunology – “the study of white folks” – where he argues, “because only Europeans get to be Eskimologists, theoretically only Inuit should be allowed to be Qallunologists” (Rasmussen, 2001; 113). The utility and purpose of Qallunology is then “to get white folks to examine and change their destructive behavior” (Rasmussen; 113). Therefore, it is not necessarily that Aboriginal Elders or facilitators will be teaching non-Aboriginal teachers and learners about Aboriginal knowledges, cultures or spiritualities, but may in fact be teaching those non-Aboriginal people about themselves.

Education is a human experience – “essentially a communal social activity” (Cajete, 1994; 20) where younger and older people gather together to exchange ideas, feelings and experiences. I agree with Gregory Cajete when he says that we are missing the point in making Aboriginal Education just another part of the mainstream education system, it has the potential to transform the entire education system:

I wish to draw attention to a way of looking at and understanding a primal process of

education grounded in the basics of human nature. It is a way of education that is pregnant with potential, not only for the transformation of what is misnamed "Indian Education," but also for its profound applications toward transforming modern education (Cajete; 23).

Education itself is transformative, a cyclical process of learning-unlearning-relearning. Education is also a story, where “the Cree believe that a three-way symbiotic relationship unfolds between storyteller, story, and listener. Ultimately, if people nourish a story properly, it tells them useful things about life” (Cajete; 138). The story could be geography and mathematics, or cultivating medicines and calculating the passage of generations. Whatever it is, the story has to feel alive and it must feel relevant to the learner.

For Aboriginal Education, one of the most effective ways to keep and bring stories to life is through the use of language. “Language is the principle means by which culture is accumulated, shared and transmitted from generation to generation. The key to identity and retention of culture is one’s ancestral language” (Spielmann, 1998; 50). One does not need to know an Aboriginal language to appreciate it when it is spoken, or to understand the meaning that the speaker seeks to convey. Listening is and should be an active participatory process – we also do not necessarily need to speak to be engaged in an intercultural dialogue. Legal scholar Natalie Oman shares that:

the dialogical method must extend beyond dialogue itself to *participation* in other-cultural practices. Dialogue alone cannot be the sole means of communicating the standards of value of one culture to members of another, because the language of each cultural group limits the concepts that can be conveyed... what [philosopher Charles Taylor] describes as a ‘fusion of horizons’ occurs when we succeed (Regan, 2010; 188 – emphasis added).

Supplementing Ontario’s Aboriginal Education policy and practice entails providing what Anishinaabe scholar and Elder James Dumont calls “an all-around vision” in contrast to the “straight-ahead vision of modern thought” (Saul, 2008; 103). This all-around vision could be defined as holism, which involves values of respect, connectedness, and truth. How do we achieve a holism that is characterized by respect, connectedness and truth however? Relationships; only relationships can give us perspective, connect us, and keep us honest. Those are not exclusively human-to-human relationships

either. Ontario's approach to Aboriginal Education for Aboriginal learners has not quite succeeded, so perhaps we need to – for the time being at least – place our focus of Aboriginal Education on non-Aboriginal teachers.

Aboriginal Education for Non-Aboriginal Teachers

One of our strongest and most powerful capacities as human beings is our ability to create understanding (Armstrong, 2003; 282). This means teaching but also learning, though some of us need to relearn or unlearn how to learn, particularly as it relates to new cultures and ways of teaching.

Learning how to learn is a key element in every approach to education. Therefore, the cultivation of the human capacities listening, observing, experiencing with all one's senses, developing intuitive understanding, and respecting time-tested traditions of learning naturally formed the basis for skills used in every process of Indigenous learning and teaching (Cajete, 1994; 222).

Implementing Aboriginal Education for non-Aboriginal teachers requires not only relearning facts and stories about Aboriginal people, but relearning how to listen and learn (Archibald, 2008). This is an involved and intensive process that places the needs of the privileged learners “on par with (and occasionally above) those who are oppressed. This is not an easy embrace because it requires that the traditional primacy of the needs of the oppressed stand the possibility of being eclipsed by the learning needs of the privileged” (Curry-Stevens, 2007; 53). However, if we do not start to focus more strongly on educating non-Aboriginal educators, surrounding them with Aboriginal Traditional Teachers and cultural teachings, how do we expect to eliminate the multiple barriers and issues that are a direct result of non-Aboriginal ignorance? A similar approach to this method of Aboriginal Education was suggested in the context of achieving Québécois cultural distinctiveness. Gérard Bouchard and Charles Taylor, Commissioners tasked with analyzing cultural difference in regards to reasonable accommodation, had this to say: “the wisest and most effective method of dealing with cultural differences is not to hide them

but to show them” (Saul, 2008; 317). Show and tell should be a familiar exercise to teachers and students, although who does the showing and telling is of paramount importance here.

One of the greatest obstacles to overcome is having teachers recognize their burden of knowing and the imbalanced power dynamic that it creates, and not just concerning Aboriginal content. Teachers and students need to come closer together, a more inclusive Aboriginal Education approach can acknowledge that the “relative egalitarianism among staff and students can be empowering for students’ self-concept” (Battiste and Barman, 1995; 184). Additionally, Teacher Candidates need to feel valued in the Aboriginal Education process, even if – especially if – they cannot express confidence in their knowledge. In the context of Aboriginal Education, teachers and learners should be supported to take up agency and responsibility in the learning process. Educator and scholar Roger Spielmann explains the key cultural difference in this approach: “I was used to being *told how* to do things and I primarily learned via didactic means and reading. Most of what I learned in the community...I learned by being *shown*” (1998; 39 – emphasis original). If Aboriginal Education is really about social justice, perhaps the things *told* and *shown* should not really be things at all, but rather feelings and values.

We cannot expect that the mainstream education system, media or even our parents will teach us what it means to be in relationship with Aboriginality because those sources do not necessarily reflect an intercultural perspective. If Canada is indeed a nation of multiple identities, those identities need to be respected and responded to. For teachers, learning about Aboriginal Education and its relationship to social justice will involve a lot of deep thinking and perhaps hard or hurt feelings, but it also must involve hope, fun and joy (Bishop, 2001; 148). The work of becoming a good citizen (one of the mainstream education system’s most complex goals) should be joyful, but also critically based in self-reflexivity. Education scholar Beverly M. Gordon theorizes: “citizenship education then ideally becomes education for informed political awareness, and in the practice of critically analyzing reality, and not simply a process of rote indoctrination” (Pinar and Castenell, 1993; 27). Good, informed

citizens can then become leaders in their communities, but depending on how we were raised and what we believe, leadership can become a byproduct: “leadership in and of itself was never a goal of Indigenous education but rather a result of living in community and striving toward becoming complete” (Cajete, 1994; 175). Therefore, that is our fundamental challenge for Ontario’s future educators and learners – strive to become complete.

Knowing that what we teach and experience in educational institutions may conflict with what we learn from external sources, it is critical that we put our best effort forward for Teacher Candidates in the limited time that we are in contact with them. Our learning does not start or stop when the tutorial or lecture ends, quite the opposite – learning is a daily and lifelong process. Ideally our personal and academic lives should not contrast, but rather be complimentary. In the context of Aboriginal Education,

the living place, the learner's extended family, the clan and tribe provided the context and source for teaching. In this way, every situation provided a potential opportunity for learning, and basic education was not separated from the natural, social, or spiritual aspects of everyday life. Living and learning were fully integrated (Cajete, 1994; 33).

While one might think that achieving completeness is easier as an individual, we are never divorced from our social and natural contexts or relationships. Communal or community based learning is less a requirement than a reality of Aboriginal Education, where “the value of wholeness speaks to the totality of creation, the group as opposed to the individual, the forest as opposed to the individual trees” (Little Bear, 2000; 79). In this way, we can visualize the classroom as a forest – an ecosystem that is comprised of diverse trees (learners) but also plants, insects and animals (ideas, values, resources) that are sustained through the growth of the trees or collective forest. In the project that I will be detailing later, the classroom actually was a forest, however the Teacher Candidates’ perspectives shifted where the forest became not just an embodied space but also a place to learn in and from.

As mentioned, Gregory Cajete’s text on Indigenous Education is of such value to this work and any discussion of Aboriginal Education that I am obliged to include a longer passage from his writing

here. I would ask the reader to evaluate this statement sentence by sentence, and also within the greater context of how we approach and achieve learning in our personal and professional lives.

In summary, a primary orientation of Indigenous education is that each person is their own teacher and that learning is connected to each individual's life process. Meaning is looked for in everything, especially in the workings of the natural world. All things comprising Nature are teachers of mankind; what is required is a cultivated and practiced openness to the lessons that the world has to teach. Ritual, mythology, and the art of storytelling combined with the cultivation of relationship to one's inner self, family, community, and natural environment are utilized to help individuals realize their potential for learning and living a complete life. Individuals are enabled to reach completeness by learning how to trust their natural instincts, to listen, to look, to create, to reflect and see things deeply, to understand and apply their intuitive intelligence, and to recognize and honor the teacher of spirit within themselves and the natural world. This is the educational legacy of Indigenous people (Cajete, 1994; 227).

Investing in Experiential, Land-Based Education

If we are to achieve systemic change regarding Aboriginal Education, the greatest challenge will be reconciling each of Cajete's principles with the mainstream education system. One of the most effective and efficient modalities to achieve many of the above-noted values is the facilitation of land-based experiential programming. Being on the land allows students to encounter, experience, and understand Aboriginal Education philosophy and practice differently. Taking learners out of their educational context and putting them in direct contact with nature and the elements provides an environment where learners can draw connections, conclusions and hopefully recognize and remember the lessons that they learned. However, what does it mean to be 'on the land'? The land could be a patch of grass out back of the school, or it could be the deep woods of Northern Ontario, next to a bubbling brook in a small town or amongst the trees and shrubs of a planned park in the middle of Toronto.

We can also recognize the land and aspects of nature in grasses and weeds growing up through the cracks in the sidewalk; the sidewalk itself is comprised of minerals and particles from the natural environment. This is the inherent tension that we experience living in cities and urban environments. Chris Corrigan, a non-Indigenous scholar, shares a story about Indigenous perspectives on land and

cities: “When he looked at trees he saw wonderful living things connected to the earth. And when he looked at skyscrapers, he also saw wonderful living things connected to the earth” (1991; 376).

The value of land-based learning is to make a direct connection to nature, to feel the softness of the earth under your feet, the wind brushing against your skin, or simply to feel the cold. The natural environment also teaches us a number of primary lessons about ourselves. We see with the passage of time and seasons that change is necessary and inevitable. We see with the rain and plants that growth is a product of interdependence and cooperation. We see how animals behave and survive in their home environments, and we are fascinated by all of the intricacies of their lives. “The Indigenous method of learning is really one of transformation, and it is experiential, observational and practical” (Alfred in Regan, 2010; 52). Land-based learning is meant to both demonstrate transformation but also be transformative.

The immersion that this type of cultural programming proposes does not exclusively involve the physical environment either, but rather provides an immersion of thought, feeling and perspective. Having Teacher Candidates learn on the land gives the Elders or facilitators an opportunity to take them out of their classrooms, but also into their selves. “A significant part of experiential education that occurs in community involves learning about one's inner self” (Cajete, 1994; 178). Whether it is becoming complete, transforming or learning about one's inner self, educators need to recognize that committing to Aboriginal Education is a complex and always evolving process. This is not to say that non-Aboriginal teachers must integrate these values and principles into their personal lives, but rather to acknowledge the enormity and importance of what it means to teach with and for, instead of about Aboriginal peoples.

As a whole, traditional Tribal education revolved around experiential learning (learning by doing or seeing), storytelling (learning by listening and imagining), ritual/ceremony (learning through initiation), dreaming (learning through unconscious imagery), tutoring (learning through apprenticeship), and artistic creation (learning through creative synthesis). Through these methods the integration of inner and outer realities of learners and teachers was fully honored, and the complementary educational processes of both realities were fully engaged (Cajete; 34).

Experience is a holistic process of making meaning of not only what one sees and feels but also how that experience fits within their lives and social contexts.

Experience from an individual perspective is a complex interaction between body, sensory input, and neurological processing—a relationship with the world as humans encounter, interpret, and shape messages. Experience is a multilayered phenomenon; individuals make sense of experience through cultural, cognitive, subconscious, and personal interpretive layers, by negotiating norms and dominant values, attending to immediate human relationships, and through an individual’s context within larger societal and historical positioning. Furthermore, these webs are interconnected with larger networks of culture, history, political economy, and power (Fox, 2008; 41).

Either way, experience is about change, where “the premise of experiential learning is that individuals create knowledge through the transformation of their lived experiences into existing cognitive frameworks, thus causing individuals to change the way they think and behave” (Seed, 2008; 210). Stó:lō scholar Q’um Q’um Xiiem (Jo-ann Archibald), a leader and visionary in the field of environmental learning, says very simply that we must recognize the ‘importance of learning stories about the land, while being on the land’ (2008; 73). The primacy of land is both in its role as a site of learning but also as a teacher – “land is the most sacred thing in the Indian way of seeing. It’s where life comes from and all the teachings and philosophy...lose that connection you lose yourself...you lose that feeling of being part of something bigger than everything” (Harder, 2005; 340). It is the reciprocal process of give and take that we have with the land that provides us opportunities for learning. “Knowledge is often sought through guidance where the classroom might be the bush, a fast, or a sweat lodge, and the teachers include the medicines, the animals, and the rocks that are respected as people” (Harder; 335). If the land is going to be a teacher and/or site of learning, we absolutely require guidance, in the form of an Aboriginal facilitator who is competent in both reading and relating to the land.

Fyre Jean Graveline (2002; 17), noted Métis Traditionalist and scholar shares that

true knowledge is gained through reflection on our experiences
in the classroom
in the world
on the land.

She also notes (2002; 14) that

Through Traditional teachings and ceremonies
we learn and teach about building relationships
within diverse Communities.
Lessons can be learned
from past History
present struggles
future Visions
of Elders
those actively involved in
Traditional Ceremonial practices.

Ceremony and learning on the land make Aboriginal Education personal. You cannot remain impassive and impartial when you are chopping wood as hail pelts you from what seems like all directions. There is a vibrancy in being outdoors, a relevance that cannot be replicated: “it is in relationship – in the interaction of the inner person with the outer world – that experience occurs and it is in and through experience that people learn” (Jarvis, 2005; 1). Being on the land is also about finding your way, navigating a physical but also psychological space where one might feel or actually be lost. However, “part of finding is getting lost, and when you are lost you start to open up and listen” (Tafoya, 1995; 11). The beauty of navigating unknown territory is that if you visit often enough, it becomes known, and if you travel this path frequently, the land becomes a part of you. There is a tremendous amount of power in learning from someone who comes from this place, whose stories are rooted here, and whose life is embedded in the very ground.

My Trout Lake takes care of me, is very gentle with me, and teaches me everything I need to know; in turn, I take care of my Trout Lake to the best of my abilities, and I remain open to learning and growing. Every rock and every tree and every blade of grass on my Trout Lake tells me the stories of those who long ago walked these trails. It is said that the clear cold waters of my Trout Lake carry the memories of my grandmothers and grandfathers (Haig-Brown and Dannemann, 2002; 456).

Knowing What We Don't Know – The Role of Spirituality in Aboriginal Education

When we talk about being on the land, something different can happen to us. We might feel something transcendent, or acknowledge a commonality with the minerals, plants or animals that we

encounter – much like the commonality we feel with other people. Making those connections, and our engagement with nature could actually be conceived of as a spiritual process. Due to the desire for secularism in schools, religion and spirituality have been reduced and remanded to an inconsequential status in relation to the learning needs of students. There is a great deal of utility in bringing a focus to spirituality in education, for “to ignore the spiritual side of students' and faculty's lives is to encourage a kind of fragmentation and a lack of authenticity, where students and faculty act as if they are not spiritual beings, or as if their spiritual side is irrelevant to their vocation or work” (Bobilya, Akey, and Mitchell Jr., 2011; 303).

Spirituality, as a term and concept, can encompass every possible belief system while retaining space for those diverse and divergent beliefs and their expressions to be accepted. “Because spirituality is not attached to any particular religion, it can be described in nonreligious terms” (Bobilya et al; 303). Hawai’ian scholar and educator Manulani Aluli Meyer describes the complex but essential notion of spirituality:

Spirituality is not about religion, of course. It is the fundamental sense of how we relate to the world, how we see the world, how it relates back to us. It is a spiritual context. So one of the ideas that we get out of this is the notion of ‘ike—‘ike is our word “to see,” which is a fascinating metaphor. We have empiricism in our Hawaiian language: ‘ike for seeing, or nana, ‘to look,’ but ‘ike also means ‘to know.’ ‘Ike means ‘to know’ and ‘to see,’ but it’s also information and energy that are given from your ‘aumakua or from any other deity or life force. ‘Aumakua are natural representations of personal family that have gone before you. Also, another synonym for ‘aumakua is kumupa’a. This is an old word. It is fascinating that the idea of kumupa’a also means “a foundation of knowledge.” Kumu is ‘a foundation,’ pa’a is ‘to make firm.’ So kumupa’a is the same word for the ancestor deities as it is for a foundational knowledge pool. This thought comforts and educates me (Meyer, 2001; 193).

To acknowledge spirituality in the education system is to acknowledge that it is an integral aspect of many peoples’ lives. Learning and talking about spirituality is not prescriptive, one does not have to be indoctrinated, but rather notions of spirituality can open up a space for dialogue and new ways of learning. “This way of thinking is based on the physical senses and developing the ability to hear, observe, perceive, and emotionally feel the spirit moving in all its manifestations in the world around us.

For traditional Indigenous people around the world, Spirit is real. It is physically expressed in everything that exists in the world” (Cajete, 1994; 48). Therefore, at the very least, in applying an Aboriginal Education practice and philosophy, spirit and spirituality become not just accepted and acknowledged but fundamentally important.

Likely the greatest challenge that the formal education system perceives with the inclusion of spirituality into education is its lack of definability, the complete absence of standardization and objectivity. Using that metric however, people also cannot be easily defined, controlled and observed dispassionately. “We are what we know. We are, however, also what we don’t know” (Pinar and Castenell, 1993; 4). Therefore, when we talk about spirituality in education, it is as much about searching for something that we do not or cannot know. Spirituality is in many respects, to borrow from Anishinaabe cosmology, a great mystery. This may seem antithetical to education, but it has the potential to be liberating. “Many people are uncomfortable with spirituality in any aspect of modern education because of the instances of misunderstanding and misapplication of spirituality in modern society. As with everything in human affairs, it becomes a matter of perspective and consciousness” (Cajete, 1994; 73). Spirituality in education can be everything that people perceive to be wrong with religion and faith, or it can be about everything that is right that spiritual people accept and attest to.

One practical application of spirituality in education could be achieved through making an addition to Howard Gardner’s multiple intelligences theory. Ontario’s approach to Aboriginal Education already promotes differentiated teaching and learning styles for Aboriginal learners, including spirituality as an additional intelligence or learning need/style would not be inappropriate. Gardner did not include spiritual intelligence in his multiple intelligences, though Emmons (2000) suggests that the following five capacities necessitate its inclusion: 1) the capacity to transcend the physical and material; 2) the ability to experience heightened states of consciousness; 3) the ability to sanctify everyday experience; 4) the ability to utilize spiritual resources to solve problems; and 5) the capacity to be virtuous (Wickett,

2005; 160). As we will see later, the Teacher Candidates who participated in the ICE who claimed to be non-spiritual expressed and exhibited these capacities. Spirituality cannot be perceived as merely being a component of Aboriginal perspectives, instead recognized as something within us, but also the basis of the connective tissue between each of us and the world. “Human beings are, therefore, both being and becoming, and these are inextricably intertwined, since growth and development in the one affects the growth and development of the other” (Jarvis, 2005; 2). An emphasis on spirituality with Teacher Candidates enlivens Aboriginal Education, and produces a focus on personal development – who we are, and who we will be.

This is the meaningful nature of being an educator – fostering not only learning and comprehension, but also transformation and growth – for the student and teacher. It is therefore incumbent upon us to acknowledge the role of spirituality in teacher training, particularly as it relates to Aboriginal Education. Understanding notions of spirituality is but one of the competencies that we aspire our educators to not only acquire, but also to embody in their teaching practice with, for and about Aboriginal people.

Training Requirements for Teacher Candidates

Despite its seeming simplicity, the complexity of the Creator’s law makes it impossible for a human being to learn all of it in a lifetime. The best we can hope to achieve is a single drop in the river of understanding (Johnson, 2007; 27).

This quote indicates the simple truth about Aboriginal Education and demonstrates why Ontario’s approach has thus far attempted to rely on definite and knowable facts rather than indefinite and sometimes unknowable feelings. You cannot know everything, even in 50 lifetimes – but you can try. Similar to Harold Johnson’s thoughts above, I have been told that there are as many life teachings as there are stars in the sky. Following this theme, teachers require a ‘constellation of pedagogies’ to meet the needs of all learners (Lusted in Dion, 2009; 63). It is not adequate that Teacher Candidates only

remember a few dates, important historical figures, and information about Residential Schools and the Statement of Apology. There is more to teaching in Aboriginal Education, there is more at stake, and more consequences of not preparing youth to be critical and considerate of what they learn. We have to be very conscious of why Aboriginal Education is important, and why learning, feeling and doing more than what is currently required of teachers is necessary.

I do not propose that Teacher Candidates' learning in Aboriginal Education will be easy or without personal challenges and conflict, however we can draw inspiration from Paolo Freire's philosophy that "knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (1970; 72). Just like Teacher Candidates, students need to see the practical benefit of what they are learning (Wiggins and McTighe, 2005; 16). The way to achieve this is through offering Teacher Candidates and students a new way of learning, through experience and engagement with Aboriginal Education pedagogy and practice.

Each teacher and student involved in Indian education must relearn and practice contexting information in culturally sensitive and holistic ways. Making story the basis of teaching and learning provides one of the best ways to accomplish this contexting and enhancing of meaning in all areas of content. It is possible to teach all content from the basis of story. We can again allow teachers to truly become storytellers and storymakers, and allow students to become active listeners. Teaching is essentially a communicative art form based on the ancient Tribal craft of storying (Cajete, 1994; 139).

Before Teacher Candidates can explore their role as storytellers or storymakers, they first need to explore their own identities and how they situate themselves in the context of their historical roles and responsibilities in this place called Canada. The racial positioning of non-Aboriginal teachers does matter, even if no Aboriginal students are present (Schick and St.Denis, 2005; 298), not only to avoid appropriating Aboriginal knowledges, but also to frame – in the absence of Aboriginal people – how and why Aboriginal Education is meaningful to them.

A foundational training requirement of teachers in practicing Aboriginal Education is to recognize and not fall back on the Eurocentric teaching and evaluation methods that have been ingrained in them through their personal academic journeys and professional learning as teachers. It is the role of teachers to recognize this Eurocentricity, and assist their students in navigating it in order to learn more about themselves while asking: “how can students, steeped primarily in hegemonic Eurocentric consciousness, become aware of the nature of their cultural conditioning?” (Graveline, 1998; 90). We cannot expect any student to go through or experience something that their teacher had not yet considered or encountered – we cannot expect to transform learners’ conception of Aboriginal people if teachers do not also experience a shift in consciousness. Transformative learning “involves experiencing a deep structural shift in the basic premises of thoughts, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically alters our way of being in the world” (O’Sullivan, 2002; 11). We must pursue this shift in perspective, however just as one can shift towards an Indigenous perspective, we can revert to old ways of thinking and being (in Part III of this dissertation I will address the maintenance of change behaviour through Allyship).

Understanding is not a one-way, cognitive process. “If you want to understand, you must have respect and a willingness to listen and learn with your heart, which will lead to being involved” (Harder, 2005; 337). This is the type of learning that is required of Teacher Candidates, however the opportunity must be provided for them. There are a number of positive Aboriginal Education options and infusions available at Ontario universities, though there are just as many structural barriers at Faculties and Schools of Education that impede Teacher Candidates’ respectful and meaningful engagement with Aboriginal people and their cultures, knowledges and consciousnesses.

Chapter Five – TRAINING FOR TEACHER CANDIDATES – OISE

Having discussed the context and various components of an improved approach to Aboriginal Education – respect, relationship, reflexivity, experience, criticality, spirituality – it is time to see what this approach can look like in action.

Based on my past experiences supporting Immersive Cultural Experiences for non-Aboriginal university students, facilitated by Anishinaabe Elders Wendy and Mark Phillips, they agreed that a similar approach could be useful for Teacher Candidates at OISE. The experience took place on Wendy and Mark’s land over the course of two days and nights – being in a remote and rural environment, the land was optimal for complete immersion for the participants. I am extremely thankful that Wendy and Mark were willing to share their time and knowledge with the group, with no aspirations other than we use what we learned to be accountable and to maintain our connections to each other and all of creation.

One of the research goals of the ICE was to inform non-Aboriginal Teacher Candidates through experience and traditional land-based activities and ceremonies, where I hoped this engagement would promote understanding and ultimately social justice. The entirety of the ICE is owned, conceived of, controlled, and facilitated by Wendy and Mark – their traditional roles and knowledge as Anishinaabe are acknowledged as the singular valid source of authority for this experience. They dictated the content and process of the ICE for the Teacher Candidates and myself – their approach to teaching aligns with the notion that “unlike popular education, [their] form of pedagogy is not neutral. Rather, it is counterhegemonic in its goals and works within a framework of praxis, whereby assisting in transformation is linked with becoming an ally in struggles for justice” (Curry-Stevens, 2007; 34). Wendy and Mark unselfishly shared their land, knowledge and perspectives with us in order for us to know more, but with that authenticity comes a responsibility for us to be respectful and not appropriate what was shared.

This is one of the dangers and consequences of intercultural engagements like the ICE, however by acknowledging the Elders' authority as being foundational to the program, it instills an expectation of ethical conduct on not only myself as a researcher but also on the participants. "Central to the act of appropriation is the misrepresentation or partial representation of an idea or artifact without recognition of the traditional sources of knowledge or inspiration, often in combination with gaining prosperity, success or benefit from others' ideas" (Graveline, 1998; 236). No specific details or teachings that Wendy and Mark related to the group will be repeated or represented in this dissertation, for despite those teachings being the foundation of the ICE, it was the act of building relationships and sharing that need to be acknowledged, celebrated and replicated in other contexts in the name of Aboriginal Education.

Rationale

Creation – Lee Maracle

I know nothing
of great mysteries
know less of creation
I do know
that the farther backward
in time that I travel
the more grandmothers
and the farther forward
the more grandchildren
I am obligated to both.

(Graveline, 1998; 59)

Why do this research? As renowned Stó:lō author Lee Maracle eloquently shares with us, we have a responsibility to both the past and the future. In the context of Aboriginal Education, this requires telling the story of how we got to the place where we find ourselves, and how we might move forward together. My role as researcher is a tricky one, I operate under the conviction that I *know* nothing – all of my knowledge comes from someone or somewhere else. This is not an aversion to responsibility, but rather an admission of lack of ownership. Therefore, the best thing I can do is gather the most useful

information, from the most reputable and reliable sources, and organize it in order to achieve some of the goals that I set out in this dissertation. I am connected to the story in innumerable and immeasurable ways, but I am not the story. I am facilitating this research in order to open up a dialogue concerning Aboriginal Education not only for Aboriginal learners but also for non-Aboriginal people to discover our many responsibilities and relationships.

Whether we call it story or research, the inquiry relating to the Immersive Cultural Experience was proposed and carried out respecting the standards set out in the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres' (OFIFC) 'Utility, Self-Voicing, Access, Inter-Relationality (USAI) Research Framework' which recognizes "all manifestations of community life as both appropriate spheres of research and valid methods to address research questions" (2012; 15). This is to say that whatever context or content Wendy and Mark chose to present is considered to be both valid and authentic – and exactly what we are meant to learn, experience and know at those times we spent with them.

USAI research is envisioned as a culturally-appropriate, methodical and practical inquiry in the service of urban Aboriginal communities, conducted by those very communities so that they can nurture their capacity to self-actualize and realize only those futures that they themselves conceive.

We do hope, however, that it will also become a mechanism which will help shift the balance of authority, contributing to a systemic change in how Indigenous knowledge and praxis are positioned vis-à-vis other knowledge systems – culturally, intellectually, historically, and politically (OFIFC; 17).

Despite the ICE being facilitated only over the course of a weekend, it is my assertion that if one can be acculturated, they can be unacculturated (Graveline, 1998; 90), and then subsequently reacculturated. As mentioned throughout this dissertation, it is important who does the teaching and acculturating when it comes to Aboriginal Education. "How people learn about historical injustices is as important as learning truths about *what* happened" (Regan, 2010; 11 – emphasis original). Taking part in an ICE and getting direct counsel from Aboriginal Traditional Teachers cannot help but look and feel different than mainstream educational processes. Psychologist Gordon Allport proposed a theory that has

become known as the “contact hypothesis, which states that ‘actual face-to-face interaction between members of clearly distinguishable and defined groups’ in situations involving certain ‘optimal conditions’ will improve people’s attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors toward diverse others” (Seaman, Beightol, Shirllia, and Crawford, 2009; 211).

Leroy Little Bear might call this a common sense approach, because “that is why we engage in conversation, so I can share my experience with you and make you understand what I am feeling. When you respond, you are doing the same thing with me” (2000; 85). In the context of being immersed in nature, participating in ceremonies that have been reenacted since time immemorial – the transmission of knowledge becomes more meaningful – it becomes sacred. “When one views the world as a sacred place, a place that reflects a living process and way of being that goes beyond the human sense of experience, one deals with Nature in a very different way” (Cajete, 1994; 88). One of the goals of this project was to bring non-Aboriginal Teacher Candidates into a physical and emotional space that was unfamiliar and somewhat uncomfortable, thereby creating a new context for learning. I reflect on Paulette Regan’s thoughts when she shares that: “my own deepest learning has always come when I was in unfamiliar territory culturally, intellectually, and emotionally. It seems to me that this space of not knowing has power that may hold a key to decolonization for settlers” (2010; 18). That power of unknowing is precisely the crux of this research project and dissertation.

This document contains a philosophical orientation for non-Aboriginal people participating in Aboriginal Education that is based on not being required to know anything about Aboriginality. This research explores the interactions between those who did not know (non-Aboriginal Teacher Candidates) and those who do (Anishinaabe Elders). The Teacher Candidates are my research subjects, but having said that, Wendy and Mark are the conduits through which this research is animated – it would be meaningless without their participation. Without engaging them, requesting their guidance, and observing them facilitate the ICE, we would simply have been replicating mainstream Aboriginal

Education principles. It is my hope that the research I conducted, and my writing thus far has demonstrated what the OFIFC's USAI Research Framework suggests is the

fundamental recognition that Indigenous knowledge is not a singular entity that can be discovered by social scientists, translated and interpreted, critically analyzed, and summed up in scientific journals or academic dissertations. We recognize that Indigenous knowledge comes from all relations, it manifests itself in the voices and actions of people, it is generated when people get together, it arises simultaneously from the past, present and future, it lives in words, stories, movement, dance, feelings, concepts and ideas. It is participatory, historical, and political and 'this political form of participation affirms people's right and ability to have a say in decisions which affect them and which claim to generate knowledge about them. It asserts the importance of liberating the muted voices of those held down by class structures and neo-colonialism, by poverty, sexism, racism, and homophobia' (OFIFC, 2012; 4).

This is what Ontario's New Approach to Aboriginal Affairs ought to have said. All at once, 'Aboriginal solutions to Aboriginal concerns' seems shallow in comparison, but it is a starting point and provides the orientation of the research and alternative orientation to Aboriginal Education that this dissertation describes. The report of the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), and the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) will indicate that non-Aboriginal people just do not know enough about Aboriginal cultures, knowledges and histories. This is rationale enough for me to pursue a project such as the ICE. This is not a matter of White guilt, or my desire to right the wrongs of my antecedents and ancestors – these approaches have not found any legitimate traction in strengthening Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relationships in Canadian history. I am but a curator of the knowledge that has been shared and entrusted with me.

As Paulette Regan notes, we do indeed have a 'Settler problem'. So there is work to be done by Settler people, including both self-reckoning and cultivating the collective will for change. In regard to research, the USAI Research Framework recognizes the value of "forging alliances with informed and respectful parties who are willing to work for the advancement of urban Aboriginal communities" (OFIFC, 2012; 12). There is space for Settler Allies to pursue decolonization – to discover and counteract the ways in which we all experience and are implicated in colonization – but this work needs

to be informed and directed by Aboriginal people. As Leroy Little Bear reminds us, we talk to know how each other is feeling – but if we cannot commit to listening, truly hearing what is being said, any attempt at collaboration will be incomplete.

Objectives

One of the primary goals of the ICE was to have non-Aboriginal Teacher Candidates observe, hear, speak about and participate in Anishinaabe cultural practices, beliefs and ceremonies at the direction and discretion of Wendy and Mark and their ceremonial helpers. How one defines culture is both highly variable and contentious in the context of Aboriginal Education. Culture means something very different to Settlers, as does for various Indigenous people. Therefore, when a non-Aboriginal person encounters Aboriginal cultures or languages, one's frame of reference or definitions needs to be considered and temporarily set aside.

For Indigenous societies, these definitions of 'culture' and the term itself are foreign and imposed concepts, often conveniently used by others to authoritatively represent, label, compare and study Indigenous systems of knowledge and practice. Since the word 'culture' is now widely recognized as a term of convenience, we note its everyday use while referring to Indigenous ways of seeing, knowing, believing, and acting. We do, however, stress that in our work we are guided by the multigenerational knowledge and experiential insights to counteract the externality of the term 'culture'.

...balanced, complete and fulfilled reality of people's everyday's good living is what we strive for and what is also closest to what the term 'culture' may mean for Indigenous people: not an object, not an entity, but a felt sense of great peace within us. This very wisdom that we inherited from many generations who came before us and which tells us to practice who we are everyday of our life, which is simply described by us as 'everyday good living' (OFIFC, 2012; 6).

Understanding the meaning and power of the words we use is integral to pursuing ICE and Aboriginal Education. "Language is not just another thing we do as humans – it is *the* thing we do. It is a total environment; we live in language as a fish lives in water" (Bunge in Spielmann, 1998; 54 – emphasis original). If the only outcome of the participants' experience in the ICE was that they chose and reflected on the words they use more critically, it would have been successful. What is at stake here

is not just how we talk about and define culture, but also the ways we talk about Aboriginal people as objects of our experience and Canadian identity. The ICE provides an opportunity for non-Aboriginal Teacher Candidates to reflect on what they knew or believed to be true about Aboriginal people, and create new understandings based on engagement and relationship. Most importantly, the ICE provides Teacher Candidates with a localized and culturally distinct experience with Anishinaabe Elders that does not define, essentialize or reduce our facilitators' identities to the collective marker of 'Aboriginal'.

In practical terms, the ICE proposed to demonstrate to Teacher Candidates the need to adopt the following crucial themes in their Aboriginal Education teaching practice:

- a) the importance of partnerships within the community that can assist in the delivery of curriculum;
- b) the application of alternative forms of evaluation to track learning;
- c) the use of land-based learning to engage students beyond specific curricular objectives;
- d) an acknowledgement of teacher-centered mainstream education;
- e) an incorporation of Indigenous culture, language, and spirituality in all aspects of the educational context;
- f) issues of sustainability of the current Aboriginal Education approach within a traditional educational setting;
- g) and an example of an alternative learning and teaching structure (O'Connor, 2009; 417).

The approach of the ICE was to provide non-Aboriginal learners with an alternative learning opportunity, where they were encouraged to listen, experience and observe at their own pace and in ways that were meaningful to them. The greater objectives of the ICE were not necessarily preparing Teacher Candidates to be better teachers – however I believe that this did indeed occur – but simply to have them experience authentic Aboriginal Education. The nature of this experience was holistic and cyclical, where the participants were encouraged to explore the following:

- a) concrete experience — engaging with the world through direct experiences;
- b) reflective observation — engaging in serious consideration and meditation on the experience;
- c) abstract conceptualization — making connections and transitioning from the experience to creating a plan for future actions; and
- d) active experimentation—testing the plan by implementation (Seed, 2008; 211).

How we asked the participants to move through this process will be more fully articulated in the next section, on methodology, but the experience was structured to provide Teacher Candidates with the

space to do, think and evaluate how their experiences could be applied to their career aspirations as educators. Some of the goals of the ICE would be fulfilled if participants could recognize and reflect on Gregory Cajete's characteristics of Indigenous Education:

- a) Integration and interconnectedness are universal traits of its contexts and processes;
- b) It recognizes that each person and each culture contains the seeds that are essential to their well-being and positive development;
- c) It recognizes that learning requires letting go, growing, and re-integrating at successively higher levels of understanding;
- d) Its purpose is to teach away of life that sustains both the individual and the community;
- e) It honors each person's way of being, doing, and understanding;
- f) It recognizes that we learn by watching and doing, reflecting on what we are doing, then doing again;
- g) It recognizes that learning and teaching require overcoming doubt;
- h) It recognizes that learning is about seeing the whole through the parts;
- i) It recognizes that thinking and learning who one is can be accomplished by learning who one is not!;
- j) We learn through our bodies and spirits as much as through our minds (1994; 29-31).

We cannot assume or ask non-Aboriginal participants in Aboriginal Education to be able to understand what it is that they have experienced. "Because participants are often asked to view their experience through new or different lenses, the act of verbalizing can be profoundly difficult and ambiguous" (Fox, 2008; 47). It is the object of experiential learning for people to make connections, and when wholly new and often unrecognizable information approaches a learner, they are forced to reconcile that new information with what is known or common to them. "Experiential learning allows participants the opportunity to explore personally meaningful concepts that are derived from their own feelings and history in order to make connections between one's experiences and learnings" (Seed, 2008; 210).

Having non-Aboriginal Teacher Candidates participate in the ICE assisted them to draw connections and conclusions to things that are largely "unconscious, unintentional, and structural forces such as racism, classism, [and] sexism" (Fox, 2008; 38). The ICE attempted to guide the Teacher Candidates through those difficult processes by offering a complete immersion, and by making what they were learning relevant to who they are and their role as teachers.

Another key dimension of personal identity is the cultural self and its role in self-differentiation. Each individual understands herself and others through the perspective of values that have been affirmed as part of her heritage. This identification with one's heritage can become a central element of one's overall self-concept. On the other hand, when the person reconsiders or rejects values from his heritage, it fosters a self-differentiation process. This critically reflective process is a central part of the development of the person's sense of self. A central focus of multicultural education is that a person learns to understand and value his unique cultural self, both in relation to and in the rejection of cultural norms (Wright and Tolan, 2009; 139).

Our current approach to Aboriginal Education policy and practice largely suffers because, as John Ralston Saul offers: "you cannot be a part of a place if you feel you cannot engage with it" (2008; 284). Marie Battiste and Jean Barman talk about how teachers experience a culture shock when they teach unfamiliar curriculum (1995; 227), though by experiencing Aboriginal Education we can begin to make the issues known and familiar to them. In our current system teachers are charged with bringing marginalized knowledges and perspectives into the classroom, but there likely is no personal connection to the material (Dumbrill and Green, 2008; 499). The ICE situates Aboriginal Education as not something to be known, but experienced; it thereby gives Teacher Candidates a different frame of reference for how and why Aboriginal Education can become a part of their teaching practices, so as to avoid the following trap:

Many non-Native teachers feel that time spent on Native content materials is time spent poorly because they are prevented from achieving their goals for the year and students are prevented from accumulating the required academic knowledge by year's end. Some non-Native teachers do include Native content but give it only a small amount of time in their anxiety to move on to the more 'important' material (Battiste and Barman, 1995; 236).

Conversely, as we saw with the Teachers Toolkit, time spent on Aboriginal content can end up being reductionist and romanticized, where 'the celebration of the other takes place in trivializing ways' (Schick and St.Denis, 2005; 307). I call this approach to Aboriginal Education 'exclusive inclusion', meaning that by attempting to be inclusive of other cultures and knowledges, one ends up excluding them, alienating and further marginalizing those whom the teacher aimed to include. Knowing how to teach in Aboriginal Educational contexts becomes just as important as knowing what to teach –

“consciousness-raising is an educational and healing model that focuses on the sharing of personal feelings, attitudes and behaviour to gain a deeper understanding of the collective reality produced through societal conditions” (Graveline, 1998; 89). Understanding the collective reality, I could not put it more simply than that.

I think finally, and perhaps most importantly, the objective of the ICE and this whole dissertation is to reframe or refocus on strengths rather than deficits. Many of us are astutely aware of what is going wrong in Aboriginal communities, but what about addressing what is going right? This persistent negativity is informed and perpetuated by news media, but one has to make a conscious choice to focus on the negative, to choose to believe that there is only negativity. “People who concentrate on what doesn’t work in Aboriginal communities usually haven’t been in any” (Saul, 2008; 82). The ICE is a reality check for Teacher Candidates, a chance to gain direct exposure and experience in Aboriginal Education, but also a chance to see ‘how things really are’ – unsurprisingly, Wendy and Mark did not frame their life experiences as negative, however they also did not shy away from discussing difficult topics. This is their right to choose how to tell their story, and allowing participants to come to their own conclusions about what their role and responsibilities are in promoting and practicing Aboriginal Education.

Methodology

As mentioned, even though I am not ‘researching’ Wendy and Mark, their worldview or their teachings, I acknowledge their authority and my absolute responsibility in upholding and protecting the integrity of the information that was shared during the ICE. “Any knowledge generated through community self-voiced research belongs to the community and its inherent integrity is fully recognized and protected. It does not have to be validated by comparative research or deconstructed with analytical tools. It represents the community reality ‘as-it-is’” (OFIFC, 2012; 12). The OFIFC’s USAI Research

Framework provides me with a set of principles to guide and evaluate my research and the methodology that I have selected. Beginning with *Utility*, the research inquiry has to be practical, relevant, and must directly benefit the Aboriginal community – the ICE is as practical as it is experiential, it is relevant to participants’ personal and professional contexts, and it benefits the community, but perhaps in a more indirect manner. *Self-Voicing* suggests that the “research, knowledge, and practice are authored by communities, which are fully recognized as knowledge holders and knowledge creators” – Wendy and Mark are the Knowledge Holders and creators, and they have authored the knowledge and practice that informs this dissertation, which they also have editorial control over. *Access* speaks to the research “fully recognizing local knowledge, practice, and experience in all their cultural manifestations as accessible by all research authors and knowledge holders” – the way in which the ICE was carried out aligns with access, and because Wendy and Mark’s traditional knowledge is not a subject of this dissertation, it does not infringe on their rights, however if they were to want to utilize this writing to pursue additional research, it will be made available to them. *Inter-Relationality* in research is an acknowledgement of being “historically-situated, geo-politically positioned, relational, and explicit about the perspective from which knowledge is generated” – the ICE and this dissertation have attempted to pursue this vision through intercultural exchange that is situated within the context of decolonization and social justice (OFIFC, 2012; 9-10).

As I have outlined throughout this document, experience is the principal method through which I have anticipated a new approach to Aboriginal Education being validated. However, a weekend experience – immersive or not – is not sufficient for a complete reacculturation to Aboriginal Education for Teacher Candidates. The experience was intended to be a kick-start or reboot for participants – an opportunity for them to unplug and recalibrate. Basil Johnston, celebrated Anishinaabe storyteller, gives us a metric for achieving intercultural understanding: “time and deliberation are required for adequate appreciation. There is no instantaneous understanding” (1976; 8). Q’um Q’um Xiiem (Jo-ann Archibald)

shares her feelings on the principles that are integral to Indigenous storytelling as a pedagogical practice: “respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness and synergy” which values the importance of ‘listening properly’, requiring “the concomitant involvement of the auditory and visual senses, the emotions, the mind and patience” (Regan, 2010; 190). This way of learning and thinking can be inherently challenging for the non-Aboriginal Teacher Candidate, for a great deal of Indigenous Knowledge is expressed through metaphor; “metaphor is powerful; an apt metaphor can carry a huge information load with it because it can be interpreted at many different levels and in many different contexts” (Urion, 1999; 11). It is not my intention nor is it appropriate for me to define Indigenous or Anishinaabe Knowledges – what I am intensely interested in, however, is the Teacher Candidates’ responses to these Knowledges.

Participants were recruited from the Central Option of the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) program at OISE, a collective who had at least a minor level of exposure to Aboriginal ways of knowing and issues in education, through a now-defunct ‘Aboriginal infusion’. This infusion was validated in part through a requirement for Central Option students to complete an Aboriginal Action/Inquiry project that is meant to be inclusive of Aboriginal perspectives on teaching and learning. Central Option students were also provided with opportunities to hear from Aboriginal guest speakers, and were made aware of various cultural events taking place at the University of Toronto. I made a recruitment presentation to this cohort in order to solicit participation from 10 non-Aboriginal Teacher Candidates for the ICE. It was my reasoning that gathering participants from the Aboriginal infusion cohort would ensure at minimum an interest in Aboriginal perspectives and how they relate to teaching and learning. Out of 63 Teacher Candidates, I had an initial commitment from 10 students, however the final participant register was only six. Before the ICE, Wendy and Mark offered a compulsory preparatory session for the Teacher Candidates that served to contextualize the experience, outline a tentative itinerary and provide the learners with a list of supplies and gear that they would require, as well as an overview of cultural

protocols. These included a request for the participants to abstain from the use of drugs and alcohol for at least four days prior to the ICE, as well as a discussion of cultural protocols on the spiritual importance and implications of menstruation for the female participants, of which there were four.

Participants were provided with information about the ICE at recruitment and were required to demonstrate their informed consent – Wendy and Mark’s discussion of cultural ethics, values and protocols represented a community-based ethics process however. The principal form of data collection for the ICE project was participant interviews facilitated pre- and post-experience with the six Teacher Candidates. The interviews were structured to gather both quantitative and qualitative data, documenting a range of variables from personal motivations and confidence to the desired and actual learning outcomes and the utility of the experience. Interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, analyzed, and evaluated for thematic similarities. In order to understand the utility of the ICE from a quantitative standpoint, the participants were asked to rate the learning that they received while attending the preparatory session and ICE. Relationship building began from the point of initial contact with participants in the pre-experience interview and preparatory session, through travel to the land, and within the experience itself. In total, the time period of engagement with the participants was less than three months [three weeks between recruitment and preparation – during which time pre-experience interviews were held; one week between preparation and experience; roughly one week between experience and debrief; and one month between debrief and post-experience interview].

During the ICE, it was not possible or appropriate to keep notes or audio record conversations due to weather conditions, cultural protocols, and the necessity of my contributing to working on the land with Wendy, Mark, their helpers and the participants. Informal conversations were sought throughout the ICE with individual participants in order to cultivate an accurate account of their personal location, reflections, actions, and learning. These variable methods served to substantiate the goal of this study and to lend support to the notion that Aboriginal immersive learning experiences are more impactful,

beneficial to the learner, and more time effective than traditional classroom learning, even when that learning is Aboriginal-focused and perhaps even facilitated by an Aboriginal faculty member.

Regarding data analysis, I would like to give thanks and acknowledgement to Patricia Cranton, an education scholar and teacher, who guided me and provided a chapter she co-authored on transformative education analysis and research methods. Reading Patricia and Sharan Merriam's work, it is clear to me that my research is situated within the interpretive paradigm that she describes, which is to say it is interested in asking questions that relate to experience, and focuses on the improvement of practice and how people perceive their experiences (Cranton and Merriam, 2014). To me, this is a nurturing process that supports growth, a guided process that reflects natural cycles of composition and decomposition; different plants in a patch grow and change differently even though they receive the same sunlight, water and live symbiotically in the same soil.

The research was also inductive, in that it is based on my observations and relies more strongly on trustworthiness and credibility than validity and generalizability. In analyzing and evaluating the experience and the participants, it is critical that I balance my positionality and perspective with methods that will accurately accomplish my research objectives – I was able to achieve this credibility through a variety of methods, such as triangulation (interview, observation, and participant self-report), as well as engaging in my own reflexive self-inquiry in relation to the research (Cranton and Merriam, 2014). Another research model that is reflected in this project is a process called heuristic inquiry. Cranton and Merriam suggest that “heuristic inquiry brings the researcher's personal experiences into the research; that is, the researcher investigates a phenomenon that he or she has been intimately involved with and is passionate about” (2014). Some of the qualities of heuristic inquiry relate well to cultural research work, such as: “total immersion in the research experience, a period of contemplation where the researcher waits for insights, a phase of illumination where clarity emerges, and a time of explication, debriefing and analysis” (Moustakas in Cranton and Merriam, 2014).

This research relates to me as much as the Teacher Candidates, for I was once a ‘White guy’ who did not know – did not care to know, and did not know to care. Through my own experiences working with not only Wendy and Mark, but also other Elders and Traditional Teachers, I have learned a great deal about different cultural ways of thinking, knowing, doing and being. I have learned enough to know that I cannot claim to really know anything at all. That is why I requested that Wendy and Mark allow me to ask questions and to write this thesis, because there is no substitute for their teachings or the ways they conduct ceremonies; and there is no greater honour than to be a visitor on their land, a listener to their stories, and a friend to their families – ceremonial and otherwise.

Finally, in regard to methodology, the USAI Research Framework suggests that the research relationship that most closely resembles the ICE is the ‘Educational Research Space’, which is characterized in the following way:

Within this research space, there is an opportunity for a direct educational interaction/relation between a knowledge holder and a knowledge seeker, who may or may not be a member of the community, and may or may not be conducting a methodical inquiry.

Both the knowledge holder and the knowledge seeker agree to cooperate, working or acting together as researchers but there is no expectation that they share identical objectives.

There is recognition that this interaction generates a very specific type of knowledge situated in the interaction itself. This type of knowledge represents the shared reality that now includes the knowledge seeker.

Both the purpose of the interaction and the type of knowledge being sought must be explicitly stated, and the potential biases of the knowledge seeker addressed in a principled way.

The knowledge holder is the sole author of the narrative/story/facts being shared; every effort must be made to recognize that the knowledge holder and the knowledge seeker share the situated, co-produced knowledge that comes from the relation, the act of sharing, and exchanging ideas (2012; 13).

Even though most of the participants were non-Aboriginal, I still approached them as keepers of their own non-Aboriginal knowledges. The USAI principles do not just apply to researchers when working with Aboriginal stakeholders; it is a completely different orientation to analyzing and

evaluating social and cultural phenomena. Much of this dissertation is reflective of the thoughts, ideas and feelings of the Teacher Candidates; I treated them as the owners of their comments and narratives found in the next chapter. I can recognize my own relationship and responsibility to them in that they have the knowledge that I sought to understand, which was co-produced through interview and discussion, through engagement and experience.

Chapter Six – OUTCOMES AND REFLECTIONS

The ICE involved Teacher Candidates from OISE's BEd program selected from the Central Option (Aboriginal infusion) cohort. It was surprising to me that only six of 63 students in the Central Option chose to participate in the experience. I would have liked all of them to take part. Regardless, I believe those who participated and the experiences that we had were exactly what they needed to be to demonstrate the effectiveness of the ICE approach. It is not my intent to unequivocally assert that this approach to Aboriginal Education is the only way, but rather to declare that the ICE is antithetical to the way in which modern postsecondary education operates. ICE requires the participation of fewer people at any given time, necessitates an investment of time and feeling by the learner and a willingness to accept one's vulnerability in not knowing about Aboriginality. Aboriginal Education is and should be different.

This Chapter focuses on the comments and reflections of the Teacher Candidates who took part in the ICE, drawn from the pre-experience interview, a sharing circle that closed the ICE, a debrief session in Toronto, post-experience interview as well as correspondence from two of the Teacher Candidates. The utility of the ICE and this approach to Aboriginal Education, were validated through the participants' comments, reflections and experiences. While I did not edit their responses, it is critical that we consider the ways their responses changed and evolved as they moved through the stages of the ICE. Being initially unfamiliar with what content or process Wendy and Mark would apply to the ICE, my pre-interview questions were broad and general in scope and did not necessarily address the specific experiences that the Teacher Candidates would have.

I anticipated that the participants' responses would complete an otherwise fulsome argument for the revisioning of Aboriginal Education; however valuable the ICE was, there is a great deal more work to be done. Over a year before the ICE, when I was still struggling to find a way to articulate what type of research I should be doing to inform my dissertation, I was sitting with Mark on their land – he asked

me what I wanted to do, I told him that I wanted every non-Aboriginal person to know and have a relationship with Aboriginality; what he told me was that I had to start one person at a time. This, more than anything, helped me recognize the enormity of the task at hand.

I have had a number of opportunities over the past year to confer with Wendy and Mark regarding the content of this dissertation and the many spaces in which they and their contributions are referenced. In addition to facilitating the ICE and observing the participants, Wendy and Mark were provided with multiple drafts of this document for their review and evaluation. Through my original aspirations for the research project and development of a wholly different and more expansive research proposal, Wendy and Mark have consistently guided me in what is a reasonable and appropriate scope for this thesis.

The participants were provided three opportunities to review the transcription of their comments and their inclusion in this document during both the three-month course of the project and after the first draft of this dissertation was completed roughly eight months after the ICE was completed. While not all of the six participants have chosen to maintain contact with me over the course of the last year outside of their review of research data and materials, I am suitably convinced that each of them are in support of the vision and realization of this thesis.

I am extremely thankful that each of these six people took it upon themselves to be a part of the ICE, I have made an effort to understand their motivations, thoughts, and feelings, however the most useful data is not inscribed in the forthcoming pages, it is within them. Perhaps the most hopeful outcome of the ICE is that the impact of the experiences will reverberate exponentially, as the participants will likely become teachers and the ICE will inform their teaching practice and/or inspire them to seek similar experiences for their students. Additionally, perhaps these Teacher Candidates will choose to Ally themselves with Indigenous people in the struggle for decolonization. The ICE never needed to prove anything, but it did anyway – it proved that when we come together to share and listen, real changes occur.

This chapter will be broken down into five sections based on the data gathering contexts listed above [pre-interview, closing circle, debrief, post-interview and correspondence] which will then be further broken down into themes where participants' comments will be analyzed as a collective. These themes should be considered as generalized outcomes that one could expect from a similarly situated Immersive Cultural Experience, as well as connected and corresponding to the Rationale and Objectives outlined in the previous Chapter of this dissertation.

Pre-Interview

Identity

To begin the interview, each of the Teacher Candidates was asked a complicated but very straightforward question: who are you, and where do you come from? I did not have any expectations of what kind of responses I would uncover, however I wanted to ask the question as a way to acknowledge for the participants that this was an important question to be asked and to ask of one's self. In my experience working with Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee people and Traditionalists in Ontario, I have been instructed and have found that locating yourself is a critically important first step in building relationship. If I were a stranger or visitor, I would identify who I am and where I come from – including my clan, family and any other significant markers – in order to see whom and how I related to the host group.

This is but one functional and practical way in which one's identity should be known, however there are other more imperative reasons for knowing who you are and where you come from. Having a strong self-concept that may or may not include cultural knowledge and practices can provide a person with a foundation from which to build their lives upon, particularly when it comes to interacting with another, different cultural and social group. However, this foundation is missing for many people whose ancestors have come to Canada from other places, who do not consider their Whiteness to be subject to

racialization. This notion becomes complicated with the recognition that “our society is so thoroughly racialized that to be without racial identity is to be in danger of having no identity. To be raceless is akin to being genderless” (McCarthy and Crichlow, 1993; 5). Therefore, we must consider the implications of Canadian people who do not (or cannot) perceive their Whiteness as a racial identity in the same category as that of Aboriginal people. It is all too easy for Canadians to feel cultureless because of the relatively short history of this nation, however it is just as convenient to consider one’s self raceless due to the privileged position that many White Canadians hold in this country and its remembering.

For me, I only started to think about my identity when I began working and studying in the Aboriginal community, and knowing who I am (and who I am not) has kept me mindful of ways in which my participation in Anishinaabe social, cultural and ceremonial life needs to be balanced to avoid appropriation and to sustain healthy relationships. With this in mind, we can begin to see how the Teacher Candidates started to discuss who they were and where they came from, although each participant received and responded to these questions in very different ways. Adam, for instance, discussed his identity in relationship to space, place and land.

Adam: “I say I’m from Kansas because that’s the only real place that I spent most of my life... but I don’t feel like I’m from there.”³

“I don’t have a big relationship with the land... the one place I do gravitate towards is Belize, because I do have ties there... But at the same time, I’ve never spent a significant amount of time there to really say that it’s home.”

‘Kansas is an Indigenous name; the Kansas City Chiefs; the grade school mascot was the “Indians”; when recalling meeting Native people, it was just people coming into the school to display their culture’.

“At the time I wasn’t thinking about my own identity, and where it was all fitting in... this year has been the year when these ideas all sunk in, looking at my own identity.”

“I do have a tie to Indigenous people, and I’ve always appreciated that, but it wasn’t one of those things where I felt as drawn to it until maybe now.”

³ Participants’ comments are not cited in American Psychological Association (APA) style or format. This choice was made to emphasize the identity of the speaker, particularly where multiple participants shared thoughts that were thematically similar and are thereby grouped together.

“Growing up I had a few friends who had, you know, I say the word Native just because that’s what we say in the States. Yeah, or American Indian or Native American blood.”

Where Adam talked about having ties to Indigenous people in Central America, Christie identified during the recruitment process that she identified as Métis, but that she wished to participate in the ICE because she is currently coming to know her heritage and ancestry. Despite this dissertation focusing on the needs of non-Aboriginal Teacher Candidates, and this experience being originally offered exclusively to non-Aboriginal participants, Christie shared that she believed that the experience would be useful for her:

I truly believe that this experience will give me a great opportunity to understand my non-settler side, primarily so I can carry it forward! I don't want to stand by anymore and watch this continue to slip away. I honestly feel that I will benefit from this personally and more importantly feel more comfortable in bringing fmn [sic] focus into my classrooms!

While it was my intent to have only non-Aboriginal participants in the ICE, Christie’s desire to learn and connect with her own identity was simply more important than attempting to control for variability. Observing Christie’s comments about identity, and the ways she did or did not express that identity throughout the experience was particularly instructive concerning the fluid and dynamic nature of Aboriginal identity as well as the ways in which Christie chose to pass herself as non-Aboriginal during certain aspects of the Immersive Cultural Experience.

Christie: ‘It’s not that I have any choice in not knowing, I feel embarrassed... I feel like I should hold some identity because of that label [being Métis]’.

‘My identity comes from my great-grandmother on my father’s side, her mother was First Nations and she married a European, French Settler’.

‘I don’t know, and I’m very aware of that, that I don’t know a lot of things’.

‘I auditioned for Pocahontas in elementary school, grade 6, to be an Indian, but I was told that I was too white. I had to be a settler in favour of the Italian and other girls of colour who played the Indians. The teachers were white’.

Christie’s story about auditioning for the role of Pocahontas in a school play, but not getting it despite being the only Aboriginal person is problematic, however it demonstrates some of the social and

structural issues that influence non-Aboriginal conceptions of Aboriginality. With Darcey and Jaclyn, the issue was not about what it means to be non-Aboriginal, but rather what it means to be Canadian.

Darcey: ‘My family came to Canada at the time of the American Revolution; my mother lives on Manitoulin Island’.

‘It’s difficult to answer question that question, of “Who I am.”’

‘I have been learning more about identity through OISE; I can’t pinpoint what Canadian culture is – “I can’t recognize my culture because I’m sitting in it everyday – breathing it.”’

While it was one of the recruitment goals of the ICE to have only non-Aboriginal Teacher Candidates participate in the experience, most of the participants recognized at least some European lineage. Jaclyn, however, clearly presented herself as being from Hong Kong and identified strongly with Chinese culture and sensibilities. Likely due to her identity and experiences being racialized, Jaclyn presented very different perspective and knowledge than most of the other participants, making connections to concepts such as colonialism and being very comfortable talking about issues such as racism. More than the other Teacher Candidates, Jaclyn was also astutely aware of the ways in which there was potential for the ICE project to become appropriative, where Wendy and Mark would merely become objects to gaze upon. This is true, I assured her that these types of projects can go wrong in all manner of ways, and they sometimes do. This is where there is the need for autonomy and authority of Elders and Traditional Teachers who can exercise control over such issues; to do what they feel is right and appropriate, particularly when their entire group consists of non-Aboriginal teaching professionals – learning what is and is not teachable in Aboriginal Education is an important theme for the Teacher Candidates, and Jaclyn in particular raised this issue.

Jaclyn: ‘I need to “criticize my Canadian-ness.”’

‘As a racialized Settler on this land’, “I identify myself in the East Asian area, particularly Chinese.”

‘With Hong Kong being a former British colony, the White dominant group is looked up to’.

“I look at me in this country, having to unfortunately in that acculturation process... a lot of it became losing my own cultural identity” and “I try not to blame the education system for acculturating me.”

“A lot of this assimilation, this façade... to me, multiculturalism has become more a façade and I’m seeing past that, and so a lot of this search on my identity has come to how my connection is with Indigenous people of this land.”

“This whole thing about being true to yourself, and when I say self I mean knowing your identity and where you come from, as well as where you are right now, I think is very important.”

“I’m anticipating using my voice on the trip, which may include some emotion and pain, but doing it with others will help – will be touching on certain aspects of self.”

As we found earlier, Aboriginal identities are not static, therefore non-Aboriginal identities should also be expected to change and evolve. Jaclyn brings up a critical set of questions concerning her identity, what it will mean to transcend or criticize her ‘Canadian-ness’, and what the potential is for any of us to renegotiate what it means to be Canadian. Education scholar Peter Taubman (1993) writes that there are three registers through which the construction, function, and meaning of identity are expressed.

Fictional: “identity emerges here primarily as a construct of language and certain preverbal relationships and as an artifice imposed on the plenitude and the individual”;

Communal: “identity is activated and given meaning by and through the group”; and

Autobiographical: “identity emerges as a personally meaningful and continually developing aspect of one’s Self, as a private center of being or as an autonomous subject capable of excavating his or her own history in the service of transcending it” (Pinar and Castenell, 1993; 27).

Taubman further suggests that mainstream education keeps us from moving past the second register, whereby identity becomes frozen and people “disappear into a dialectic of alienation” (Pinar and Castenell; 27). We saw this in Darcey’s previous comment about her inability to define what Canadian culture is, where she rightly notes that when you are in it (or when your cultural identity is taken for the norm), it becomes difficult to define what it means to be Canadian. With Josh and Nadine, however, they relate that their identities are more tied to places that are not Canada, and that those are

the places where they feel most at home – which can potentially create a certain kind of dissonance where one might not feel attachment or belonging – or responsibility.

Josh: ‘My parents and family are Portuguese, but I was born and raised in Canada with Portuguese culture and values – in some ways I see Portugal as home, I feel home when I’m there’.

Nadine: ‘I was born in BC, but moved away before age 5; my family lived in the US for a year, then moved to Zaire (currently D.R. Congo), then Kenya for a year, and then up til the end of high school in Tanzania. I attended university in Waterloo, Ontario, then I moved back to Tanzania for 10 years until 2010’.

“I think of myself as African, but I’m not African. I’m Canadian, but I’m more African than I am Canadian, I’m Tanzanian. I look Canadian, I look like I’ve been here my whole life and I know nothing.”

For Josh and Nadine, Canadian identity becomes a de-centred or supplemental marker of who one is – certainly identifying their respective homelands as a place other than Canada makes it difficult to use only the space and place as a way in which to identify ourselves. Perhaps for non-Aboriginal people, we need to consider our identities to be more transportable, in that it is carried with us and relational to the place in which we find ourselves and whom we find around us.

As a follow-up question on identity, some of the participants were asked to reflect on what it meant to be non-Aboriginal and if that notion had any relevance in their lives. Darcey and Jaclyn had the following to say:

Darcey: “Distinguishing one’s self as non-Aboriginal is interesting because there are not very many situations where I’ve been asked that or had to consider that, ever. So that’s definitely something that I don’t know how to answer.”

“Yeah, especially with what’s happening right now with Idle No More and all the other issues, and issues I didn’t even know existed before I got here, and issues that directly affect Canada and how we treat our ‘Canadian’ citizens, or how we treat the people living on the land, I think all that needs to be quickly addressed and acknowledged” – “I didn’t want to put Aboriginal people under Canada, because that’s not necessarily how they would see themselves.”

Jaclyn: “It’s important to know where you’re coming from.”

“I think it’s important to “reflect on social position, and acknowledging privileges” because “as a racialized Settler I can be the oppressor and the oppressed.””

‘I can recognize and understand, but not necessarily empathize, the assimilatory practices affecting Aboriginal people, reflecting on this can help me understand what I’m going through’.

In Darcey’s reflections, being non-Aboriginal was never really an issue because of her racial positionality and privileges – Aboriginality was not and never needed to be a part of her life, it was something that she could choose. However, with Jaclyn identifying as a racialized Settler, she is much more familiar with social processes and productions of race and identity. When it comes to being non-Aboriginal, whether you are White or racialized, man or woman, young or old, we can only make this distinction based on the existence – and our acknowledgement – of Aboriginal people. Rather than be the Other in our experience of Canadianness, Aboriginality is the foundation of Canadian identity.

Personal Responsibility

The theme of personal responsibility ties into the core of this dissertation, though it should be noted that these Teacher Candidates self-selected to participate in the ICE – while I drew people from the ‘Aboriginal infusion’ cohort, I also did not turn anyone away. Despite the ICE not being service-learning in a Western sense, I do believe that the following holds true here: “Those who agree to participate in service-learning opportunities may begin with higher levels of compassion relative to those who do not participate in these programs” (Plante, Lackey, and Hwang, 2009; 40). Regardless, those who did participate, whose comments are embedded here, did feel a responsibility to not only learn but to act as well.

Adam: ‘I see ways in which government actions and policy need to change’.

“I feel a bigger responsibility to sort of acknowledge what’s happened but also where it’s going, sort of this understanding of self. And that’s really where it has to start. Looking at myself and my privileges.”

“[I] wanted to experience the world in a more real way, and looked to education as means to do that [but not only] a means to travel. But now I’m doing it as a means to not only educate others but educate myself and continue getting exposed and revealing a lot that is not looked at more closely in social structures.”

Christie: “It’s just the beginning of the journey and mine happens to be starting now.”

‘I want to explore these issues from the inside out’.

“Jumping in head first, that’s what I need.”

Feeling responsible – a separate, but connected notion to guilt – and becoming engaged is critical for these Teacher Candidates and Allies. However, in order to do that one needs a platform on which to learn about and explore these concepts – the only suitable forum being relationships with Aboriginal people and community. One of the ways that I sought to have the Teacher Candidates reflect on their relationship to Aboriginality and personal responsibility concerning Aboriginal Education was to simply ask if they knew or know any Aboriginal people growing up or during the course of their studies at OISE.

Darcey: “Personally?... well... of Aboriginal people? TV stars?...off hand, I’m going to say no.”

“Hopefully as an educator I will have that opportunity to go out and contact community members and gain more knowledge that way.”

Jaclyn: ‘I didn’t know any Aboriginal people before coming to OISE’.

Further, because of their role in the Central Option at OISE, which concerned itself with Aboriginal-specific issues, I asked what their thoughts were on the question: Should Canadians feel responsible to know about Aboriginality?

Darcey: “Should they? Probably. Do they? No. Personally, talking to my friends, they know zero history. Some of them don’t even know what Residential Schools are, and then I have to explain it, and they’re like ‘what are you talking about?!’ That happened?”

Josh: “There’s this giant gap in my knowledge, it’s important, it’s a part of Canada, it’s a part of where I live and it’s a part of what’s going on around me that I don’t even realize that there’s this giant gap in my knowledge and other peoples’ knowledge, and I’m going to go teach and be perpetuating that... that’s the exact opposite thing that I want to be doing.”

“Everyone should know, in general, the shared culture of where you’re living... especially in this particular situation where things are being marginalized, excluded and pushed to the side, even more so, you have to push to learn a little more on your own.”

‘Knowing about Aboriginal people “may not be relevant in the day-to-day engagement sense” for Canadian people, but there are bigger reasons for knowing’.

Nadine: “I’m shocked at how little I know, and how little Canada cares to know, and at how shut up everything is, and why we say we care about the world and why we have our reputation when we have third world conditions in our own country... shameful, I don’t know why we’re not ashamed of ourselves.”

“I’m shocked and appalled and I don’t know what to do.”

This issue of not knowing relates to non-Aboriginal peoples’ privilege in not being required to know about colonialism, Residential Schools, even racism (Schick and St.Denis, 2005; Dion, 2009; Regan, 2010). This is the ‘giant gap’ that Josh describes. Privilege absolves us of the responsibility to understand how issues that concern Aboriginal people – and I would say, that concern all of us – are relevant to our ‘day-to-day engagement’ in Canada. It is an imperative question that Nadine poses, that if we should be ashamed of ourselves, what will we do with that shame if and when we feel it?

Knowledge and Comfort Level

When one starts ‘knowing’ about Aboriginal people, cultures, histories and knowledges we are often confronted with the necessity of quantifying our experience, comfort level or competency. Cultural competency is a sometimes-overused term to denote one’s ability to understand and navigate Aboriginal communities and perspectives, however our experiences exist along a circular continuum of learning-unlearning-relearning. If indeed cultural competency is a skill that requires training and practice, we can accept that there are at least two stages, requiring both contemplation and action.

Cultural Understanding: sensitivity and appreciation of cultural differences;

Cultural Competency: ‘preservation of identity and language while building bridges between cultures’ (Pinar and Castenell, 1993; 24).

For the Teacher Candidates, they expressed various levels of comfort in accessing Elders and Traditional Teachers, demonstrating another fault in the cultural competency model. Before even participating in the ICE, some of the Teacher Candidates gave themselves a high rating despite acknowledging that they had little experience or knowledge working with Aboriginal people. The

Teacher Candidates likely did not want to appear ignorant in giving themselves a low ranking, however their responses indicate what is extremely common in cultural competency processes – a participant gains some knowledge or direct experience from a source perceived to be reliable and then believes that the competency cycle is acceptably complete. None of the Teacher Candidates claimed that they ‘knew enough’ about Aboriginality in general, however their responses suggested that their knowledge was sufficient without taking part in the ICE. If we are to determine our own cultural competence it can easily set us up for failure, as well as our students and Aboriginal partners. We also cannot set a threshold for our own learning as Allies, where we feel that we know enough to get by in our interactions.

Adam: ‘I wouldn’t be afraid to approach an Elder, but I would be careful in choosing my words and being as respectful as I can’.

Christie: ‘I’m so ignorant to everything... I know nothing. I grew up in the Catholic school and I was raised that way, so to me, all of the injustices were so hidden from me; this is all new... I have a big part in all of this, and this is where I come from so that’s been hard on me too’.

‘I had no idea what Residential Schools were until late high school, if that... it was not something that was so predominant in my schooling or anywhere else’.

‘I remember in school, I was always fascinated with First Nations, but it was never something we talked about, it was a blip in history in the textbook’.

‘I tend to look at Elders or Traditional People as being almighty – it’s intimidating to approach them’.

Josh: “Understanding and exposure” is important in teaching respect, not “fearing the unknown.”

This fear and apprehension is an important acknowledgment to take note of. While I cannot speak for anyone else, I know that I still get nervous when approaching Elders or Traditional Teachers regarding the transmission of knowledge. This engagement is a personal process, being and feeling prepared to engage in a culturally competent or ‘good’ way. Where Christie talks about Elders “being almighty,” there is a respect and understanding of cultural protocols that is appropriate, however we cannot let that perception get in the way of learning and building relationships.

Darcey's family relocated to Manitoulin Island – which contains a number of Anishinaabe communities – however she relates that her exposure to and engagement with Aboriginal people was minimal.

Darcey: “Very little and very superficial if there was anything – moccasins... A lot of misconceptions from media but also my family living on Manitoulin Island.”

“Everyone feels entitled to something [on Manitoulin Island], and they're feeling entitled to the same thing.”

“I've never been to a pow-wow... my family is closer to the Wiki, the Wik [Wikwemikong], but we would have never considered ever going to one.”

Despite Darcey observing and perhaps even participating in the perpetuation of these misconceptions at some point, she suggests that this is a very one-sided way of viewing relationship.

Darcey: “You need information, you need perspectives and then you can gather that all together and make your own opinion.”

This comment demonstrates a different ethic, however it is limited in that the decision-making authority still rests with the observer. If you cannot access genuine information, encounter Aboriginal perspectives and consciousnesses, and truly understand what those beliefs mean in relation to your own, even the most well-meaning engagement becomes validated by one's own worldview.

Josh: ‘One needs to be careful not to appropriate things’.

‘Classmates have spoken about young students questioning whether Aboriginal people are still around’, “if no one talks about them, they must not exist anymore.”

“It's scary as a country that we would marginalize them, exclude them to a point where the next generation doesn't even realize that they exist. To me that's a really scary thought.”

“Things aren't going to fit together because they're missing so many pieces of the puzzle.”

This is the delicate balance of knowing but not appropriating that we all require, which can only be evaluated by being in relationship with Aboriginality. If we have gotten to a point where Aboriginal people are something to be ‘talked about’ and historicized and romanticized in schools, there is only one solution – invert that notion by making space for Aboriginal people to make themselves present and

accessible and known in a meaningful way. This making of space is not about blocking off a time period or classroom, but rather a deep consideration of why we should ‘talk about’ Aboriginal people. We make a choice to accept and believe that Aboriginal people, histories, knowledges and cultures cannot be known unless we are in mental, physical and spiritual contact with them – learning about Aboriginality requires a mind, body and spirit investment.

This type of investment is largely missing in Canada’s approach to relationships with Aboriginal people, and consequently how Canada is perceived internationally. Nadine previously talked about Canada’s international profile, and how that was incongruent with what she saw as ‘third-world conditions’ in Canada concerning Aboriginal people. One of the lenses which some of the Teacher Candidates viewed intercultural engagement was through their experiences travelling, experiencing other people and cultures.

Adam: “When you travel, you really test yourself, as far as what you’re capable of and your comfort level of various different types of people.”

Jaelyn: ‘I’m very adaptable with other cultures, but in this case I don’t know how to adapt because I haven’t had interactions with Aboriginal people.’

It is important to acknowledge the role that travel can have on exposure, interaction and relationship however, we have to be careful when talking about intercultural engagement in the same way as travel or tourism – where people and cultures are consumable and quantifiable. We can see this in the way in which pow-wows can become tourist attractions (even if some of the residents of Manitoulin Island are not the ones going). It is true that you can learn a great deal by observing drumming and dancing, however it does not necessarily constitute understanding or relationship.

Importance of Aboriginal Education

A great deal of the first parts of this dissertation have been concerned with the notion that Aboriginal Education is and should be different, that it must involve Aboriginal people and perspectives

in order to provide teachers and learners with a fulsome first-person engagement with Aboriginality. One of the key reasons to do this, beyond the social justice implications, is to recognize how the diversity and variety of Aboriginal identities creates a balanced perspective. As Gregory Cajete writes, "cultural diversity is as important to human ecology as bio-diversity" (1994; 80); similarly, different Aboriginal perspectives are essential to stimulating and developing non-Aboriginal consciousnesses – and certainly requisite in determining what Aboriginal Education is, and why we would do it.

Jaelyn: ‘It’s important to teach children about their individuality but also teaching about and respecting each others’ differences’.

Adam: “There needs to more lenses out there to really look at things from a non-mainstream perspective, an Indigenous perspective. Not just to look at it, but to implement it.”

“I used to think that things are just the way that they are. This year has really opened up, kind of exposed things a little bit more to see what’s behind it all.”

‘The best way to teach and learn is to “speak with people themselves,” there needs to be a school agenda, and have administrators place importance on it’.

‘I’m really curious, I don’t know when I’m going to get this opportunity again. I hope I do though, relationship building with Indigenous people in whatever community I’m in. This is a great opportunity to start that.’

Adam’s comments address the *what* and *how* of the importance of Aboriginal Education, however

Christie reflects on the *why*.

Christie: ‘We need to know where to access this knowledge’.

“Students don’t even think that First Nations people are still living – I know they’re young, but that’s no excuse – I heard one of my students say extinct in reference to Aboriginal people.”

One of supplemental ways to address this pervasive lack of knowledge – which the Learning Ministries have been diligently focusing on for decades – is to update content and curriculum concerning Aboriginality. However, Darcey acknowledges that this emphasis on Aboriginal perspectives may be fleeting and inadequate.

Darcey: ‘Aboriginal knowledges and perspectives in education are topical right now, but are important to Canada’s history’.

‘Most resources available are not “reflective of Aboriginal ways of knowing, it’s still pretty Eurocentric.”’

Christie outlines some of the problematic content that is available in classrooms:

Christie: ‘Lots of books and resources are available for teachers – how to make your own tipi for instance’.

Having experience erecting tipis and other traditional structures, it is certainly not advisable that someone attempts to do this alone, not to mention the tokenistic and trivializing implications of the ‘make your own’ logic. Would we be ok with this book if it was ‘Make Your Own Ceremonial Pipe’ or ‘Make Your Own Sweat Lodge’? In fact, I have encountered an Ontario Trillium List-approved textbook that lays out directions and explanations on the function and construction of a sweat lodge. There is a delicate balance between content, access and authenticity when it comes to Aboriginal Education – it is critical that we question and understand what students are learning, how they are learning it, and what the source of their knowledge is.

Nadine: ‘Aboriginal content and resources are out there for teachers, but “it’s not spoon-fed like the rest of the curriculum.”’

The current structure of mainstream education makes it difficult to make an investment in Aboriginal people and knowledges. Jaclyn offers a useful summation of the utility of working with Traditional Teachers – a process of decolonization – where Aboriginal Education can represent a structural shift in not only perspective but also educational process.

Jaclyn: ‘When I talked with an Elder, I always ended up with more questions than when the conversation started, and always questions about myself that required reflection’.

‘It’s not about picking up knowledge, but experiencing it’.

‘This hopeful process of decolonizing the curriculum – I say hopeful because there’s a lot of work to do, but at the same time it’s important, it’s important for me’.

‘There’s a lot to learn from Aboriginal cultural revitalization for other communities’.

Aboriginal Education has to be and feel relevant for people in order to pick it up and carry it forward. Josh rightly notes that if we are not careful, Aboriginal Education can become a routinized add-on – a check mark on an overloaded checklist. Therefore, Aboriginal Education needs to become both local and personal.

Josh: “Having a more localized sense of things is great... it’s about where you come from.”

‘If you’re only talking about multiculturalism for one week, it’s just something that you do. It’s not who you are’.

“People need to be aware of that so they can start moving in the right direction, the more that you have that in education, the more people know about it, and the next generation grows up and those kids become the leaders, the politicians, the voters, the people that are doing the media, consuming the media, they’re the ones who have the power.”

There is an agency in Aboriginal Education not found in other aspects of the mainstream curriculum, which ask us to simply be engaged, but not necessarily to act. Where one of the productive values of teaching and learning chemistry is to understand our makeup and the bonds between things, so too does Aboriginal Education make us aware of the ways in which we are connected. If done properly, it also allows us to discern what is real and true for each other and ourselves – moving beyond the facts and into feelings, replacing pass/fail evaluations with experience.

Nadine: “Facts aren’t the same as truth... truth is different.”

“We teach from a Western logic structure, and I don’t like it. Partially because I’m more brought up outside of it, and I have a stronger belief in things like community and understanding and relationship, than I do in logic and true/false and consequences.”

“Binaries are a Western construct.”

“There’s only so much I can learn by listening to people talk in a classroom. I need to learn through relationship, and I might need to be encouraged to make those relationships happen.”

“There has to come some respect somehow.”

Jaelyn: “When it’s not genuine, it doesn’t feel right... it’s not honest.”

Honesty is really interesting concept. It is also interesting that these comments came before the Teacher Candidates even participated in the ICE. They were able to discern what ‘honest’ Aboriginal

Education was (and what it was not) – partly involving relationships, but also truth, another interesting concept.

The Teacher Candidates have affirmed that the best way to learn about a group of people is to engage with them directly, for a number of reasons – to correct imbalanced and inappropriate curriculum, or even worse, because children think that Aboriginal people are extinct. The Teacher Candidates have recognized that Aboriginal Education is important, however as we will see in the next theme, their Aboriginal infusion at OISE may not have prepared them adequately for an experience such as the ICE, or to practice Aboriginal Education in their classrooms.

Aboriginal Education at OISE

Teaching a form of storytelling.

How we tell a story

interacts with who will hear it

what meaning they will take from it (Graveline, 2002; 17).

The Teacher Candidates entered OISE to learn how to be educators, to enhance their knowledge and cultivate their gifts. Prior to 2014, at OISE, there were various cohorts that focused on a range of topics from technology to globalization – the Aboriginal infusion cohort was OISE’s best effort at creating a space for learning and dialogue concerning issues that relate to Aboriginal people and the greater Canadian community.

Darcey: ‘Eurocentric perspectives are written directly into the curriculum, we have to flip it around sometimes, even in First Nations/European Settlers – Grade 6 Social Studies, a lot of the curriculum in there is how did the First Nations benefit from the European Settlers’ – “Is how the right question? – I don’t know that I would have recognized that if I didn’t go through Central Option.”

Josh: ‘I was taught what students learn about Aboriginal people in Grade 5: “This is where they live, this is what they eat – the exact same conversation as you would have about animals in a science class.”

“The whole Idle No More thing was right in the middle of our year when we’re learning about this, so I got to see how the media reacts to these things, and it was just infuriating.”

Some of the Teacher Candidates disclosed that they did not necessarily choose the Central Option for its Aboriginal infusion, but nevertheless saw that it might be practical experience given the quickly rising Aboriginal demographic situation in Canada.

Darcey: ‘I chose Central Option knowing that there would be employment opportunities opening up with an Aboriginal emphasis’.

Josh: ‘Aboriginal infusion in the Central Option was a bonus, I chose the Option for other reasons’.

However, when it came to what the Aboriginal infusion actually looked like in their classroom, Christie suggested that faculty and administrators were not necessarily able to demonstrate what appropriate Aboriginal Education theory and practice were.

Christie: ‘I have been told that even if we as Teacher Candidates know something about Aboriginal cultures and knowledges, to not speak for them, but we haven’t been given strategies or tips on what is appropriate’.

‘There have been discussions of news topics, and what we shouldn’t do in the classroom, but not what we should do’.

Mathematics professor Lucy Horwitz (1989) suggested, “one cannot teach something in the complete isolation of the classroom and then hope that a transition will automatically be made to real life” (Graveline, 1998; 114). Without the foundational understanding, the social, spiritual and cultural underpinnings of Aboriginal Education, the stories that we hear and see in the media gain no context.

Christie goes on to say:

Christie: ‘Central Option was “a lot of unfinished business, I feel like”; regarding the Aboriginal infusion’.

“There has been a few guest speakers, which have been great, but at the same time I don’t know how beneficial it was – there could have been more.”

Josh: ‘Aboriginal guest-speakers have been more “lecture-style” rather than immersive, we need to get a “deeper, more nuanced” understanding’

Fyre Jean Graveline writes about the need to teach/learn through/from/about experience (1998; 183), but if these Teacher Candidates’ only experience is content, guest speakers and the occasional field

trip, does this actually resemble an infusion? Perhaps calling it ‘Aboriginal inflection’ might be more appropriate – infusion denotes something closer to transformation. This is not to unfairly challenge OISE and their efforts, it is clear that the Central Option was not equipped to offer the type of infusion and experience that it aspired to. In discussions with the two non-Aboriginal faculty members associated with Central Option, it was the resounding sentiment that this infusion was being offered because they saw that giving students *something* regarding Aboriginal content was better than what they would have received otherwise.

Closing the Immersive Cultural Experience

The following comments were made during a closing circle in the tipi in which we slept and received most of our teachings. Because we were embedded in the experience, I did not use any recording devices or take notes during the ICE – I maintained accuracy through having the participants confirm and elaborate on their comments in the post-experience interview. At the point of being spoken, their comments were more elaborate, however I have attempted to distill the intent of each below. As mentioned, the structure of the post-interview was to have the participants reflect and elaborate on these comments.

It is important to note that despite Christie self-identifying as Métis during her recruitment, and talking at length about her heritage during the pre-experience interview, she did not disclose to Wendy and Mark or anyone else during the ICE that she was Métis. This issue was addressed in the post-experience interview. When I interviewed Darcey prior to the ICE, and in comparison with the other participants, she appeared to be the most guarded or cautious in her reflections. Some of Darcey’s comments were non-committal or reflected some hesitancy to share all of her viewpoints; though being guarded can certainly not be held against her in this instance. My questions, the ICE and this whole project were a departure from the daily lives and thoughts of many of the Teacher Candidates – some

aspects were meant to be uncomfortable or unsettling. However, with Darcey, it was extremely interesting to see that Michael (Wendy and Mark's ceremonial helper) asked her to perform the prayer and lay down tobacco for the trees that we were cutting down for the teaching lodge we partially constructed during the ICE.

Having four female Teacher Candidates participate in the ICE also opened the experience up to include teachings on the physical and spiritual aspects of femininity.

The primacy of women, who bore the unique gift of life, for it was through woman that the cycle – creation, destruction, recreation – was completed. For her special gift of giving life and being, women had a special place in the order of existence (Johnston, 1976; 17).

There was a unique circumstance of Jaclyn's involvement in the ICE, that unlike the other women, she was menstruating during the experience. Considered in an Anishinaabe cultural context, which Jaclyn had the opportunity to learn and experience first-hand, this is not a shameful or unclean physical process. Called moon-time, partly for its cyclical nature aligned with the moons and being a uniquely female experience, is a signal of one's ability to create life and is widely regarded as a special, spiritual, and sacred process for women. The significance of this for the project was that Jaclyn was excused from participating in certain activities that conflict with Wendy and Mark's moon-time teachings, such as handling medicines and participating in the sweat. It was interesting to see Jaclyn and the other Teacher Candidates consider what this meant to them, how it contrasted with their own social and cultural understandings of the woman's role in creation, including the persistent narrative in Western society that women are weaker during their menstruation, or even that issues of menstruation should not be discussed publicly or by men. As with all of the things that happened during the ICE, I could not have planned or expected this to have happened, but it ultimately turned out to be an opportunity for the participants to get a lived-in understanding of Aboriginal Education that could not have been replicated in other contexts.

I am really proud of the experience and the participants for immersing themselves in it. I was hopeful that when we got together, sitting across the fire from one another, that we would gain perspective, learn to be resourceful, self-reflect and become more connected. These are just some of the themes that did emerge from the ICE, and for that I am truly thankful.

Gaining Perspective

The ICE, and a supplemental approach to Aboriginal Education are meant to provide new perspective to participants, whether they are Teacher Candidates or elementary school children. Despite EDU suggesting that Aboriginal perspectives bring the curriculum to life, the ICE did not serve the course content or requirements of the BEd program; it was simply focused on having participants gain perspectives that could inform their concept of Aboriginality and Aboriginal Education. In order to demonstrate this fundamentally different way of seeing things, I offer perhaps my favourite quotation, from Leroy Little Bear:

There are no dichotomies in Aboriginal understandings of the world, there is no animate/inanimate dichotomy. Everything is more or less animate. Consequently, Aboriginal languages allow for talking to trees and rocks, an allowance not accorded in English. If everything is animate, then everything has spirit and knowledge. If everything has spirit and knowledge, then all are like me. If all are like me, then all are my relations (2000; 78).

Further, he suggests that spirit is not just an abstract concept, but rather the way in which to explain and understand the connections and relationship between all things:

In Aboriginal philosophy, existence consists of energy. All things are animate, imbued with spirit, and in constant motion. In this realm of energy and spirit, interrelationships between all entities are of paramount importance, and space is a more important referent than time (2000; 77).

These sentiments should inform our Aboriginal Education policy and programming, acknowledging that while Aboriginal perspectives may be fundamentally different than our own, they offer the only pathway for us to truly understand Aboriginality. Adam and Josh found that connecting to the source was important:

Adam: ‘The ICE helped to recognize the importance of acknowledging, and searching out other worldviews’.

Josh: ‘I sought out sweats and cultural activities in Toronto previous to the experience, but for some reason I just didn’t connect’.

This is not surprising, it can be difficult to put ourselves out there and engage with another cultural group in such a meaningful way. Perhaps now Josh would be more comfortable or confident though, or perhaps the ICE demonstrated just how complex ceremonial protocols are, and how important relationships are in accessing Aboriginal cultures and ceremonies.

Christie shared that her perspective shifted over the course of the experience, where Wendy and Mark’s teachings made her reflect on her own worldview.

Christie: ‘The experience felt surreal’.

‘Participating in the ICE makes me realize that I’ve lived a sheltered and luxurious life’.

‘This experience will change the way that I carry myself from here on forward’.

Some of the participants, despite being elementary school teachers, found it refreshing to see so many children around camp, and to recognize the important role that they played in community life.

Darcey: ‘I found a lot of pleasure in watching and interacting with the children [Wendy and Mark’s and their helpers’].

Nadine: ‘Working with the children was a grounding and important experience’.

Darcey acknowledged that one of the most impactful parts of the ICE for her was observing the faith that Wendy and Mark had in their beliefs and how that resonated with her, something she had not encountered before.

Darcey: ‘Wendy and Mark’s conviction in their beliefs is impressive’.

‘I’m grateful for this experience’.

Those two comments perfectly summarize the value of having Elders or Traditional Teachers facilitating the ICE and Aboriginal Education in general. It was not just that Wendy and Mark believed so strongly in their teachings, it was also that we were expected to follow cultural and ceremonial

protocols during the course of the ICE, a responsibility that the Teacher Candidates suggested that they appreciated.

Jaclyn: ‘I was honoured to be asked to do things their way [with following their moon-time teachings]’.

‘I appreciate the reinforcement of the power that we have [with the teachings about free will]’.

Adam: ‘I learned to be resourceful during the ICE, chopping wood, building fires and providing for the group’.

Nadine: ‘I’m not looking forward to going home’.

It was the intent of the ICE that the Teacher Candidates found their experience to be rewarding and meaningful, but also legitimately enjoyable. If the participants did not find meaning in the experience, and could not enjoy themselves it would create resistance to the initiation of any personal or professional changes. I acknowledge that camp life is not for everyone, but it feels like home to me, and the Teacher Candidates expressed the same sentiment – at least for a weekend. The idea with an immersive experience on the land is that it sensitizes us, where our social context often desensitizes us. Being on the land asks us to be connected and aware in very different ways, perhaps more natural ways.

In order to understand Aboriginal perspectives – or in this case, Anishinaabe beliefs – one has to experience them. We experience a way of seeing the world that is uniquely different than our own, which leads us to consider and question what we believe to be true, not only about Aboriginal people, but also ourselves. When we open ourselves up to new ways of thinking, feeling and being, it can cause transformative change; immersion ensures we receive more than a superficial understanding.

The Need to Build

For all of the benefits of the ICE, it was essentially a harmonizing process, bringing everyone and everything into alignment. “Harmony is achieved through such a process, but it lasts for only a short time before it has to be revised as people and their circumstances change” (Cajete, 1994; 209). Having

said that, there is a need to build on the experiences of the weekend and expand upon that feeling of harmony.

Adam: ‘There is a need to continue building on the ideas and teachings of the weekend’.

Like Nadine mentioned in the last section, she did not want to go home after what she had experienced. It is worth noting that some participants, like Jaclyn, did not quite know what to make of the ICE and needed further time to reflect.

Jaclyn: ‘Transitioning from the experience is difficult, not having the answers or knowing where you're going’.

‘I'm looking forward to reflecting on the experience’.

For Josh, going through the ICE caused him to recognize how far away Canadian society is from that feeling of harmony and unity, how few people have experienced what he just did in the ICE.

Josh: ‘I see how much things need to change in society’.

I agreed with Josh when he said that things need to change, but it was always my hope that the Teacher Candidates would see that *they* were the change; however, this is up to the participants. Like Mark shared with me when I was trying to figure this dissertation out, sometimes change comes one person at a time, if at all.

Nadine: ‘This experience was a “good start.”

Even if these six people do not become teachers, even if their only memory of the ICE is that they spent the weekend in the woods with Elders that one time, I have to believe that this is not the end of the road for these participants. There is a need to build on what we learned that weekend, and it may not all come right away; perhaps it will be found in the way one reads the newspaper, or in responding to someone's racist comment. However, Cree scholar Harold Johnson implores: “If you know that this is happening and do nothing about it, then you must intend it to continue” (2007; 32). Having the Teacher Candidates engage the fire inside is what I was after, and I think they definitely found that within themselves – even if they might need more practice to locate it and find the fuel to make it burn.

Self-Reflection

Cree academic Willie Ermine suggests that Aboriginal people specialize in inner space, where non-Aboriginal people search to completely understand the outer space (Battiste and Barman, 1995; 101). Without having to ask the participants to consider this inner space during the course of the ICE, they inherently found themselves looking inwards – not necessarily to find answers, but rather to find new questions.

Adam: ‘You can think that from your normal experiences/information that you're aware of Aboriginal people and perspectives, but you're not’.

Jaclyn: ‘I was wary of the appropriateness of coming on this trip because of my own social position’.

Christie: ‘I’ve felt shy about my ignorance and it’s scary admitting that’.

With Christie, despite not being Anishinaabe and not disclosing her identity to Wendy, Mark and the other participants, she related that the whole experience resonated with her.

Christie: ‘I'm meant to be here.’

‘I learned that I need to be more honest with myself’.

Jaclyn reflected that being on her moon-time during the ICE gave her a unique perspective; not participating in various chores or ceremonies could be seen as not participating in the experience. However, I would suggest that Jaclyn got the greatest experience of all.

Jaclyn: ‘It allowed me to act as an observer at various points’.

Some of the Teacher Candidates explained that the ICE made them recognize something within themselves that they either did not know was there, or that they wanted to begin to cultivate.

Josh: ‘I never knew that I would have done something like this’.

‘The experience has/will change the way that I see and react to things’.

Adam: ‘This experience was as much about figuring out about myself’.

Christie: ‘I’m going to be more conscious of the footprint that I leave behind’.

Nadine: ‘I want to start over after this experience’.

Nadine's experience was unique in that she was the only participant to disclose and express a strong religious or spiritual belief. The other participants talked about spirituality, or how the spiritual components of the ICE made them feel, but Nadine had a more intimate experience with her faith. However, her expressed ignorance about Aboriginality, combined with her knowledge that the Church was complicit in the operation of Residential Schools, among other injustices caused her to express the following:

Nadine: 'I want to apologize for my ignorance concerning Aboriginal cultures and for the Christian religion' [Nadine being Christian and having worked through the Church].

It should be noted that Wendy and Mark never placed the expectation on us to apologize or feel guilt for our ignorance and the actions of our ancestors; it just would not be productive. What we were asked to do instead was look inside of ourselves, explore our intentions for participating in the ICE, and find ways in which we are responsible for the knowledge that they shared. The ability to be reflexive should not only be a component of Aboriginal Education however; it is a necessary quality for anyone to embody in any relationship.

Connections

We are inherently connected to all things – something that we can consider but often not comprehend in our education practice – but the ICE helped to demonstrate some of these connections, large and small through experiential learning. “Education is, at its essence, learning about life through participation and relationship in community, including not only people, but plants, animals, and the whole of Nature” (Cajete, 1994; 26). The group of six Teacher Candidates became much like a family, which I found enhanced their learning, where “cohort experience as being like a family [is] due to the interactions and bonds created among individuals. Cohort grouping allows participants the opportunity to learn from each other” (Seed, 2008; 214). Each Teacher Candidate brought a different and unique set of

skills, knowledge and perspectives – and different teachings resonated with each participant differently. One of the first things that Wendy and Mark shared with us was the importance of acknowledging not only the role of spirituality in our lives, but accepting that we can be spiritual people first and foremost.

Nadine: ‘I appreciate the notion of it being ok to be a spiritual person first’.

This obviously made sense to Nadine, but I wonder what the lasting impact of that emphasis will be for the other Teacher Candidates? In talking about spirituality, many of the teachings that we received that weekend related to vision and discovering ways in which we can live with purpose and integrity – ways we can discover and walk along our ‘path’ in life.

Adam: ‘The ICE helps finding out how to connect to your path’.

Jaelyn: ‘I really value the teachings on the interconnectedness between people and things’.

For some of the participants, finding those connections was a messy process, quite literally. As Darcey mentions, sitting and sleeping on the ground for much of the experience – sometimes choking on wood smoke, and being exposed to nearly all of the elements imaginable – what she might have otherwise considered to be quite distressing was actually enjoyable.

Darcey: ‘I’m surprised at how comfortable I was at camp despite being dirty and uncomfortable’.

It was not an exaggeration when describing our exposure to the elements. Despite being the month of May, over the course of two days we experienced extreme cold, snow, sleet, hail and rain as well as high winds and an intense thunder storm – contrast this with bright, warm sun during some of the day and humidity enough to bring out the mosquitoes to feast on us as we worked. It was incredible to be present for all of these occurrences, which made the entire experience more real, and in many ways forced us to acknowledge our connection to our environment.

New Styles of Teaching and Learning

Aboriginal Education being different does not necessarily mean differentiating instruction for Aboriginal students, but rather bringing in a whole new conception for what education is in the first place. We need to remember, “one culture’s definition of education will not be identical to or may not significantly overlap that of another” (Battiste and Barman, 1995; ix). The word holism often arises in educational discourses, however it is often not clear what it means to be holistic, and what work is required for us to achieve the vision embedded in this word. It can be seen in our understanding that “Western educational practices dissect and disconnect knowledge, whereas Native Ways of Knowing presume a holistic context” (Warner, 2006; 150). All of the participants acknowledged this, probably because they are educators, but it is critical to understand that there is not one way to teach or to learn – particularly with, about, and for Aboriginal people.

Christie related that the ICE forced her to invert the way she looked at learning and teaching, even if that inversion was going to take practice to recognize and adapt to.

Christie: ‘The ICE is inside-out vs. outside-in learning’.

‘It takes practice to start looking at things differently’.

‘I’m concerned with retaining the information/teachings’.

Retaining information was a common concern with the Teacher Candidates, who were used to being able to take notes, read over them and invariably study for a test, assignment or examination. As Christie mentioned, however, it takes practice and continued participation to get the entire value from the teachings, a sentiment shared by Darcey.

Darcey: ‘I’m slowly registering the information shared during the experience’.

‘I appreciate the repetition and themes of the teachings’.

Unlike mainstream education, there were no evaluative criteria or expectations placed on the Teacher Candidates other than to participate respectfully, listen and observe. Wendy and Mark were not

concerned with testing their knowledge, because despite us spending a sum total of 48 hours together – likely many times more than any unit of study would offer – there was an acknowledgement that this was not enough time to do anything other than scratch the surface. The other issue is that we are used to learning something and immediately ‘knowing’ it, giving us the authority to use and pass that information on. The ICE demonstrated to the participants that Anishinaabe teachings were not something to be ‘known’ in the same way as the OISE curriculum, because of the sacred and spiritual nature of some of the teachings, but also because one ought to question why such information should be consumable and controllable. For many non-Aboriginal people, wanting to know comes out of a desire and a belief that sharing will help to achieve social justice on behalf of Aboriginal people. Jaclyn addressed this very issue:

Jaclyn: ‘I wonder, how do we transfer knowledge, what can we transfer?’

‘I have lots of questions - despite Mark and Wendy being open to answer questions, I can appreciate the indirect nature of learning here’.

For the participants, we never had an expectation that they would come away knowing anything – like Jaclyn suggested; she came away with more questions than when she started. This is where I see change happening – we need to teach ourselves to be curious again, or at least more patient in the ways in which we access knowledge and information.

Sometimes it was not actually knowledge or information that persisted with the Teacher Candidates, it could have been something as indefinable as the feeling of a warm breeze, the laughter of children at camp, or perhaps the drum songs that were sung throughout the ICE.

Adam: ‘The drum songs will stay in my head after the trip’.

The ICE was an educational trip in many ways, but the learning was not just a mental process – even though the drum songs will play and stay in Adam’s head, they will also likely live in his heart. Each of the Teacher Candidates took something different from the experience; there was no focus or worry about standardizing the process. If we really wanted to have what would come close to a more

standardized Immersive Cultural Experience, I would need to take these Teacher Candidates back onto the land at least a dozen more times. The participants recognized that they only got a glimpse during that weekend, and I believe that they found comfort in discovering a new way to learn and teach – indirect, based on repetition and practice, inside-out and holistic, and most importantly, imbued with feeling.

Debrief

The debrief session occurred in Toronto, at OISE, 10 days after we closed the ICE. All of the Teacher Candidates except Nadine were able to attend, and Wendy and Mark were able to come down to Toronto to facilitate the discussion and share food. This sharing was instructive for the Teacher Candidates I hope, because a big part of the ICE was the preparation and sharing of food. There is a level of comfort and intimacy that comes with eating together, a simple way to reenact some of the connections demonstrated in the ICE. Most of the responses were short, and some people only offered one or two comments during the two-hour talk. It was an opportunity for the participants to reflect on things that they learned and experienced, and Wendy and Mark offered clarity and encouragement for them to continue to think about and challenge their notions of what it meant to be an educator.

Some of the Teacher Candidates expressed difficulties reintegrating into their day-to-day lives and relationships both personally and philosophically. I realized during the debrief that it would have been useful to keep meeting as a group to keep those connections strong. I felt a degree of responsibility to the group during this time – I had collected them, and now we were acknowledging the reality of breaking off into our individual lives. I have not had much contact with the group since the post-interviews – however they have been on my mind a great deal since the ICE and not only during the writing of this dissertation. I wish only the best for them, and hope that they can look back on the ICE with fondness.

In this section, the following themes emerged from the participants' comments: *Explaining the Unexplainable*, *Emotional Attachments*, and *Personal Changes*. The Teacher Candidates could have

discussed anything in the debrief, but the things that they reflected on were personal to them. They were focused on themselves, which is exactly where they needed to be at that time.

Explaining the Unexplainable

William James, American philosopher and psychologist, suggested in 1902 that there are four characteristics to a spiritual or mystical experience. I would suggest that despite the Teacher Candidates not necessarily articulating their feelings in these ways, each and every one of them could apply these characteristics to their experience.

1. Ineffability: inability to describe the experience
2. Noesis: receiving knowledge in a spontaneous fashion
3. Transiency: the phenomenon is temporary
4. Passivity: the individual lacks control over what is happening (Bobilya, Akey, Mitchell Jr., 2011; 304)

Few of the participants could rightly explain their feelings about the ICE, many of them suggested that there were particular teachings that resonated or were ‘meant’ for them, and nearly all of the participants related that their energetic feelings diminished after leaving the land. The last characteristic – *passivity* – can sound scary, suggesting that someone does not have control. Rather, it is the notion that unless we have cultivated those gifts, we cannot bring on a spiritual experience – it comes to us.

Josh: ‘I can’t explain the experience, or put it into words, one needs to experience it’.

Adam explained that even after the ICE he experienced a spontaneous connection to something spiritual and unexplainable.

Adam: ‘I was recently at home reading a story about a girl who went to Residential School when the doorbell rang, when I went to answer the door, there wasn’t anyone there. This made me think about the power of stories and the fact that other things are influencing reality – not just us’.

It was a common refrain from the Teacher Candidates that despite their best efforts, they could not explain to other people what they had gone through – partly because they did not have the words, but also because they found some of the people they spoke to unable or unwilling to comprehend.

Adam: ‘People need to be really listening in order to receive a message or an explanation about the ICE experience’ – “it’s meant to get let out.”

Christie: ‘Stereotypes and misconceptions were brought up unexpectedly when discussing the experience with people, people worried that I had been preached upon and brainwashed’.

Josh: ‘The notion of a cult was brought up with people when I described the experience to them’.

Darcey: ‘Family and friends were scared for me before going on the experience, but I couldn’t get over how good it was’.

‘My partner was interested and supportive, but only one other person who I talked to actually “got it.”’

Having had the same experience as the others, Jaclyn questioned why it was that people just did not ‘get it’ when the ICE was explained to them.

Jaclyn: ‘How do you determine who’s ready to hear about certain teachings or experiences?’

If we can agree that the best way to understand is to experience something, we also need to acknowledge that not everyone is going to have the opportunity for an ICE, nor would they offer themselves to participate without some previous knowledge or interest. I can sympathize with the Teacher Candidates, who desperately wanted to tell people how much they enjoyed themselves but were met with some form or another of resistance. There is a great teaching that I received years ago from Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe Elders Dan and Mary-Lou Smoke – which I have heard repeated multiple times in many different ways – that says that ‘when the student is ready, the teacher will appear’. There is a great deal of variability in what that teacher might be, but this lesson has helped me in navigating my own life and learning – for me, it has mostly been about being open and aware of experience. It is also a great deal easier for me to talk about the types of feelings that come along with Aboriginal Education because I have developed the vocabulary to articulate my experiences; I have also had the time to develop a number of emotional attachments to my friends and teachers, and to the many teachings that Wendy and Mark shared with our group.

Emotional Attachments

I could only have hoped that the Teacher Candidates would have appreciated the ICE enough to form emotional connections and attachments to Wendy, Mark and their ceremonial community, but also to the teachings and the experience itself.

Josh: ‘There was an emotional attachment to the experience that was not detached as the “just facts” approach we often get in education’.

Once again, that is the benefit of immersive experiential programming. Out on the land, the facts were determining the best ways to split hardwood versus softwoods, or perhaps the process of starting a fire with only bark and twigs; or maybe it was something more abstract like how the ground feels sleeping inside a tipi, or the way the wind picks up at various points in the telling of creation stories. Everything we did on the land was imbued with positive feelings and energy, which Christie clearly noticed.

Christie: ‘During/after the experience there was an increase in positivity, energy, and motivation, followed by a diminishing’.

These attachments are positive, because they demonstrate a concept that I came across recently: *eudaimonia*, an Ancient Greek word that roughly translates to a state of happiness, contentment and ‘human flourishing’. That is one of the only ways that I can explain the feelings that I get when I am on the land, or listening to teachings and doing ceremony. It just feels good – it feels right; in the context of the ICE, you have to be present in the experience to get it.

Personal Changes

Environmental scientist Tony Andrady offers the following: “Change is the hallmark of nature. Nothing remains the same” (Weisman, 2007; 171). Whether we are aware of it or not, we are constantly changing. It was my hope that being on the land would help us see this more clearly. Even if it was just the energy that we get from the sun and the diminishment of energy we experience during the night, we

are connected to the natural environment. The Teacher Candidates expressed that they formed many attachments during the course of the ICE; some of them also found that despite the diminishment in energy and positivity, they came away from the experience changed. For Darcey, it was a fear of the unknown that she had to overcome – particularly participating in the sweat lodge ceremony.

Darcey: ‘I had a phobia about doing the sweat’.

However, Darcey found that despite her reticence, participating in ceremony helped her work through her anxiety. It allowed her to discover something unknown about herself.

Darcey: ‘I’ve become more self-aware from the experience’.

In Josh’s case, it was his immediate family who noticed how he had changed.

Josh: ‘My partner and family noticed that I was quieter, calmer, and more serene after the trip’.

While it was not the intent of the ICE to produce such feelings, these results were not unexpected. I would challenge anyone to go through the experience and not feel quieter, calmer and more serene afterwards. Jaclyn also reflected that she became more aware throughout the ICE, which led her to make connections to and between things that she might not have otherwise recognized.

Jaclyn: ‘I experienced a “heightened sense of awareness” from/during the experience and an increase in personal strength and confidence’.

‘After the experience a classmate opened up about spirituality, and I felt more able to respond – this opened up relationships and connections that I didn’t think were there’.

These comments were the product of 10 days’ reflections on the ICE. It was important for Wendy and Mark to see the Teacher Candidates again, and to help them process what they had been through. With Nadine’s absence, the closing circle on the land was the last time that the whole group was together. However, the debrief did provide an opportunity for the majority of the participants to get together again, and it was clear that they had grown closer throughout the process of the ICE. Whether it was learning something about Anishinaabe beliefs and ceremonies, or learning about one’s self, the ICE clearly had an impact.

Post-Interview

The structure of the post-interview was to have the Teacher Candidates reflect on the comments they made in the sharing circle that closed the ICE, giving them space to consider what those statements meant to them at the time, and also one month later when the post-interview took place. Like the debrief, the participants suggested that the ICE positively impacted them and acknowledged that Wendy and Mark's participation and facilitation was invaluable to the process. They reflected on being invited to do ceremony, and feeling wanted and useful during the experience. Taking time to reflect over the month, the Teacher Candidates also had a lot to say about the utility of the ICE, and how it could be applied to educational contexts. Finally, some of the participants reflected on who they are and how participating in the ICE influenced their identities.

The Impact of the ICE

When asked how they felt about participating in the ICE, the Teacher Candidates expressed a variety of thoughts and feelings. Adam, more than the other participants, articulated that he felt the ICE had a deep and meaningful impact on his life.

Adam: "I thought it was remarkable."

"As far as, I think, the experience fulfilling its purpose, I think it's done more than that, it's sort of reaffirmed what I think is important in life... integrating it into my life."

'It's not just about making it a part of your life, but integrating it into your life'.

I should not have been surprised that Christie was enthusiastic about the ICE, however she shared that one time was not quite enough for her.

Christie: "I would do it over and over again."

Some of the other participants shared their hesitancy around participating in the ICE, and even skepticism about what the purpose of the ICE was before they experienced it.

Nadine: "I really didn't know what I was going into."

Darcey: 'I was unsure of what I was supposed to be doing'.

However, both Nadine and Darcey found that they overcame those hesitations.

Darcey: ‘And all of the things that got me there, that had to happen “including my fear of even going at all.”

Nadine: “I like that it all wasn’t given to me in a handout.”

Josh also did not know what to expect out of the ICE, but found that what it ended up being was beyond his expectations.

Josh: “I don’t think I realized the emotional/spiritual impact it would have, I thought it was going to be more like a knowledge that I was going to gain, that I was going to know more about First Nation communities and Anishinaabe beliefs and teachings.”

“It ended up being so much more... I wasn’t expecting that.”

“It was something so different from other things that I’ve experienced, we experienced, it felt like so much in just those three days, in the grand scheme of things a short period of time, but I think we are also just impacted by it, you gain that emotional connection to it.”

That emotional connection that Josh describes is a holistic concept – attachment to the land, to the people, and the teachings. It is a somewhat foreign concept to us that we have an emotional connection to knowledge, however some of the other Teacher Candidates expressed a similar sentiment to Josh, discovering a new relationship to learning and knowing.

Nadine: ‘Because of my memory, I wish I could take notes, but “I remember 100% the emotion and the confidence and the security that I felt, but I can’t remember the words.”

Jaclyn: “I greatly admire this concept of honoring knowledge because I feel, in this day and age, there is an information overload, and we should ask ourselves, ‘What is valuable? What is useful and meaningful for peoples’ lives?’”

“It was nice to be able to blend in, sit by the fire and listen to peoples’ jokes and stories.”

Like Nadine, Darcey shared that she found it difficult to hold onto the teachings in her mind, struggling against losing the content, but still retaining the feeling and the message. This must have been challenging, particularly if the Teacher Candidates felt that they *should* be remembering what they learned. Those good feelings that the participants encountered are balanced with the moral/ethical aspect of the ICE, where we were engaging in a socially significant experience.

Darcey: “I feel like I need to hear them again, because they’re leaving me, and I don’t want them gone.”

The entire experience was something different for the Teacher Candidates, and that culture shock or overstimulation could have been a drawback for the participants, however Christie shared that she felt an unexplainable connection during the ICE that persisted.

Christie: “I feel very connected.”

“Just sitting in that tipi, besides how tired I was, I was just so engaged and I felt a really strong connection.”

“I felt really powerful when I came back from that weekend.”

Adam found that it was not just one thing that he was focusing on after the ICE – it was everything – which required a new perspective. Integrating this new perspective into one’s teaching requires practice, recurrent experience, in order to begin to regard familiar things/issues from different positions.

Adam: ‘Finding a new framework of looking at things, getting a better awareness of what’s happening around you, and how we’re all dependent on everything and each other’.

Part of Adam’s newfound perspective, an acknowledgement of the interrelatedness and interdependency between humans and the natural world, could not have been as easily demonstrated to the Teacher Candidates if we were not on the land – as both Jaclyn and Adam recognized:

Jaclyn: “I feel like, being at the community and recognizing their respect for nature, has made me more conscious of nature’s truer purpose, that it’s not just a part of the environment but provides for people in many ways, ways that typical science books do not explain.”

Adam: ‘Trying to spend more time in the moment, especially outside, “all the life that’s happening” and being more appreciative of that, which hopefully rubs off on others’.

Christie had an opportunity to explore the practical application of a nature-connected philosophy, which at first caused her some confusion when it came time to chop down trees for the building of the teaching lodge that we helped construct.

Christie: “Cutting those trees down, I had such a hard time, but Michael [a ceremonial helper] called me out... ‘I feel terrible cutting these trees down’, but he said ‘look what we’re making out of it, the trees are going to grow back, we’re giving thanks, that’s part of life.’”

‘Chopping wood to keep us warm instead of just turning up the thermostat really affected me, I’m more conscious of the things we use’.

“The earth is something more [than a place] for me to walk on now.”

With the natural environment – the land – being our platform, the Teacher Candidates found that they started to explore some deeper issues in their life, such as life’s meaning, one’s purpose and the vibrancy of life and living.

Christie: “I didn’t know what I wanted to do with my life, and I wasn’t feeling good about myself, but it made me feel important again, it lit a little fire inside of me again. ‘Alright, I’m here for a reason, don’t forget that.’”

“I felt like I could belong there, I felt welcomed and alive, almost more so than I’ve ever felt before. I felt alive, that’s what I felt. I was high on life, and I’d love to keep that feeling.”

Nadine: “It’s good to feel grounded again, and that was a very grounding time.”

‘Since this experience, I haven’t had any bouts of depression, or anxiety, which are something that I struggle with’.

Darcey also shared that the ICE had a personal impact on her, causing her to reflect on the ways she sees the world and interacts with others.

Darcey: “In general, it made me more calm” and ‘also inspired me to reconsider/rephrase negative thinking and comments that I make’.

‘I learned the benefit of kindness and being kind’, “that’s a really positive change that I’ve seen in myself, that I’d like to continue.”

‘I’m not worrying so much all the time.’

“The experience touched me in ways that other things haven’t necessarily influenced me.”

Participating in the ICE also led the Teacher Candidates to search out more information and experience. In addition to local opportunities, Adam shared that in taking a teaching position in Guatemala, he sees a great opportunity for him to build on his knowledge and experience with Indigenous people in Guatemala.

Adam: ‘I recently attended a TDSB [Toronto District School Board] Aboriginal theatre event with other ICE group members’ – the experience “pushed me to seek out that stuff more and participate more.”

‘After the ICE, I’m looking to get in touch with Indigenous teachers in Guatemala, where I’ll be teaching’

The ICE was impactful. I could have only hoped for the types of responses I received from the Teacher Candidates; I could not even have hoped for the particular ways in which the experience changed them. From Nadine disclosing that she had not felt anxious or depressed since the ICE, or Christie feeling alive and important for the first time in a long time – I could not have known. Having said that, I am not surprised. These are just two examples of the countless potential benefits of intercultural exchange, that people can find both simple and complex ways to not only augment their perspective, but to change their lives. None of it would have been possible, however, without Wendy and Mark. As mentioned earlier, in *Investing in Experiential, Land-Based Education*, Bernie Harder suggested that if you lose the connection to the land, you ‘lose yourself’. If we lose the connection to people like Wendy and Mark, we do not just lose ourselves, we become irreversibly incomplete – which I would suggest is far worse.

Elders as Facilitators

Wendy and Mark are what make Aboriginal Education Aboriginal. I asked for their guidance in establishing the ICE, and I understood that my role was two-fold: make space for them to do what they do, and record the process. “Making space includes inviting expert members of Other groups to teach in the academy. By ‘expert’ we mean expertise as defined by those groups themselves, not as defined by the academy. This means having people teach even if they do not have doctoral degrees” (Epp, 2003; 500). The issue of the inclusion of Elders and Traditional Teachers goes beyond content and curriculum; it has to be at the root of whatever Aboriginal Education policy or initiative one proposes – in fact, they are the roots. “To ensure appropriate standards are identified and adhered to, Aboriginal communities need to be asked not only to send elders to teach in the academy, but they also have to be asked and

involved in developing ways to evaluate students' learning" (Dumbrill and Green, 2008; 501). To do otherwise would be to suggest that those Elders or Traditional facilitators do not know what is best for the learners that they are working with. There would have been no ICE without Wendy and Mark, no immersion, no transformation, and no meaningful intercultural exchange.

Nadine: "It was really refreshing to be in a community with 'respectable' Elders who know what they believe and who aren't stupid for believing it, or ignorant and who conduct themselves in such a respectable manner."

Darcey: "I couldn't think of a time when someone had that much belief and conviction, and then shared it too."

'I'm grateful that they took the time to share with us, showed kindness and did it with an open heart, it therefore had an impact on me.'

Adam: "We need to give credit where it's due."

Christie: "Things just made sense."

Josh noted that the ICE created, and almost necessitated, a sense of intimacy between people – something that was unusual for him and in particular, how quickly this process took place.

Josh: "It was really great to see how, the environment we had there... there were other people there that I hadn't met the day before, but with what we had going on there, we connected to each other in a much quicker way that we normally would have in another environment."

'When I'm somewhere that I don't know people I can be very quiet, but here there was no warm-up period, but I didn't need it.'

'You get to know things about people you wouldn't get to know otherwise.'

Developing a sense of how the ceremonial community operates, Nadine and Jaclyn reflected on what it meant to them to learn and then observe cultural protocols; particularly when it came to the Teacher Candidates needing to demonstrate their capacity or understanding.

Nadine: "I didn't feel like I was put on the spot for interrupting, it was just – "Wait, wait for a minute, there will be a time."

Jaclyn: "I really liked the idea that the teacher delegates responsibilities to the student and this was an opportunity for the student to demonstrate that s/he can be trusted, especially with knowledge, when the knowledge is valuable and sacred."

“We, as Teacher Candidates, should be there to recognize and respect the people of the community. To take every opportunity to learn from them, and learn in the sense of experiencing and sharing their lives, not ours. We should remember that historically, and currently, settlers have centered themselves, and we need to take the extra effort in stepping out of the spotlight.”

The holistic way in which Wendy and Mark teach is not just an acknowledgement of all of the aspects of a person – if someone is familiar with the most basic medicine wheel that proliferates many educational contexts – they teach acknowledging all of creation, past, present and future. It can be difficult to fully appreciate this as we are so used to Western knowledge, which is linear, singular and objective and manifests itself in a social hierarchy (Little Bear, 2000; 82). To even say that Wendy and Mark have PhDs in Traditional Knowledge would miss the mark, there is no comparable in Western culture – and you will not find Wendy and Mark holding themselves up for their knowledge either.

Because of the fundamentally different ways in which Aboriginal knowledges operate, Darcey and Christie reflected that at points it was difficult to focus and follow along with the teachings.

Darcey: “My brain had to completely re-focus itself... I adjusted but it was really funny right at the beginning, I couldn’t even gather what was being said.”

“It was hard to focus, but also I feel eventually I didn’t have to look focused after a while, and that actually helped me focus more, instead of looking someone in the eye and nodding, which are all things we are taught to do, and are good, but for three hours, you’re going to need to readjust.”

Christie: “I don’t know how they pass these stories on, because I listened so intently. As soon as one story ends, a new one begins. It was so hard to filter, so, I was really struggling with that and trying to pay attention as much as I could, but I can tell you, I probably forgot half the things they said already. But I definitely did retain the overall messages, I think I was trying to listen too intently on specific things.”

This type of learning was more familiar for Nadine, where she reflected that she saw similarities in the ways in which Wendy and Mark and another Traditional Teacher had shared their teachings – and began to draw connections to those different teachings.

Nadine: “She taught in a completely different way, and “being in that tipi with Mark and Wendy has brought meaning and connections.” It’s a web with only a few strands, but I feel like I’m building a web of understanding’.

Without speaking for them, or analyzing their motivations, it is clear that Wendy and Mark found facilitating the ICE and guiding this dissertation were important enough to dedicate their time and space to. In part, this speaks to “the function of Aboriginal values and customs [which] is to maintain the relationships that hold creation together. If creation manifests itself in terms of cyclical patterns and repetitions, then the renewal of those patterns is all-important” (Little Bear, 2000; 81). Jaclyn and Christie reflected on how thankful they were for the opportunity to have Wendy and Mark share with us during the ICE, acknowledging the value of what they taught us:

Jaclyn: “On a more personal topic, I feel honored to have Wendy and Mark share their traditions with us and this overall sense of the importance of knowing one’s culture and community. I fully acknowledge and admire the strength and courage that FNMI peoples have had, and still have, for their communities, and this was something that I have personally paralleled to my own culture and community. I have been inspired to work with my own community while continuing to follow the growth of FNMI communities to see how they have overcome, and still overcoming, their obstacles within and around their communities. I feel the lessons and learnings are more valuable than ever, as I see how it pertains to myself and my own community, and this is something that I am glad to have recognized.”

Christie: ‘I was inspired by their motivation and listening to their stories about how we all have a place here’.

Darcey related that one of the biggest impacts of the ICE and working with our Elders was the way belief was foundational to Wendy and Mark’s life and their teachings.

Darcey: “Growing up in a very non-religious, non-spiritual, non-anything family, that it’s interesting, weird in a way to see someone so committed to their belief, even if their belief was not spiritual or religious, any belief. It has been rare, in my experience, to see someone so committed, with such conviction to that belief. That’s why I commented on it, because it’s so powerful, it’s on you, you’re in it, you’re sitting there.”

“It opened up my eyes to more possibilities of what I could do, even myself. I mean, what can I do? What am I really here for?... is there something I can do that has more impact? Or, is there something I believe in enough to commit to that and do it?”

Despite feeling moved by the conviction and belief that Wendy and Mark expressed during the ICE, Christie found it difficult to understand some of their stories or teachings, likely because they did not easily align with Western epistemological and metaphysical rules.

Christie: ‘I questioned the reality of the stories, there were elements that seem fantastical’.

“I feel like I need to justify on some level, I can’t just accept it for what it is. I feel like there’s something I always need to be skeptical about, but why? I don’t understand why.”

This questioning, of being at odds with what one believes to be true is one of the greatest possible outcomes of the ICE. However confusing particular teachings were, Christie acknowledged that in general, what Wendy and Mark were teaching us was perhaps ‘more real’ than other philosophies and life teachings that she had previously encountered. This could have been because of her Indigenous ancestry, or perhaps just because the teachings resonated with her on some level.

Christie: “It was something more real to me... I felt like I could make a connection to what they were saying, I can actually believe in what they’re saying.”

Recently passed Kanien’kehaka lawyer, author and activist Patricia Monture (2008) shared with us the value of storytelling: “storytelling traditions are very common in our Indigenous nations, and through our stories we learn who we are. These stories teach about identity and responsibility” (Cannon and Sunseri, 2011; xvii). This is one of the many fundamentally important ways Wendy and Mark’s participation made the ICE what it was. Their knowledge and authority ensured that all of the possible ways an intercultural exchange program could have become problematic did not occur – such serious issues as appropriation, exoticization, and racism were possibilities but never probable under the care and guidance of Wendy and Mark and their helpers. As a way to diffuse these concerns, the tables were turned on the Teacher Candidates early and often – for them to reflect on their intentions, motivations and misunderstandings.

Cree Saulteaux Dunne Zah legal scholar Val Napoleon suggests that “many cross-cultural sensitivity training programs are designed solely to educate settlers about Indigenous people without any reciprocal sharing by the former about their own history, cultural practices, world views, and values” and perpetuates the ‘Aboriginal people under glass’ phenomenon (Regan, 2010; 33). Wendy and Mark avoided this by simply being who they are, but it needs to be acknowledged that for as much as they were responsible for facilitating the ICE, the final responsibility rested with us to be respectful.

Doing Ceremony

Basil Johnston writes that if Aboriginal people are to be learned about, a deeper appreciation needs to be enacted, which can only truly be informed by experience. “If the Native Peoples and their heritage are to be understood, it is their beliefs, insights, concepts, ideals, values, attitudes, and codes that must be studied” (1976; 7). Within the ICE, this also included language, song and ceremony – whether that was handling medicines, participating (or not participating) in a sweat, or simply learning to give thanks in Anishinaabemowin.

When we were building the teaching lodge, there was an opportunity for Darcey to offer tobacco, something that she reflected on in depth – more so than any other topic that we discussed in the closing interview. It is intriguing to hear how Darcey rationalized and almost intellectualized the prayers and spiritual components – the ceremony – of offering tobacco and giving thanks.

Darcey: “When I was doing it, and sort of saying all of the things we wanted out of the lodge, ‘May it last as long as we need it, may it be comfortable’... it was really different for me to take that opportunity to actually take that time and do it with meaning. I knew it had meaning, whether it was just to me, but it didn’t feel like just to me, it’s for everyone, which was very special to take part in. Which I connect now as I’m saying it, more to that community feel and that everyone has a reason to be there and we all need each other to complete this lodge, and the importance of that. That most of us don’t have that sense of community.”

“It takes me back to trying to teach a student about tobacco, but [commercial tobacco] is all that comes to mind. Well, you know, there’s reasons, for example if you’re on a long voyage, it suppresses hunger, whatever you’re trying to teach them, but [commercial tobacco] is what comes to the brain. And then, how many other stereotypes and things in the news and all the other stuff that you have to fight against to get down to...it’s like you have to clean up first, and then get down into the teaching of whatever you’re teaching.”

“I think it was actually physically doing it, taking it, crouching down, saying things I wanted, that we all wanted for this lodge and then putting it in and also that being done, ‘Okay now that part’s done’, and then moving on to the next one. Something about the whole ritual of doing it that was, again, something that I’d never done, but just the value of doing it, and it was such a simple thing. The value of doing such a simple thing seems so much greater than that action.”

“It is essentially bringing meaning to something that you’re doing in that moment, we go through so many things where we don’t even think about it, we just do it because we’re supposed to or because we’re paid to, or whatever it is. But, I think there’s value in certain things, I think, in stopping and thinking about what you’re doing is important.”

For Jaclyn, it was what she was *not* doing that she found to be most important. Being on her moon-time afforded her not only the opportunity to observe and reflect, but to have something so internal, so inherently personal become a point of learning and acceptance in the community. The other female Teacher Candidates did not have the same option to experience this ceremony during the ICE; I am just so thankful that Jaclyn responded to it in the way she did.

Jaclyn: “I feel especially honored that I was not allowed to enter the sweat lodge. For me, this was acknowledgement that I was a part of the community, a small way of welcoming me into the community, and that I was to respect their traditions and ways of living.”

Before the ICE, even Wendy and Mark were not certain that we would be able to do a sweat, but I am incredibly thankful that the Teacher Candidates had that opportunity. Sitting in the tipi can be immersive, observing Anishinaabe culture through storytelling and connecting to the land – it is another thing entirely, a more immersive thing, to be able to participate in a sweat. Christie and Adam reflected their thoughts on this privilege:

Christie: ‘I felt freezing cold in the sweat, I had chattering teeth, goosebumps and I was shivering’ – Mark said, ‘that’s just the spirits’... “it was really emotional in there, especially at the end, giving thanks.”

Adam: “It’s no longer just something that you hear about or read about, it makes it more real, makes it more meaningful.”

‘Until someone goes through it, they won’t really appreciate it’.

I cannot say for certain, but I perceived the sweat to be almost like a consolidation for the Teacher Candidates, a culminating activity through which they could validate and consecrate the whole experience. I know that the participants would have said otherwise, but it is just the immersive and impactful nature of the sweat lodge. However, Darcey participated in just as meaningful a ceremony; Jaclyn performed perhaps the most important ceremony that ever existed. There were so many things that we did that weekend, large and small, that were ceremonial and sacred – and I believe that those are the things that will stick with the Teacher Candidates longest, those things that made them feel

connected and special, part of something greater than themselves. For me, that is the meaning of Joseph Boyden's quote at the beginning of this paper – every aspect of creation, every experience contains medicine strong enough to heal our individual and collective ailments – even if that ailment is ignorance.

Feeling Wanted

Those positive feelings that the Teacher Candidates reported were partly in response to them not simply being passive recipients in the ICE. Even though we spent a considerable amount of time listening to teachings, we also worked the land, prepared food and kept the fires going in order to keep ourselves warm. Christie expressed that she was not used to this level of trust or responsibility so soon after meeting someone and being in a new and unfamiliar space and place.

Christie: ‘Sleeping in the tipi threw me off guard, I very much need my own space, but after the first 20 minutes I just got over it, and I loved it’.

“I felt like I could let go, that I didn't have to worry about anything when I was there.”

“I felt like I was needed.”

“Not until that weekend did I have very much belief in myself...I constantly feel like I'm chasing myself” and ‘I don't know what it was about the weekend, but it brought me back into reality’.

“I was a little nervous at first, to be amongst the Elders, because you're a stranger, you're so naïve and you don't know what to do, what not to do, but I think I quickly got over it... it's out of our comfort zone a little bit, but they make you welcome within minutes, like ‘Oh hey, can you pass me that, or go cut wood for us? Sure, I can do that, thanks for trusting me with it!’ I was very humbled with how much they trusted us right off the bat.”

For Josh, he saw the connections between the tasks that we were asked to perform, and the needs of the group – and gained a great deal of confidence from taking up those responsibilities.

Josh: ‘We can't build the teaching lodge if we didn't have hot water for the dishes because I didn't chop wood for the fire.’

“Everyone had their tasks when they were there... everyone worked together to complete a goal.”

“The longer I spent chopping wood, the better I got at it, and the more I was able to contribute to the group.”

Like Josh, Nadine appreciated that everyone had a role in the group and the ceremonial community, even the children.

Nadine: ‘Having the children around fast-forwarded me into feeling like I was part of the community’.

“Being appreciated for whatever it is that you bring to the group, is so much more beautiful than a typical classroom.”

Unlike the mainstream classroom, where everyone is required to perform the same tasks up to the same standard, the ICE demonstrated that this approach does not hold up in Aboriginal Education. Some tasks and responsibilities were broken down and assigned by gender, such as chopping wood, which did not preclude the women from chopping wood – you should have seen how excited Christie was using the log splitter. Other tasks, such as cooking were mostly done by the women that were not on their moon-time. Just by using these two examples, the men became protectors – keepers of the fire, and the women became nurturers – preparers of food and sustenance. None of the participants could have had the same experience; you could say the same for those in the classroom however. Even though all of the conditions are in place to produce sameness, we are all unique in our life practice and perspective. Therefore, we acknowledged that everyone in the ICE had a different role, whether you were man or woman, young or old, Aboriginal or not – and we contributed to a collective goal while reflecting on our own personal growth.

The Utility of the ICE

When I approached Wendy and Mark about bringing Teacher Candidates onto their land, doing teachings and ceremonies, I had to believe that this experience would have an impact on them – that it would be meaningful and useful. Having observed and experienced the ICE, putting myself in the shoes of the Teacher Candidates, quite honestly, I am not sure what I would make of the whole thing. When I

made my recruiting pitch at OISE, I told the students in the Central Option that this would be a great experience that would solidify their understanding of Aboriginal Education theory and practice. So, in that regard, I think my aspirations were well met. The greatest limitation of the ICE is that only six people participated. If all of the 9000 graduating Teacher Candidates in Ontario had taken part in something like this, imagine the impact. Whatever else I say about Aboriginal Education and experiential intercultural exchange in this dissertation, the utility of the ICE is that it happened at all.

Josh: “The more people who had these experiences and talked about them, the more people you’re able to reach.”

Adam: “For me, I need to go through something, go through and experience... so when it comes to reaching other people who haven’t gone through that... it would involve going through an experience such as I did.”

Darcey suggests that the value of experiencing something like the ICE is that these issues are glossed over at best, and obscured or hidden at worst.

Darcey: “Opening your eyes to something you didn’t see before... like it was hidden somewhere and no one bothered to tell you about it.”

“I think it would probably be beneficial for everyone.”

“Everyone should see something that powerful” that ‘should strengthen what you already have of your own.’

When we learn something this powerful or shocking, that goes beyond our original conception of Aboriginality, it can spur us into action. As Adam relates, one needs to question what they have learned, and perhaps unlearn it for not only their own betterment, but that of others as well.

Adam: “What ‘history’ has taught us is very limited in some ways, to really understand something, you have to start deconstructing the knowledge you have and look past what you think you know about things.”

“I definitely feel a responsibility at this point, I feel like this isn’t something just for me... more people need to be aware... people still have this misinterpretation/misrepresentation of Indigenous people in general, they don’t build a relationship enough with a group of people to understand them.”

‘When I think of all the knowledge I gained, it’s things that we need to work up to anyway... environmentally, socially’.

This reframing or deconstruction is hard work, a cognitive restructuring. One might not think that Aboriginal knowledges, cultures or histories have much to do with their daily lives, but non-Aboriginal identities are built upon the absence of Aboriginal ones. As Adam mentions, we need to challenge ourselves to question our privileges and to risk the discomfort that goes along with stepping outside of our identities.

Adam: “It’s not enough just to talk.”

“If you want to learn a language, really, you need to immerse yourself, you have to go over that plateau.”

‘When you’re out there, with the bugs, you can lose focus, it makes it more difficult to concentrate’.

Those mosquitoes truly were distracting, however one can look at them as a teaching or a metaphor for the various ways we can get distracted by our privileges and to revert back to old ways of thinking. As Josh mentions, this type of focus takes practice, quite literally and figuratively he notes that:

Josh: “We were building something.”

Part of that building is actually deconstructing or tearing down what we thought to be true. We cannot unlearn our privileges, or the colour of our skin, but we can become more mindful of the politics of our identities and the knowledges that are associated with those identities. Josh shared with me a rather thorough evaluation of what he perceived the problem to be – ignorance – and what some of the negative outcomes of that ignorance can be.

Josh: “Being in Central Option, and having a focus on learning about the way that things are, even if you’re looking through a legal lens... status cards, blood quantum... or the fact that within my lifetime they got rid of the last Residential School.... That’s just mind-blowing to me. It’s obvious that a lot of those values, or ways of thinking that some people think are long-gone are obviously not that long-gone.”

“Just the other day, I showed pictures of the trip to the Grade 3 students on the last day of my practicum, because they had learned about First Nations earlier in the year before my internship... I had no idea what they had learned but I told them that I went on this experience and I showed them some pictures of the tipi we slept in, ‘This is the land, this is

building the thing’, and I had kids going: ‘Wait. They still exist?’ They thought they had died out, like the dinosaurs.”

“If you change the source of what those negative perceptions are, then those negative perceptions will go away.”

“It’s a lack of knowledge... there’s an ignorance.”

‘We need to “change the perceptions of the people, those perceptions all come from an ignorance of the way things are and the way things were and the impact that that had on people.”

It is true that those perceptions need to change, but ideally they need to be changed before Grade 3 or better yet, never be established in the first place. The solution is not a unit on European explorers and the advent of Thanksgiving; what does that even hope to achieve? The solution is more of an ethical approach to teaching and learning that may at various points not have anything to do with Aboriginal people. A significant aspect of Aboriginal Education is learning about ourselves, how we relate and what our responsibilities are in an intercultural nation state like Canada.

Christie: ‘We don’t get community values anymore – but we can do it in the classroom’.

There are ways that Aboriginal Education philosophy and values can be used as tools in the classroom, that go beyond differentiated instruction methods for various learning styles – that are not reductionist or romantic.

Christie: ‘In my internship, we did do some mini-circles with kids who had been misbehaving’

And while I have made it clear that I do not believe that curricular reform is exclusively the way forward, it is necessary to ensure that whatever curriculum and content exists and is used is accurate, respectful, relevant, and appropriate. However, rather than wait for EDU or the school board to implement changes, there is space in the current curriculum for teachers to bring in new resources and perspectives.

Josh: ‘Making small changes in curriculum could have a huge impact. It’s a very important first step’.

When it comes to Aboriginal Education, we have to remember that the *how* and *why* sometimes matter more than the *what*. The type of facts that students learn in school about Aboriginality is not necessarily as important as how those facts are transmitted, and why. Jaclyn lets us know that the how is experience, but Josh explains that the why is more difficult to nail down.

Jaclyn: “I understand, from a teacher’s perspective, that it’s okay to paraphrase or confirm some things, but I feel, or I think what it is, for FNMI peoples, the transfer of knowledge is not necessarily asking questions but absorbing and experiencing knowledge. So the simple acts of listening and reflecting. Seeing how I feel when certain stories are shared and making personal connections to my life or what I already know. Making implications from the stories that were shared and getting answers that are not directly taken from the responses I receive. Figure out the hidden meanings. Honing in on my memory skills and focus on the actual meanings behind the stories. Being articulate with what I share, when I am given that opportunity. Making connections with what others are sharing. Being courageous with sharing and showing your true voice. Revealing your vulnerability.”

“If anything, teacher’s college should’ve deeply emphasized cultural sensitivity for Teacher Candidates. It is definitely a systemic issue, where we are told to respect others’ cultures, yet we are not taught how, nor is it modeled at teacher’s college.”

Josh: “It’s valuable for both teachers and students to go on these trips’ but “the teachers aren’t going to teach it to the students if they don’t know about it and they don’t see the importance of it.”

When Christie was asked if we could have had the same experience in the classroom, she responded emphatically:

Christie: “Oh, heck no! No! Not at all. Not at all. I wanted to stay out there.”

‘Learning by doing and experiencing was better rather than having it regurgitated’ and “if I don’t experience things, it’s literally in one ear and out the other.”

Hopefully these six Teacher Candidates see the importance of Aboriginal Education, and can acknowledge that when it comes to talking about Aboriginal people with their students that they will not necessarily reach for the history books.

Nadine: “The classroom is not the only place to teach; it’s not the only way to teach.”

Darcey: ‘I think there’s real value in storytelling and the oral aspect of teaching and learning’.

And when it comes to bringing spirituality into the classroom, Nadine shared that rather than being exclusionary, it can represent something very natural and perhaps more appropriate than the denial that secularism can often promote.

Nadine: ‘We need to acknowledge what’s obvious to most of the world, which is a spiritual existence’.

“When we’re in touch with our emotions, and our beings, there’s a whole level that we’re all communicating on.”

The ICE promoted a sense of connectedness for many of the Teacher Candidates, whether one would call that spirituality or not, it was clear that they felt an emotional clarity when they were out on the land. This could have been due to the lack of technological distractions, or perhaps because we were consistently engaged in tasks that were necessary for our continued existence – physically and culturally. This was the imperative nature of the ICE, whether it was making food and fire, or learning about Anishinaabe creation stories, ethics and values. Each of these experiences was focused on making us whole and complete, as people and as Canadians. Ultimately, however, these feelings can be transient – requiring consistent focus and experience to maintain its permanence.

Darcey: “The longer I spend away from that weekend, the more everything kind of drifts away, all the concrete stuff, the teachings are starting to filter away.”

“I think that things have gotten so abstract, depending on where you are, if you’re in the city and you don’t get out into the woods, or you’ve never planted a garden, you actually have no idea that you have to plant seeds to make things grow... I forget that lack of understanding, that things just get away from us, out of context.”

“All of the things that are happening around us, to make us have the things we have, and live the way we live, they just go by, we don’t actually know what’s happening. I think if we did, we’d be better off. I think we can do better, as a society.”

“My experience was very positive, very interesting, very eye-opening, really neat too even though we didn’t get to finish the lodge, actually being able to participate in that... all those little interactions, and again, that’s not even stuff you can structure. And those types of things will probably sit with me longer.”

Those unstructured and nuanced interactions with people, but also with nature validate the ICE as a viable learning tool. For Darcey this is where she found her greatest and most meaningful learning took place. When I asked Jaclyn what it meant to be out on the land during the experience, she had this to say:

Jaclyn: “That the nature around me is my classroom, not a camping site. That this is someone’s home and community, and that I am to respect their land. I greatly enjoyed the discussions of appreciating what nature gives to people and that we are to honor nature by following through with the traditions of the community. It gave more meaning to objects around me.”

For all of the Teacher Candidates, whether they make it out to Wendy and Mark’s land again, or become teachers in the formal education system, they have something to build on.

Nadine: ‘I feel like I have the experiences now to go back and connect to’.

Memory can be an important and powerful tool; it is the only thing that we can always carry with us. The utility of the ICE was that it demonstrated that the foundation of Aboriginal Education is our memories, not necessarily of facts but of experiences and feelings. The ICE gave the Teacher Candidates something to ‘go back and connect to’ – though attempting to have their friends and family understand those experiences is another thing entirely.

Debriefing with Friends and Family

This is something that I anticipated being a challenge for the participants. I expected that they would feel as though some aspects of the ICE were indescribable, and that some of the people in their lives would resist hearing about how important the experience was; I only hope that those challenges did not deter the Teacher Candidates from seeking more perspectives and experiences. I know that I have felt silenced and shamed for the work that I do at various points over the last 10 years, particularly early on in my learning – I was so excited and inspired that I wanted to say and do everything possible to get people to see things how I learned to see them. So, I was not surprised to hear the participants talk about their difficulties explaining what the ICE meant to them.

Christie: “Everyone was pretty supportive, I got a few ‘What?! Are you nuts? You did what this weekend? You’re still alive?’ and I was like, ‘Yeah, it’s only 45mins away from here’... the hardest part about talking to people is actually being able to verbalize what I went through and the feelings that I went through. I was on such a high that weekend that I couldn’t get it out of my system. When people called to ask how it was, all I could say was that it was amazing, I can’t explain, but it was amazing. The most heartwarming experience I’ve ever had. Everything we did was amazing, every part of the community. It felt nice to be wanted.”

“When I went to go talk to people about it, about my weekend, as I went on I started getting less and less able to voice how I felt.”

Where Christie described the feelings she had during and after the ICE, Josh attempted to explain the ICE through comparison – even if the only way that people could end up relating to it was that we went camping. However, Josh comes up against the issue of trying to describe the ICE in practical terms, but all along he wanted to communicate a feeling, his feelings.

Josh: “I can talk, in a literal sense, about what I did. I went and chopped some firewood, I helped build the teaching lodge, there were saplings that were put in the ground, there was a sweat ceremony where this thing was really dark and really hot, a pitch-black sauna, things like that. But that, on it’s own... I can’t explain to them what I got out of it, and how that experience, all that put together, it’s one of those things where it’s more than the sum of its parts, and so, I can’t really explain how it impacted me and made me feel and why. It’s more than just the fact that I went out and chopped wood, and had fun camping, because in any way you describe it, it just sounds like you went camping.”

“It’s different because of the context that it was in, it was accompanied with these teachings and the sweat lodge, even though it’s similar to a sauna in a literal/physical sense, you’re experiencing heat from the steam, but sort of where your mind and your spirit goes is different. I can’t explain all of the teachings that I heard, and how it was that I felt when we were in the sweat lodge listening to the teachings, in that sort of meditative state that you get into when you’re listening to the songs or the drumming and everything, it’s an experience, it’s really hard to communicate that with someone. It’s a feeling. How do you communicate a feeling to someone?”

How do you communicate a feeling? More importantly, how do you receive communication about a feeling? This is the issue that Darcey encountered, she related that only one person that she talked to about the ICE really ‘got it’, and that mostly had to do with that person being an open and receptive listener.

Darcey: “The person who “got it” has an “open personality and open heart” who listens rather than waiting for a chance to speak’.

“I feel like when I was talking to other people, they asked me, but they didn’t really ask me about what was happening – they weren’t listening.”

“It makes me think about what I do when my friends are talking, in response, and do I really listen to what they’re having to say? Or just people in general, am I actually listening?”

There are a number of differences between hearing and listening however. Darcey makes an incredible point, not only about being passive when in conversation, but about us hearing what we want to hear when people talk to us. Christie and Josh discovered this when they tried to explain the ICE, and were met with resistance.

Christie: “She said: ‘they tried to brainwash you’... she had this whole vision that they were this mean cult trying to push their views on everyone.”

Josh: “Because I enjoyed it so much, and it was this amazing thing, it was like I wanted to defend it if someone said something about it. After that whole experience, my first day back with me being very quiet and someone made a joke about me being brainwashed or something, they didn’t mean it, it was just a joke, but I felt defensive.”

Where Josh talks about defending the ICE, I think that is a fairly accurate way to describe the way an Ally has to approach this topic with difficult learners, as it were. Much like a debate, you are often faced with someone with an opposed perspective that has a whole roster of ideas and reasons why Aboriginal Education is not valuable, not useful and not impactful. Unfortunately, for the Teacher Candidates, they are not necessarily equipped to make this debate a fair one.

Josh: “The frustration of wanting to explain it, but you can’t. You want people to see the value in it, but they really can’t without experiencing it.”

“You can kinda see that people didn’t really get it, from what your description is of it, they don’t see it as something as valuable as you see it.”

“Some people I’ve spoken to, they acknowledge that ‘I don’t totally understand what it is that you’re saying, but I can see that it’s had an impact on you. You’re telling me it’s amazing, so I trust your judgment.’ Other people say, ‘That’s something that I’d like to experience’... it is something you need to experience, you can vocalize that it’s something that might have an impact on you, but you have to trust.”

Trust is a word that I never uttered before, during or after the ICE, but it is foundational to the work we did. The Teacher Candidates obviously had to trust me, had to trust Wendy and Mark, and the

process. They had to trust that we were not just going camping in the woods, that we were not simply going to simply consume and appropriate Wendy and Mark's teachings. I wonder though, if I had told those students in the Central Option what they would be experiencing, if any more or less people would have signed up? Nadine related that the ICE ended up sounding boring when she described it to people.

Nadine: 'A couple people said "how was that immersive experience?" And I don't really know what to say, so I say a few things, and they ask "what did you actually do?" Well, we sat around in a tipi and listened to teachings and we ate some food and we sat around in a tipi and listened to teachings. "Sounds kind of boring." These are the interactions that I've had, but I have a list of at least five people who want to go experience for themselves'.

For whatever benefits the Teacher Candidates took from the ICE, the reality is that after the weekend they went back to their 'normal' lives, making it difficult to keep the experience and teachings intact. I liken it to keeping a candle lit in a snowstorm; one needs to create a shelter through the building of experience. It should not be our goal though to shelter our knowledge and experience, but rather to be able to express it freely and openly. The greatest limitation of the ICE and Aboriginal Education is that most Canadians will not have enough opportunities to have Immersive Cultural Experiences. Unfortunately, such an absence of experience is precisely the reason we find ourselves in our current state of ignorance and unknowing. A new ethic, informed by relationship and responsibility, is required to produce change sufficient enough to alter our current approach.

Identity

That fire, the one that burns inside of us, is strongly tied to our self-concept and cultural/social identities – it also represents our conviction to uphold our treaty responsibilities. We can only really know who we are by knowing who we are not – which necessitates an understanding of Aboriginality in order to understand ourselves. On the topic of Aboriginal identity, Leroy Little Bear shares that:

Given the opportunity, a culture attempts to mold its members into ideal personalities. The ideal personality in Native American cultures is a person who shows kindness to all, who puts the group ahead of individual wants and desires, who is a generalist, who is steeped in spiritual and ritual knowledge – a person who goes about daily life and approaches 'all his or

her relations' in a sea of friendship, easygoing-ness, humour and, good feelings (Alfred, 2005; 10).

While it was not the purpose of the ICE to have the Teacher Candidates compare themselves to Wendy and Mark and their beliefs, it was instructive to have them be immersed in a way of being and doing that was fundamentally different to their own. Except for Christie, who identifies as Métis, the ICE was intended to strengthen the participants' non-Aboriginal identities.

However, for Christie, she did not disclose to Wendy and Mark or the other participants that she was Métis (which does not mean that Wendy and Mark did not know), the biggest reason being that she was insecure with how much she knew about her ancestry and heritage. I think Christie was being too hard on herself however, because how much do a great many of us know about where we come from?

Christie: "I felt bad [being ignorant] for some reason, I don't know, maybe it was my complicity to society... because I've never done anything to provide any support for Aboriginal people in my life. They're inviting me, and I have no idea anything about their hardships, and I almost felt guilty a little bit. And having my great-grandmother being [Mi'kmaq], I feel like I should know that part of my history and I don't."

"I need to even do more readings, do more research, make myself more aware".

"I still don't know what [my identity] means, ok, it's because of my blood? I don't act any different, I don't present myself as such."

"I let my ignorance and not knowing get the best of me. I was too embarrassed... I think it was the worry about being questioned, 'What about this? Where does your family come from?'"

"To me, I'm a special person, most of my friends can't say that they hold Status, I almost feel empowered by that."

Christie shared that her family was very supportive of her looking into her roots, and that she is a registered Citizen of the Métis Nation of Ontario. Darcey, however, explains that Aboriginality does not really have a place amongst her circle of friends – but that is not going to keep her from looking into her own family history.

Darcey: "On a larger scale, I don't often interact with First Nations or Aboriginal people, at least not that I know of. I mean, I have a pretty small group of people that I generally interact with on a daily/weekly basis... it's not like we're chatting about it because we don't like to talk about

things like that, so I think that it's something that I'm more keeping in mind, and I think it's also something personally that I want to look more into my family history, just to sort of...well I'm always curious about it, but now I feel like I have a reason to ask."

Part of who we are is what we choose to believe in, our religious or spiritual traditions. Something that became clear to Nadine through the ICE and her year at OISE was the role that Christianity had in Canada's history and in relationship to Aboriginal people, which led to feelings of guilt, shame and contrition.

Nadine: "I'm the product of a Christian religion, the good and the bad of it; I'm the product of a North American education system... and this year at OISE learning about all of the things that have been said and done in the name of Christianity..."

'Oppressors need to be contrite and be willing to submit in some ways in order to move forward'.

Jaclyn questions the productive value of guilt, aligning with what Roger Simon explains as Settler people ending up 'feeling good about feeling bad' (2009; 6). However, that does not necessarily leave her with a clear idea of where or how she fits in here.

Jaclyn: "Admitting one's guilt as a Settler. We've learned in class *not* to speak in such a manner, as FNMI peoples have heard too often of such guilt, and Settlers are rather placing themselves as the vulnerable ones, which is not constructive to acknowledging FNMI peoples" (emphasis original).

"I am still unsure of my position as a racialized Settler of this land, as I was not born here, and I feel it is easy for me to go back to my ancestral roots of my birthplace but I struggle with my 'origins' of being Canadian, as I find out more about this European focus around the curriculum, something that I grew up with, as a child, and I feel anxious about this process of unlearning, which I know I must do, but feel unsupported in doing so [in the sense of a lack of people around me in doing a similar thing]."

Just as I opened up the pre-experience interview with a question about who each of the Teacher Candidates were and where they came from, I asked the same question during the post-interview. While the majority of the comments in this chapter demonstrated how the Teacher Candidates changed, and how the ICE influenced them, only Adam explicitly shared that how he looks at his own identity is much different.

Adam: "Who I am and where I come from has changed, it's "fascinating how it all came together."

Adam identified strongly with Central America, Christie shared that part of her family comes from here, Darcey acknowledged that her family has been in Canada for many generations, Jaclyn identifies as being from Hong Kong, Josh comes from Portugal, and while Nadine was born in Canada, she was raised in various parts of Africa. These six people come from all over the world, but one thing that unites them is that they live in Canada. Whether they identify themselves as Canadian or not, they are the beneficiaries of a colonial system that has placed limitations on Aboriginal identity, and constrained the expression and growth of Aboriginal cultures. Where we come from is critically important, but part of that is acknowledging where we currently find ourselves and how we define ourselves in relation to those people who are Indigenous to this place. The ICE has been one method of attempting to answer these questions of relationality, respect and responsibility.

Correspondence

Jaclyn and Josh both corresponded with me a couple of weeks after the post-experience interview with some of their final reflections on the ICE. For Jaclyn, most of her comments concerned the personal and perspective changes that she experienced, as well as acknowledging the limitation of the ICE being only a two-day project.

Jaclyn: “I don’t think I ever had that care and gentleness towards nature, as I have for people, and it sometimes felt like I was communicating with it.”

“In terms of what I continue to think about from the immersive experience, I’ve taken the initiative to learn more about my own family and my ancestral roots.”

“I became less frustrated and more used to receiving answers that don’t necessarily respond to my questions, as people have their own reasons on what they want to share with me.”

“Two days may still be the honeymoon phase for some people and it may take a longer time for people to truly sink in to the experience.”

Josh reflected on some of the personal changes that he experienced, but also his thoughts on the utility of the immersive learning opportunity.

Josh: “I knew that like the rest of this year, it would be an excellent learning experience, but one that would be more impactful and that I would learn a lot more in a shorter period of time. I also personally believe that immersion is the best way to learn about language and culture and that was exactly what this program provided.”

“I was so pumped for this opportunity that I was writing an email to apply for this program before Andrew even left the room.”

“The fact that everyone had a job to do and we were all working together, as well as the fact that other people from the community (that weren’t directly a part of the immersion program) were coming and going every day meant that it felt like we were a part of the community.”

“Being out in the bush and connected with nature for a few days I found that it was a really changing weekend. I felt more introspective, calmer, more connected for a while after. I’ve noticed that those feelings have worn off however. Without being there and being engaged in what brought it about it the first place has caused it to diminish, which is one reason I’d love to go back sometime.”

“At the end of the trip I felt like I had learned and experienced a lot, even if I wasn’t able to really put it into words. I just felt that something important had happened, and I’m hoping that other people will get to experience it as well.”

This entire chapter has been an exploration in validating the utility of Immersive Cultural Experiences as a meaningful component to a re-imagined approach to Aboriginal Education. For any complete policy or programmatic process, there needs to be a period of evaluation. For me, the comments of these six participants have been the only validation I needed, and their reflections allowed me to evaluate what worked and did not work for the ICE. This project began and ended with a focus on identity – I believe that this reflection was beneficial for the Teacher Candidates. I asked the participants if they thought Aboriginal Education was important, why or why not? They reflected in depth about the various ways Wendy and Mark, and the ICE had a tremendous impact on them – even if they could not explain those impacts to others. The Teacher Candidates shared their thoughts on being resourceful, feeling welcome and participating in ceremony.

Each of the themes addressed in this chapter, observed over the course of roughly two months, allow me to fairly accurately appraise the value of the ICE – I know that this experience was impactful for these six people. However, I am realistic, there is a significant gap between the findings concerning

six Teacher Candidates and generalizing those findings to the thousands of new teachers that will be graduating every year from Ontario's Faculties and Schools of Education. Adopting a similar program or approach will require growth and change, as well as an investment in time, relationship, financial and human resources. Despite the non-representativeness of the data that I gathered from this experience (six participants versus the thousands that graduate every year), it is not the Teacher Candidates who will hold this process back. Before they can ever be offered an experience such as the ICE, however, there needs to be a significant commitment from government and those who administer teacher education programs. The way to convince someone such as that of the utility of this approach to Aboriginal Education is to do what we did with the Teacher Candidates, get out on the land, hear the drum songs and listen to the stories that have been repeated on these lands since time immemorial.

PART III – A FRAMEWORK FOR ONTARIO FACULTIES AND SCHOOLS OF EDUCATION

Buoyed by the participants' comments, this aspect of the dissertation moves into the future direction, hopefully providing some answers for all of the questions that I have been asking. I envision this Part being somewhat of a 'how-to' for administrators and faculty in teacher education – and invariably also a tool for educators, a 'call to action'. This tool, unlike those provided by the Learning Ministries, is not about content; it is unequivocally about process. Any framework for intercultural engagement must be founded upon values of respect, reciprocity and self-reflection. Otherwise we risk maintaining the status quo, even if that status quo is characterized by activity and engagement. It is not enough to build a house and subsequently not maintain it properly; you can paint the walls as many times as you want, but if you ignore the cracks in the foundation, it will eventually collapse. If Aboriginal Education policy and practice is not based in equity, with a focus on social justice and personal responsibility it risks just becoming another way *we teach them*.

One of the most critical ways of changing the discourse is to strive to become an Ally. Being an Ally is a complex and constantly evolving process; it involves setting aside one's own beliefs, expectations and agenda in order to discover what it means to truly be in relationship with someone else based on their needs. Wanting to help is not a good enough reason to seek out Allyship. There are countless examples of well-meaning non-Aboriginal people looking for ways to help Aboriginal people. These desires are often borne from a belief that *they* should be living up to the same standard as *us*. This has largely been Ontario's approach to Aboriginal Education.

So, Chapter Seven delves into what it means to be an Ally, but most importantly also, what is not an Ally. My perspective on Allyship is partially informed by a cultural teaching that I received from Anishinaabe Elder H. Neil Monague, who related that he had not always followed a traditional path in his life, so he perceived his cultural age to be much younger than his biological age. For Allyship, I count the years I have been engaged with a particular community – whatever 'age' I come up with is

how I relate my knowledge with those people that I work with. So, even at 10 years old I am still a child, and trust me – sometimes I do act childishly. Everyone’s journey in Aboriginal Education has to start somewhere. If this sounds overwhelming to you, that is probably because it is.

Chapter Eight sets out guidelines for an Immersive Cultural Experience, but they can and should also be considered as components for building ethical and sustainable relationships between an educational institution and Aboriginal community. Being a framework also allows it to be flexible and adaptable across various educational contexts, which is precisely what Aboriginal Education ought to be – our current mainstream approach requires standardization instead, in order for learning to be easily tracked and students across the province to be evaluated against each other.

This standardized method of teaching and learning is comfortable and intuitive for teachers and administrators because it is the way things have been done for such a long time. Despite my consistent use of the term Aboriginal as a globalizing concept, Aboriginal Education needs to be a localized process – so much so that we should start to call it Anishinaabe Education or Kanien’kehaka Education. As previously mentioned, it does not make sense to teach Cayuga language in Sioux Lookout. Similarly, it does not make sense to teach Ontario children about totem poles on the West Coast and nothing about the people who are Indigenous to the region where they live. The standardization process needs to move from mandating the retention of specific facts to the demonstration of generalized learning outcomes. I am not here to say what those outcomes should be, that is a question for individual educational institutions to ask local Aboriginal Knowledge Holders. After all, it is common sense to ask someone what you should know about them, is it not? Therefore, we come back to listening – perhaps the most important aspect of Allyship aimed at an equitable Aboriginal Education process. However, one cannot listen if there is not space made for Aboriginal voices, and certainly not if we do not know how to ask the appropriate questions.

Chapter Seven – BECOMING AN ALLY

Characteristics of an Ally: Beyond Empathy

This chapter sets out to determine what exactly an Ally is, and who can consider themselves an Ally. I think it is comparable to a job interview – you demonstrate your desire for the position and outline your qualifications, but it is up to the employer whether or not you get hired. Your willingness might provide an advantage, however it is not a guarantee that you will get the job – nor does it mean you can keep your job. Allyship can be unpredictable and messy, however the benefit is exponentially greater and more meaningful, not to mention more appropriate, than going about it alone. This analogy might make light of the work of Allyship, however we should not be fooled – it is work.

Those settlers who would be Indigenous allies – requires those “who are capable of listening” – “to share our vision of respect and peaceful co-existence” and to “creatively confront the social and spiritual forces that are preventing us from overcoming the divisive and painful legacies of our shared history as imperial subjects” (Alfred, 2005; 35).

Indeed, those individuals who wish to be Allies can only have that title bestowed upon them by those whom one wishes to Ally with. Allyship must first be aspirational before it is even realized – much like Kevin Kumashiro’s definition of the anti-oppressive educator as something that one is always becoming, so too is the nature of becoming an Ally. Adams, Bell and Griffin share the following characteristics that one can consider, adopt and implement as an Ally in their personal, professional and academic lives. They tell us that an Ally:

- 1) Feels good about one’s own social group membership and is comfortable and proud of one’s own identity;
- 2) Listens to and respects the perspectives and experiences of target group members;
- 3) Acknowledges unearned privileges received as a result of agent status and works to eliminate or change privileges into rights that target groups also enjoy;
- 4) Recognizes that unlearning oppressive beliefs and actions is a lifelong process, not a single event, and welcomes each learning opportunity;
- 5) Is willing to take risks, try new behaviour, act in spite of one’s own fear and resistance from other agents;

- 6) Acts against social injustice out of a belief that it is in one's own best interest to do so;
- 7) Is willing to make mistakes, learn from them, and try again;
- 8) Is willing to be confronted about one's own behaviour and attitudes and consider change;
- 9) Is committed to taking action against social injustice in own sphere of influence
- 10) Understands the connections among all forms of social injustice;
- 11) Believes one can make a difference by acting and speaking out against social injustice; and
- 12) Knows how to cultivate support from other allies (Adams et al, 2007; 3N).

Living the life of an Ally can be a discouraging and painful struggle but it is also deeply satisfying (Bishop, 2001; 148). Much like interviewing for a job, one must know why they want to be an Ally, and question whether or not those reasons are aligned with the needs, wants and desires of the people whom one wants to Ally with. Empathy is “not simply an affective response or sympathy over which we have little control, but the disciplined attempt to feel as others feel, to see as others see” (Wiggins and McTighe, 2005; 98). Empathy is a common characteristic of Allyship, and a useful one, but Aboriginal Education practice will ideally not only cultivate empathy in people, but also help people move beyond simply being empathic – moving them into action. Once you can see how others see, it is critically important what you do with that vision.

Wahpetunwan Dakota scholar Waziyatawin notes: “settlers may respond to injustice with empathy, but lacking strategies for taking personal and political action, they simply intellectualize and compartmentalize their newfound knowledge and do nothing” (Regan, 2010; 64). This intellectualization is a common response because many of us simply do not have the skills or experience to recognize what it means to be colonized, cannot even imagine how different life can be.

Self-reflection, like passive empathy, runs the risk of reducing historical complexities to an overly tidy package that ignores our mutual responsibility to one another. Empathy... often works through reducing the other to a mirror-identification of oneself, a means of rendering the discomfiting other familiar and non-threatening... The simple identifications and passive empathy produced through this ‘confessional reading’ assures no actual change. [In contrast,] ‘testimonial reading’... carries with it a responsibility for the ‘forces raging within us’ – we are asked to turn the gaze equally upon our own historical moment and upon ourselves (Boler in Regan, 2010; 51).

This is why it is so important to approach Allyship from the right direction and for the right reasons. Feeling better, or feeling good about being involved is not a legitimate reason for Allyship, nor should Allies determine the parameters of what needs to be done. Much like there is a mainstream approach to Aboriginal Education, there can be an approach to Allyship that is not directed by Indigenous people – however we must resist these impulses and seek out our defined roles from those we wish to help. “This long history and legacy of Indigenous diplomacy, law, and peacemaking reveals itself to those willing learners who the eyes to see, ears to listen, clear minds, and open, humble hearts” (Regan, 2010; 3).

Allyship needs to be action-oriented, however that action cannot be achieved in isolation, or without consistent self-reflection. “To be an ally first requires recognition of the need for action in a real and present struggle: in this case, the struggle of Indigenous survival and resurgence against colonial and neo-colonial power, within Canada and globally” (Barker, 2010; 316). Becoming an Ally requires an ability to be critical and discerning concerning what often appear to be conflicting narratives about colonialism. It is likely that anyone who denies colonialism’s existence is not Indigenous to this place. Colonialism is real, it is not a thing of the past, and the ways it affects all of us are significant. Being able to identify its many incarnations and influences is critical work of the Ally. South African sociologist Stanley Cohen identifies the various forms of acknowledging injustice and harm:

The first is self-knowledge, the critical reflection that comes with facing truth but which alone is insufficient. The second is moral witness, in which bystanders take an active role in witnessing unjust acts or bearing witness to victims’ testimonies, and in the process, create their own testimonies of accountability. The third response is whistle blowing, wherein the person reveals an ‘open secret’, a heinous wrong previously ignored or colluded in, which can no longer be ignored or rationalized. Fourth is living outside the lie, in which a person ‘begins to say what he really thinks and supports people according to his conscience... [to] discover that it is possible to live inside the truth, to find as repressed alternative to the inauthentic... People become committed, driven, unable to return to their old lives or shut their eyes again’ (Regan, 2010; 177).

This inability to go back to one’s old life or way of thinking is unsettling, to be sure, but it carries with it an invaluable sense of integrity. If I could again be an example for future Allies, one can initially

become a little zealous with their desire to expose issues of coloniality and raise awareness amongst one's peer group. As Anne Bishop notes, it is satisfying to be able to recognize injustice and bring it to light, but be prepared that not everyone you interact with will see things in the same fashion, or care about what you have to say (2001; 147). Sara Ahmed states: "doing the work of exposure is both political and emotional" (2005; 83); one often cannot help but become emotionally invested. This is not to say that once we have chosen the path of the Ally we forsake our privileges and leave behind all traces of our coloniality – reflection on and the emergence of our privileges and coloniality are precisely where our learning comes from.

Despite our best efforts, we often find ourselves participating in colonial acts (Dion, 2009; 189), which can occur when we forget that "justice must become a *duty* of, not a *gift* from, the Settler" (Alfred, 2011; 4 – emphasis original). I would say that to uphold that duty requires an obligation to be vigilant. This may sound challenging, however consider what could allow someone to lack vigilance in thinking and feeling – privilege. To be 'ethical witnesses' we must assume a "posture of alert vulnerability to or recognition of difference" (Regan, 2010; 51). This is intensely difficult and can be tiresome, however there is no acceptable alternative. Allyship is not all doom and gloom however, it is extremely easy to get bogged down in the myriad injustices of the world and lose focus on what matters, which are honest and respectful relationships that benefit all those in Alliance.

When engaging in work as an Ally, one can move toward two ends of the spectrum – appropriation of another's identity and culture (Corrigan, 1991; 376-7) or resistance in the face of losing one's own privileges (Barker, 2006; 52). It is understandable that we fear the unknown, particularly the fluid nature of Allyship: "what it means to be a decolonized Settler and act as a true ally remains an open and dynamic concept" (Barker, 2010; 317). We often want to know where we stand in relation to people and things, but Allyship does not always provide that kind of security, it is context-specific. One of the best ways I can relate it to future Allies is that while I am Allied with a particular community and set of

people, once I leave that circle I am just another White guy. My work begins again if I enter a new community or meet a new group of people. The only things that I can take with me are my connections to that original group and a hopeful attitude, and perhaps some acquired knowledge, jokes, and stories. We have to be prepared to start over, and to be perpetually self-aware. As Paolo Friere reminds us, “those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly” (1970; 60).

Knowing That We Don't Know

When I discussed the role of spirituality in Aboriginal Education, I used the phrase ‘knowing *what* we don't know’ – in regard to Allyship, it is more like ‘knowing *that* we don't know’. Just as humbling as considering the implications of spirituality in education, it is humbling to relinquish our control over what we know or think we know to be true. The inversion of this relinquishment is doubt or denial. When we hear something that registers as ‘unbelievable’, what are we really saying? Partly we are saying that we are trying to fit what someone tells us within our own worldview, and when an incongruity exists, we resist the new information.

When a Native person says that he saw a bear, it might have been a bear in the standard Canadian sense of the word, but a bear is also spiritual power and sacred, and connected to the medicine wheel in specific ways that vary according to specific cultures and teachings... These ideas become a human reality – a young girl telling us about seeing a bear and exactly what the bear said to her. We have to learn not to doubt or question another person's experience (Harder, 2005; 345).

That is part of what the Teacher Candidates said about their encounters with Anishinaabe teachings and stories in the ICE – they explained unbelievable concepts to themselves by fitting them into available schemas such as metaphor and allegory. However, unlike Carl Urion's explanation of the utility of metaphor as an Indigenous teaching tool, some things just are not metaphorical – they are the way that they are. To see a bear as more than a physical being requires one to not just stretch the boundaries of her/his own worldview, but to set those perspectives aside in favour of a new way of

seeing, thinking, believing and doing. Invariably we will make comparisons between Indigenous Knowledges and our own, but we should be wary of explaining one within the other – they are completely and indisputably distinct. For a non-Aboriginal person, it is easier to comprehend that a bear is *like* a man, or a tree is *like* our ancestor. However, if we are authentically committed to seeing things in a new way, “a corn stalk is not *like* a woman; it is a woman. Or maybe it is both” (Harder, 2005; 346 – emphasis added). This may seem to be disconnected from the larger discussion of Allyship, however it is a critical tipping point that everyone must encounter and navigate for herself/himself.

Bypassing Aboriginal community members and Knowledge Holders in Aboriginal Education suggests that one ‘knows better’. These same mistakes can be made within the processes of ‘consulting’ with Aboriginal people and communities. There are countless examples of this between government and Aboriginal people in just the last four decades. Think back to the outcomes of the consultations with Aboriginal people regarding the repeal of the Indian Act suggested in the 1969 White Paper. The academy can take its directions from these mistakes – if you already know what you want to achieve, it becomes somewhat reprehensible to call Aboriginal community into consultation just for the sake of appearances.

Knowing that we do not ‘know better’, and *believing* Aboriginal perspectives despite their conflict or incongruence with our worldviews are key aspects of Allyship. As we have discussed, not-knowing has the potential to be transformative, and the same goes for building Alliances and exploring ways to implement Aboriginal Education policy and practice. One needs to approach any relationship building with a humble acknowledgement that you do not necessarily have the answers, and a tacit understanding – even expectation – that you will make some mistakes.

Journeying Forward, Making Mistakes

Renowned author and activist bell hooks shares that: “to be anti-racist is a moral choice and reminds us that we will always be engaged in the struggle to unlearn racism in our homes, schools, workplaces, and communities, and that we will inevitably make mistakes along the way” (Regan, 2010; 23). The best way to *make* mistakes, I have learned, is to just be a White guy in a room full of Aboriginal people; but that is not necessarily the best way to *learn from* those mistakes. Roxana Ng tells us that: “undoing inequality...is a risky and uncomfortable act because we need to disrupt the way things are ‘normally’ done. This involves serious (and frequently threatening) effort to interrogate our privilege as well as our powerlessness” (Curry-Stevens, 2007; 37). One of the most critically important aspects of Allyship and learning from our mistakes is giving ourselves the time to develop a relationship and space to make those mistakes in the first place. If you are invested in making a positive connection with someone, you need to be patient in waiting for that connection to occur and be solidified. That is why a lot of the work of becoming an Ally or anti-oppressive educator is targeted at our inner selves - that relationship also deserves patience and a long-term vision, we have a lot of time with our thoughts.

If we are committed to journeying forward with Aboriginal Education, we need to begin to risk – our pride and privileges, our identities and values. There are inherent risks simply by being involved. “Ultimately, to do nothing is itself failure; to risk oneself and become unsettled is a success in and of itself” (Barker, 2010; 329). If we are conscious of the ways in which change is possible, Aboriginal Education becomes truly transformative and transcends our simple classifications of what it means to be in relationship. “Cognitive restructuring is an essential element of the transformation. There are two aspects to the process: unlearning and relearning” (Curry-Stevens, 2007; 44). This leads us to question what those things are that we have to unlearn. There is an inexhaustible list of ways in which we have been acculturated to resist Aboriginal Education and Indigenous Knowledges. Many of these issues are

borne from a narrative of difference defined as racism – a concept that is as ubiquitous as it is nebulous and difficult to characterize.

Rather than fear or resist this notion of racism, perhaps we need to realistically acknowledge that despite our best intentions, the ways we have learned to view and interact with people who are different from us undeniably shapes who we are; and those ideas can be changed and unlearned. Rather than feel guilty, this reflective state fits into what Susan Dion calls ‘the labour of self-understanding’ (2009; 177). Simply by acknowledging that some of our perspectives are informed by racist beliefs can be both liberating as well as discomfiting, for that “discomfort is understood to be an essential part of the learning process, which signals that counterhegemonic learning is not simply being deflected by the learner” (Curry-Stevens, 2007; 43). Transformation in its most popular form can be viewed in the journey that a caterpillar takes to become a butterfly; it starts as something and becomes another thing entirely. Transformation is a breaking apart of our selves to reform at a “higher level of being and understanding. In its real expression in people, transformation is anything but peaceful and harmonious” (Cajete, 1994; 179). Just like anything else, in order to gather new information – to transform – something else needs to be left behind.

Anne Bishop shares that there are three types of people who are uncovered when unlearning racism: 1) the “backlashers” who deny and continue to support racist notions; 2) the “guilty”, who personalize the issue and become defensive; and 3) the “learner/ally”, who asks and learns and acts (2001; 109). Friere calls this last aspect *conscientização* – “learning to perceive social, economic and political contradictions and take action against oppression” (1970; 35). Change is tied to action; therefore Allyship needs to also be rooted in change and oriented towards resistance. “Real socio-political change will not come from hegemonic institutional and bureaucratic structures... If it is to happen, it will come from those people who are willing to take up, again and again, the struggle of living in truth” (Regan, 2010; 215). For non-Aboriginal teachers, this truth needs to be informed by experience, supporting their

resistance, which “lies in self-conscious engagement with dominant, normative discourses and representations and in the active creation of oppositional analytic and cultural spaces” (Mohanty in Graveline, 1998; 12). This is where Aboriginal Education becomes less a topic of study and more a holistic and universal approach to teaching and learning. Educators become responsible for not only interrogating the education system in which they participate, but also making spaces available to Aboriginal people and perspectives – all made possible through persistent journeying forward as an Ally, and being willing to make plenty of mistakes.

Walking Our Talk: The Role of a Teacher in Aboriginal Education

What does it mean to walk our talk? Partially it means being responsible and accountable for our thoughts and actions, but it also means to think and act with integrity. It requires us to know who we are and where we come from. These were the first questions that I asked the six Teacher Candidates in their pre-experience interview, and none of them could really provide me with a clear answer. I do not think that this was because of the fluid nature of identity, or the intersectionality of our ethnic and national characters. ‘Who are you?’ is an extremely complex question, but I would wager that we just have not been encouraged to consider the question of who we are as deeply as perhaps we should. In the context of Aboriginal Education and Allyship in Canada, we can divide ourselves into two distinct categories: Settler (including later- and new-comers) and Indigenous. The reason for making this distinction is not to erase one’s ethnic identity, but to acknowledge that one may not be Indigenous in this place. There is a great deal of resistance to using this term Settler, because of the perception that it denotes a lack of belonging. However:

Applying the label of Settler does not imply a moral or ethical judgment; rather it is a descriptive term that attempts to recognize the historical and contemporary realities of imperialism that very clearly separate the lives of Indigenous peoples from the lives of later-comers (Barker, 2006; 23).

Accepting this label demonstrates willingness to acknowledge the primacy of Indigenous peoples and their knowledges, as well as the continuity of colonialism in the Canadian context. If one can begin to look at herself/himself as a Settler, a beneficiary of broken treaties, the world and our place in it begins to shift a little bit. Being Settler only makes me inadequate in relation to my ability to speak for Aboriginal knowledges and perspectives, nothing else. Feeling guilt as a Settler can be “conceptualized along a continuum, from an emotional experience of inadequacy and responsibility that evolves from learning about privilege, which may then intensify, causing learners to be immobilized and unable to motivate themselves to act” (Curry-Stevens, 2007; 42). There is a reason that I called this section *walking* our talk however – we need to move forward.

The objective for the non-Aboriginal Teacher Candidate in Aboriginal Education is not always to figure it out, but rather to be overwhelmed (Dion, 2009; 184). This being overwhelmed may cause resistance to Aboriginal Education, but Freire (1985) notes that it should instead solidify one’s resolve: “the more conscious and committed they are, the more they understand that their role as educator requires them to take risks, including a willingness to risk their own jobs” (Graveline, 1998; 11). Being an anti-oppressive educator is a deeply personal process, and a commitment that does not begin and end with the ringing of school bells.

My voyage of discovery thus far has been filled with times of sadness and jubilation. I needed to challenge everything that I knew, to broaden my perspective and redefine my personal position within the destructive and diverse realms of colonialism. Embarking on an introspective and reflective journey is a personal choice that is difficult. I learned that examining oneself honestly can create feelings of uncertainty, as one’s secure position in the world may have to be reevaluated and reconstructed to reflect a newly developed perspective. This may cause feelings of isolation, but comfort can be found in the knowledge that others are on a similar journey and are more than willing to offer their support (Hingley, 2000; 109).

The further along that one gets in their Allyship and anti-oppressive work, the more inclined you can get to start to resist your own coloniality. “I find myself recounting all the reasons that I am not a colonizer: I am working for social justice and change from within my own dominant-culture institutions;

I am enlightened and empathetic; my intentions are good;... I have Indigenous colleagues and friends;... I am not one of those racist white upper- or middle-class people raised in insular privilege!” (Regan, 2010; 171). Despite all of this, you still have a responsibility to ethical conduct and self-reflexivity.

Canadian political philosopher Richard Day calls on Allies to recognize the “need to engage in groundless solidarity and limitless responsibility” (Barker, 2010; 324). Just consider this statement for a moment longer, and what it requires from teachers who wish to be Allies and to practice Aboriginal Education. This humbling notion gives the Settler a role, a position within the struggle for decolonization.

There definitely should be a relationship, we cannot do this alone. Our non-Aboriginal brothers and sisters have to be walking beside us, not in front of us, not behind us but beside us in this work. But they also have to be very respectful and open to hearing a new way of doing things (Silver, Ghorayshi, Hay, and Klyne, 2011; 223).

The true purpose of renewing our approach to Aboriginal Education in postsecondary and other educational contexts is to create more Allies. “The purpose of educating allies, as with all popular education, is to equip ordinary people to make change by acting together” (Bishop, 2001; 125). Not only do we need to equip people, but also convince them that their action can make a difference. Marie Battiste and Jean Barman remind us that “we all have a responsibility to bring balance and harmony to the children of the earth” (1995; xvi); teachers are fundamentally charged with this task, they have more responsibility than most. If there was one tool for teachers to use in their work towards Aboriginal Education, one process that could assist in bringing about the necessary change, it might be hope.

Hope is the transformative force that connects education to struggle in ways that are constructively subversive; hope makes the leap for us between *critical education*, which tells us what must be changed; *political agency*, which gives us the means to make change; and the *concrete struggles* through which change happens... Hope is anticipatory rather than messianic, mobilizing rather than therapeutic... Educated hope is a subversive force when it pluralizes politics by opening up space for dissent, making authority accountable, and becoming an activating presence in promoting social transformation (Giroux in Regan, 2010; 216 – emphasis original).

Aboriginal Education is political; there is no way or need to avoid it. So, by becoming an anti-oppressive educator who practices Aboriginal Education, you are engaged in activist or animistic processes. Activism by its very nature has a focus on inclusion – of ideas, perspectives, thoughts and feelings. We do not need to resist this label, though that is why I offer the alternative of animism. If one prefers to animate rather than activate, or enable rather than agitate, that is an individual's prerogative. Regardless, with newfound knowledge comes an obligation to act – to share the knowledge with others and integrate that knowledge into our everyday personal and civic lives (Regan, 2010; 55). Fyre Jean Graveline offers the following thoughts on activism:

You think of it as a little piece when you first start taking it on, but then you get embroiled in the detail of what's going on with it, and you get emotionally hooked into what's going on, and then you start taking personal responsibility for what's happening, and then your little bit that you thought you were going to take on all of a sudden becomes something personally part of your own psyche, or your own will. Part of what you feel you need to do (1998; 272).

Basil Johnston shares a similar sentiment on the need to move from hearing to action, on taking the truths from stories and peoples' experiences, and letting them lead you to fulfillment:

It is not enough to listen to or read or to understand the truths contained in stories; according to the Elders the truths must be lived out and become part of the being of a person. The search for truth and wisdom out to lead to fulfillment of man and woman" (1976; 7).

By making Aboriginal Education personal we discover more about ourselves. This much must be true, but we ultimately choose our level of involvement. However, by making Aboriginal Education a way of living rather than a mode of teaching it becomes something else entirely – by teaching with integrity we achieve a level of authenticity otherwise hidden from ourselves. Coast Salish scholar Qwul'sih'yah'maht reflects: "when we make personal what we teach, as I see storytelling doing, we touch people in a different and more profound way" (Regan, 2010; 190). So, it then becomes the responsibility of teachers to learn how to tell their own stories in the context of Aboriginal Education, and seek out opportunities for others to tell theirs.

Chapter Eight – GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR AN IMMERSIVE CULTURAL PROGRAM

While this chapter is intended to demonstrate some best or wise practices for Aboriginal Education, intercultural engagement and an immersive cultural program, it would be decontextualized without the seven chapters that have preceded it.

As I mentioned in Chapter Five, not-knowing can be a powerful catalyst for learners to experience transformative change, but that same not-knowing has greater implications for those who plan and implement Aboriginal Education at educational institutions. So, I make this humble request for anyone encountering these guidelines first, or happens upon this chapter – go back. Make an effort to consider each of the topics that have come before this section. I do not presume to find agreement from whomever is brave enough to sit through the entirety of this dissertation, but I do hope to have stirred some thought, a glimmer of contemplation that things can and should be different. Above all else, if you have an interest in Aboriginal Education, get out there and experience things. There is no better way.

Focus on people and their experience. Seek a genuine and committed relationship rather than results... Be leery of quick fixes. Respect complexity but do not be paralyzed by it. Think comprehensively about the voices you hear that seem contradictory, both within a person, between people, and across a whole community... No matter how small, create spaces of connection between them. Never assume you know better or more than those you are with that are struggling with the process. You don't. Do not fear the feeling of being lost... Give it time (Lederach in Regan, 2010; 234).

Consolidating the Dissertation

Despite my request to have the entirety of this thesis reviewed and considered, and before I offer the guiding principles that I believe an ICE initiative should adopt, I would like to consolidate all of the topics and themes discussed throughout this document. While it was my intention that this dissertation presents a complete narrative, as I mentioned early on, many topics are interdependent and may appear to be repetitive. Having said that, there is also a coherent order to things – a progressive set of ideas and principles for the Settler Ally to keep in mind when approaching and engaging in Aboriginal Education.

First of all, this dissertation operates from the perspective that rather than Canada having an ‘Indian Problem’ as has been so often described, we actually have a ‘Settler Problem’ that requires honest self-reflection. This can allow us to re-orient ourselves towards a more thorough and accountable Aboriginal Education system that focuses on the needs of non-Aboriginal learners. One of the many ways we can change our perspective on Aboriginality is to actually do away with the concept of *Aboriginal* in favour of recognizing cultural distinctiveness. Once we can perceive Aboriginal people as being distinct from each other, we can and should recognize their inherent right to autonomously determine not only *what* but also *how* non-Aboriginal people learn about Aboriginality. This suggestion reflects the notion that our collective history is currently told from only one perspective; however, history is a shared project that requires that we respect and understand treaties and our responsibilities and obligations to them. Aboriginal Education proposes that we need to have respect for what we share whether that is land, culture or values. It also proposes that common notions such as respect can mean different things to different people, and that as a concept it can be co-opted and corrupted if not informed by our two distinct perspectives and shared understandings.

This thesis is also deeply interested in discovering what it means to be non-Aboriginal in relation to Aboriginality. There is a need for Whiteness to be disrupted and de-centred, and a ‘proud, anti-racist White identity’ cultivated. Part of this involves thinking about *how* and *why* race matters in Aboriginal Education and our personal lives. That inward focus can then lead to seeking out external opportunities and experiences to learn from, which should not weaken our own identity but rather strengthen it. From those experiences we can build relationships with Aboriginal people, with nature and again, with ourselves. Relationship is another taken-for-granted concept, but if we consider what it means to be in relationship with something or someone, we can see that essentially everything is related. If we can recognize our relationship to Aboriginality, we realize that we have a responsibility to learn *from* instead

of *about* Aboriginal people – one of the many ways that I would categorize someone being a ‘good Canadian’.

I also discuss at length the spaces and places that support our learning about each other and ourselves. The classroom can be considered a forest, and the forest a classroom where our diversity in Canada can become our strength, marking an interrelated and interdependent collective characterized by change – the one absolutely necessary and inevitable component of life. By learning on the land we make connections to each other and consecrate those connections through the shared processes of being and becoming whole and complete – creating a spiritual foundation. In order to gain the immeasurable benefits of Aboriginal Education, one has to be willing to listen and learn, and acknowledge the authority of Aboriginal people to classify what is to be known and discoverable in localized Aboriginal Education practices. If one can open themselves up to experience and building relationship with Aboriginal people, that shared project of history can be changed, through a process of unacculturation and reacculturation – ultimately this dissertation also hopes to ‘un-settle the Settler within’.

This is a fearful, uncomfortable and disquieting process, but absolutely necessary; it does not require that we know anything at all about Aboriginality, in fact it is preferable that we set aside our subjectivities, stereotypes and worldviews when engaging in Aboriginal Education and an Immersive Cultural Experience. We need to do this because our words and thoughts have power, ascribed by our privileges, which lead us to resist Aboriginal perspectives and consciousnesses. Leaving our worldviews and judgments behind lets us draw connections to things unknown and unfamiliar, and allows us to focus on the positive nature of Aboriginal identities, cultures and worldviews. For a Settler to be an Ally or a visitor amongst Aboriginal people, it is often appropriate to ‘act your age’, that age being the amount of time you have spent within the Aboriginal community with which you are engaged.

When it comes to offering Aboriginal Education within your educational context, it is integral that we continue to be humble in our lack of knowledge, and honest with our intentions. This will

demonstrate that Immersive Cultural Experiences cannot be standardized because of the personal and subjective nature of Aboriginal Education, rather we should seek generalized learning outcomes that each participant can aspire towards. One of those learning outcomes can be to become more empathic, but that feeling should come with it an inspiration to act, both as a critical Ally and ‘ethical witness’ to colonialism and its resultant oppressions. You should also expect and be prepared to take risks and make mistakes, being patient in your opportunities and experiences to learn while cultivating a long-term vision of what it means to be in relationship with Aboriginal people and communities. That time and space spent cultivating a long-term vision can also be utilized to interrogate one’s own identity, culture and privileges, taking up the ‘labour of self-understanding’ that characterizes Allyship and much of Aboriginal Education. To question and come to know who we are is indeed laborious, but to become responsible and accountable for that identity is even more difficult – we need to engage in ‘groundless solidarity and limitless responsibility’ as Allies with the only real goal as educators being to create more Allies. That is precisely why Teacher Candidates need to be at the forefront of a renewed Aboriginal Education approach. This process is acculturation however, not indoctrination, borne through experience and engagement. Hope is the only real tool that we can provide for those Teacher Candidates brave enough to seek out Aboriginal Education in their personal and professional lives, who take it upon themselves to challenge the way in which things are done because it is the right thing to do.

So, with all of these topics and themes in mind, I would humbly ask that you keep them there when exploring the last aspect of this dissertation. As I mentioned in the beginning, it has been my goal to be critical but not condemning, honest but not alienating. I am implicated in the ways in which Aboriginal Education has been enacted in the past, and I am responsible for the ways it can be realized moving forward. I would ask you to take up that same focus: recognize your complicity and carry out your responsibilities – for yourself, your children and the future generations.

a. Knowing Your History

As mentioned at the outset of this dissertation, Ontario's demographic situation is unique in the Canadian context where over 84 per cent of Aboriginal people live in urban environments. This alone should indicate to any Faculties and Schools of Education hoping to implement Aboriginal Education policy and programming where relationships should be sought and built. However, we should not get ahead of ourselves – there is a great deal of work to be done before we even step outside of our offices and classrooms. We need to know why such a great proportion of Aboriginal people live off of reserves, and who those people are. The complexities of Aboriginal identities, made all the more challenging by the Indian Act, ought to be top of mind for an Ally – particularly if one is interested in learning more about Aboriginal cultures, knowledges, languages and ceremonies.

To be granted or denied Status by the government based on imposed criteria, rooted in historical conflict, is a form of violence that has myriad covert and overt implications for Aboriginal identity. I hope we can agree that to have your identity, one that is afforded legal rights, legislated, ascribed or taken away from you by an external party is detestable. Understanding our shared history will affirm that one of the first major acts of colonial violence against Aboriginal people was collectivizing them as Indians and granting rights and privileges based on that ascribed identity – a violence that is still perpetrated today (Cannon and Sunseri, 2012). The White Paper referred to previously, the 'Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy, 1969' argued that Aboriginal people were disadvantaged because of their legal status (Miller, 2000; 331). The only disadvantage is the number of constraints that are placed upon those with Status, particularly through the various historical incarnations of the Indian Act. And all of this is not even taking into account those without Status or those from which Status has been removed.

Once you can wrap your mind around the legislative nature of Aboriginal identity and its colonial underpinnings, you can begin to have an idea what cultural revitalization is resisting against. As cited

earlier, Taiaiake Alfred implores that the solution is ‘regeneration instead of recovery, restitution instead of reconciliation, resurgence instead of resolution’ (2011; 8). Many Aboriginal leaders and scholars will tell you that to be Aboriginal is to be a political being – meaning to be both a political entity in the eyes of government but also an agent of political resistance and change through an adherence to culture and tradition. Non-Aboriginal identity is also politicized however, as Roger Epp (2004) reminds us: ‘we are all treaty people’ and we therefore have a responsibility to know those treaties and what they mean for our families and future generations. For better or worse, all of the lands in Ontario have been seceded through treaty – therefore our responsibility is two-fold: know whose traditional territories you live and work on, and know what the terms and conditions of your local treaty/treaties are.

There are a number of excellent books that have been written on the subject of treaty and the historical relationship between Aboriginal people and Settlers, as well as contextualizing Aboriginal perspectives on our shared history. To anyone willing to do the work of Aboriginal Education, there are many key resources available, however I would suggest three sources to provide a solid foundation and a place to begin: Thomas King’s (2012) The Inconvenient Indian, J.R. Miller’s (2000) Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens and Marie Battiste’s (2000) edited works Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision. Once you have read through those you can move on to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the list goes on and on.

It should be noted that I largely spent 10 years in this stage of the framework, cultivating an understanding and experience within various communities before I sought out a formal partnership or program. My desire to protect Wendy and Mark, respecting the integrity of their teachings, and not wanting to disaffect the relationship which I had built with them were all reasons why I waited so long. I would not recommend that someone wait this long to carry out the principles of this framework, but rather to be prepared and mindful of the process taking time and to be willing and prepared to make a long-term commitment. Oftentimes what matters most is one’s intent; understanding why you are

seeking out community-based Aboriginal Education and for whom the program is ultimately meant to benefit.

This leads us to the last part of the first stage of the guiding principles, which is titled ‘Know Your History’ but it could also easily be called ‘Know Yourself’. As I have expressed countless times in this dissertation, one of the key objectives of Aboriginal Education is to have non-Aboriginal learners discover things about themselves that were once unknown – to cultivate an identity that is in relationship to Aboriginal people, tied to the places and spaces that we share. So, who are you? It is a deceptively simple question, as we have seen, but an integral one to ask over and over again in this work.

b. Seeking Local Knowledge Holders

Once you can decide why an Aboriginal Education approach is needed in your Faculty or School, and how it can and should apply to teacher training you can start to look for ways to achieve your vision. Once you can see who you are, you can start to recognize who you are not – thereby signaling the need for external knowledge, feedback and perspective. If we do not involve Aboriginal people in the creation and delivery of Aboriginal Education policy and practice, it persists as a mainstream educational tool that is modeled after mainstream perspectives. As much as we might want or intend for Aboriginal Education to be culturally relevant, unless we involve Aboriginal Elders and Traditional Teachers – who are the only appropriate keepers and conduits of Traditional Knowledge – we risk just doing Aboriginal Education our way. Community participation is critically important. You have to also be prepared that when you invite other perspectives into the room, the vision that a Traditional Teacher has for your Faculty or School may not be the same as your own. I am reminded of a story related by Chickasaw educator Eber Hampton (Battiste, 2000; xvii) about holding up a box. Try it for yourself, as hard as you might try, you will never be able to see more than three sides. Bringing another, better-informed perspective into your approach to Aboriginal Education will allow you to literally and figuratively see all

the sides of the box. That external perspective will help you to see the ways formal educational contexts are indeed boxes, of thought and space that can be transcended through Aboriginal perspectives, relationships and the implementation of programs such as Immersive Cultural Experiences. This is not really a recommendation, it is a requirement; there is no way to get around meaningful and respectful engagement – there is no substitute.

So, you now have a sense of why Aboriginal Education should be a collaborative endeavour, though these critical questions come up: who should you contact to assist in the creation of a new approach at your institution, and how will you get in contact with them? You might try Googling ‘Elders in my area’ but I doubt you would find who you are looking for. The term ‘Elder’ is a bit of a misnomer as well, for as Sylvia Maracle, Executive Director of the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres is fond of saying, ‘not every old Indian is an Elder and not every Elder is an old Indian’. While it might be convenient to choose the first elderly Aboriginal person that walks by, or even someone who presents themselves to you as an Elder or Traditional Teacher, it is like any other relationship – it has to be a good fit. That is why, much like many other aspects of this framework, you let the community decide. Whatever your geographic location in this province you are likely to have at least four options available to you: a) a proximal First Nation; b) a local Friendship Centre; c) a Métis Nation of Ontario community office; and/or d) finding someone in your city or town. While that last option may be a little harder to navigate, going through any of the first three channels will likely yield you someone in your community who is able and willing to help.

c. Ethics and the Traditional Contract

Having found a community-nominated Elder or Traditional Teacher to meet with, now comes the time to reach out. No matter how nice your office is, or how many amenities you can provide for a meeting with your potential partner, it is most appropriate to ask that person where they would be

comfortable meeting, and at what time. These are the first major barriers that we encounter when we engage in intercultural dialogue and experience – time and space. My suggestion: leave plenty of the first, and do not worry about the second. While whoever you are meeting with will understand that you have other commitments, making the time for whichever conversations that come up demonstrates a commitment to doing things how that person would have them done. Who knows, you might just get an invitation to their home for tea, or perhaps a quick meal at a restaurant. We cannot define the parameters of the relationship before it gets going, and we cannot expect that the relationship will even be a successful one.

While you might come prepared with a pocketful of questions, and be genuinely curious about any manner of things, it is generally best to think of engaging an Elder or Traditional Teacher as you would your grandparent. This respect and reverence can take many forms, but it is something to always keep in mind and which will guide your ethical approach to working with any partners in Aboriginal Education. Would you pepper your grandparent with questions upon meeting them? Would you invite them over, feel satisfied with your visit, and then not call them again until you felt like visiting again? Where we can acknowledge that there are a number of distinct cultural differences between us that need to be recognized and respected, there are also enough common sense commonalities that indicate how we should treat these types of relationships.

Hopefully your motivations, which were the impetus for seeking out the relationship in the first place, become secondary to the trust and enjoyment that are being built with your potential partner. If the relationship is succeeding, there are likely lots of opportunities to ask that person to facilitate smaller scale events and discussions and they are conversely just as likely to invite you to partake in various experiences and opportunities. This is the nature of a reciprocal relationship, everyone should feel as though they contribute something and that they inherently benefit from the connection.

Before that happens however, one needs to consider once again what they are requesting from the Elder or Traditional Teacher and why they are requesting it. Also, one needs to consider what this person would deem is a culturally appropriate way to seek partnership. This might take a bit of background research, or consultation with other community members, perhaps even that person's family members or helpers.

For many people and communities in Ontario, natural tobacco is regarded as a sacred and valuable medicine that has a number of properties and uses that make it an ideal offering to consecrate a traditional contract between people, or as a spiritual offering. However, offering tobacco may not be appropriate for whomever you desire to work with, and you also have to be prepared that even if the tobacco or other item is offered, it could be refused or deferred. This refusal or deferral is the prerogative of the Elder or Traditional Teacher, and would likely not be indicative of anything other than the need for either more time for consideration, or the need for you to clarify your question/request for yourself and your potential partner.

Either way, the ethical approach to this relationship should always be considered from the social and cultural position of the person you are relating to. One of those social positions is the need for honorarium, which is not a payment for one's knowledge but rather their time and effort. While money would not have been traditionally exchanged between parties, it is now a necessary component to peoples' lives. However, where cheques are acceptable for transactions at postsecondary institutions, they are not always appropriate for people in community. So when it comes to offerings and honoraria, the amount, method and type are all discoverable by simply asking or waiting for that information to reveal itself.

d. Planning the Experience

If all of the above has gone well, it is time to figure out what experiential learning program fits best for your context, and what your partner is interested in, capable and willing to facilitate. The ultimate goal should be to provide accurate and appropriate information and perspectives for learners, with participants gaining first-hand, holistic experience with Aboriginality that will inform their personal and professional lives. Ultimately it is about replicating the same relationship processes that you might have engaged in with your Traditional Teacher. That is largely what anti-oppressive education has the potential to do, make the invisible visible and the unknown known. The ICE that I collaborated on and is detailed in this thesis was based on immersion on the land, which I feel was most appropriate but may not be available in your context in the same way. Unless your Traditional Teacher objects or has other aspirations, I would encourage making land-based components absolutely necessary. As is discussed at length in this dissertation, while it can be highly effective bringing an Aboriginal teacher or a speaker into the classroom, even if there is Traditional Knowledge being exchanged, the potential value of the experience is reduced for those who experience it.

It is the vision of this dissertation that every Teacher Candidate (and really, every Canadian) should have a land-based Immersive Cultural Experience. This may not be the same collaborative vision in your context, though it provides something to measure against. If we can have every learner, faculty member and administrator go through an ICE it will mean that there have been countless relationships built between institutions and community – and it will also mean that we are all getting to know each other that much better.

The ICE at your institution does not have to be a weekend trip, but it does need to provide participants with an appreciation for not only the new perspectives that they are encountering, but also space to reflect on their own worldviews and identities. The value of it being immersive is that people are forced to confront their notions of Aboriginality, potentially become unsettled by what they discover,

and cultivate a desire to both learn more and become engaged in decolonization, anti-racism and anti-oppressive education practice. When planning experiences for Teacher Candidates, we have to consider what constitutes Aboriginal Education and perhaps more importantly, what does not.

We cannot continue to provide resources and opportunities for people that are elective that can be obscured and ignored by those who choose to remain ignorant and reliant on privilege. Even for those of us who believe that we ‘know enough’; no number of ICEs will ever provide us with ‘enough’ information and experience. Aboriginal Education, if it is to truly change, needs to be mandatory.

e. Preparation and Training

This is an opportunity that my project was not able to take advantage of, for a number of reasons: Wendy and Mark live some distance from Toronto, and there were various time constraints for the Teacher Candidates based on their program requirements. As I have mentioned, I worked with Wendy and Mark because of my prior relationship with them, and I operated outside of the OISE structure – a formal Aboriginal Education approach that includes a well-informed and attended ICE will not suffer these same disadvantages. I also recruited non-Aboriginal participants because I wanted to track the unknowing-knowing process as accurately as possible, but your ICE can and should involve all students. In order to create a truly equitable Aboriginal Education policy, there is a space for every type of person with every kind of knowledge and experience.

This aspect of the framework is where things can get more variable and more exciting for you and your Teacher Candidates. While my preparatory session dealt mostly with cultural protocols, and the fundamentals such as what gear to bring, the ways in which you prepare your learners can take many different forms. Depending on the number of Teacher Candidates in your Faculty or School, teaching and sharing circles can be offered, feasts or other cultural events can be facilitated, and smaller workshops can be provided to participants in order to introduce necessary and relevant information.

Acknowledging student numbers and constraints on available time and resources, these preparatory sessions and events may not be appropriate, but the Teacher Candidates need to know what is expected of them regardless.

Where one of the aspects of my research project was to gather those who had an interest in Aboriginal Education but not necessarily any real prior knowledge, any preparation that you can provide for participants will only enhance their experience and the likelihood that lasting impacts will be produced. One of the ways this can be achieved is to offer both elective and mandatory cultural events and sessions where students can choose their level of involvement before the ICE, at which point they will be engaged and involved regardless of their level of interest. The ICE can be treated as a cumulative experience for Teacher Candidates at the end of their BEd program, which would provide you with two years in which to make Aboriginal knowledges, cultures and people visible and known to students.

This is where the Accord on Indigenous Education and its Progress Report should be reflected upon; there are many diverse and meaningful programs and policies being enacted at various Faculties and Schools of Education across Canada that can support and enhance a new approach to Aboriginal Education and initiatives such as the ICE. The Accord's first goal is 'Respectful and Welcoming Learning Environments' after all. We just need to be mindful that while the needs of Aboriginal students are paramount, a holistic approach to Aboriginal Education that engages and transforms non-Aboriginal learners' perceptions of Aboriginality will also contribute to our ultimate goal.

f. Facilitating the Experience

This is the opportunity for you to just step back and let the experience occur and evolve. One of the key issues here is that depending on your student population, and your relationship with an Elder or Traditional Teacher, the ICEs might need to be facilitated year-round in order to reach all students – ideally in cohorts of a maximum of 20 participants – depending on the size of your institution, having a

collective of engaged Elders and Traditional Teachers certainly would not hurt. This necessitates other options, such as building more relationships with more Traditional Teachers. Another barrier that I anticipate in successfully facilitating an ICE however is getting ethical approval for the participants to use tools and be put in situations that would otherwise be perceived as being dangerous. When your greatest risk sitting in a classroom is getting a splinter in your backside, even using a rake can offer countless ways to injure yourself. One of the biggest components of the ICE that I observed was that the participants worked, whether it was cutting wood and cultivating the land, cooking and doing dishes or building structures that were to be used for teachings and ceremony. Wendy and Mark and their helpers ensured that participants were not put in situations where harm was imminent, and largely only allowed the use of hand-powered tools. The importance of working on the land should not be overlooked however; not only for its cultural relevance, but also for the inherent benefit that the ICE participants expressed that they got from it. Chopping wood became more meaningful because it was keeping us warm, we worked so that we had the time and space to listen to teachings and participate in ceremonies. So, I would do everything possible to ensure that your ICE participants are available to do whatever work is asked of them, and trust that your facilitator is asking them to do it for a particular reason.

There is a great deal to be learned from adopting a new work ethic that is informed by Aboriginal gender roles and responsibilities, as well as having participants draw the connections between themselves, nature, and the work that they are doing. One of the greatest learning opportunities for the ICE group I observed was that one of the female participants was on her moon-time (menstruating), which precluded her from performing certain responsibilities. In this way we took something familiar to the participants and made it unfamiliar. Rather than be disappointed, Jaclyn expressed gratitude for Wendy and Mark asking her to ‘do things their way’ and respecting and trusting her enough to do so. There is so much happening in an ICE that we cannot expect or anticipate for particular learning outcomes to be achieved. Every single person is going to hear, feel, see and experience something

different. Two of the ICE participants separately expressed that they felt a particular teaching was ‘meant for them’; that they both drew conclusions that were personally meaningful to them.

I have spent the majority of this dissertation contextualizing the topic of Aboriginal Education and trying to prove why Immersive Cultural Experience provides the greatest amount of utility, and cultural-appropriateness, but really it is the participants’ comments and reflections that have done that for me.

g. Debrief: Gathering Knowledge

Once the experience has been completed, in whichever iteration it was offered, there needs to be a space for the participants to reflect. It is likely that the Elder or Traditional Teacher who facilitated the experience will want the Teacher Candidates to share their thoughts and feelings at various points of the experience, perhaps in a group or individually. Depending on when the ICE is facilitated, as a culminating event, or conducted multiple times throughout the year depending on the number of students who need to be involved, there should be a space for immediate reflection as well as delayed consideration on the ICE – both facilitated by the Elder or Traditional Teacher.

While I expected positive responses from the participants, I could have never anticipated the types of things they said about their experience. That is why we have to be so clear with our intent when we start these types of initiatives – I wanted the ICE to be impactful but also to teach the participants about what it meant to be a non-Aboriginal educator. If I was facilitating the experience I am sure I would have explicitly and directly addressed these things, as we are wont to do in the mainstream education system. We assume that if someone ought to know something, we will tell them in a straightforward manner – this is not the type of learning that the ICE promotes or provides. I cannot know that the ICE will have a lasting impact on the participants, or ensure that it will make them better teachers, but at least they had that experience – I have to believe that it was enough to get them started.

The debrief that occurs in your context might elicit mixed feelings from the participants; feelings of shame, guilt and fear or even indifference. These are natural responses to cultural incongruity, not only the experience of engaging with Aboriginal cultures but also engaging with one's own cultural integrity. That is why it is important for the Elder or Traditional Teacher to solicit feedback from the participants when they are in the ICE as well as afterward, when more feelings might have been stirred up. We had one participant share her remorse for the ways in which Christianity had affected Aboriginal people, another participant expressed shock and dismay that more Canadians do not know about or have relationship with Aboriginal people.

The experience of the ICE is obviously tremendously important for participants, but the true value is the self-reflection that it has the potential to elicit. When we start to think about who we are in relation to Aboriginal people, and think about our values in relation to traditional teachings, we have created a space where new relationships – between cultures and within ourselves – can be built and maintained.

h. Maintaining Relationships

If the ICE is a part-time endeavour, Aboriginal Education is a full-time job. As Taiaiake Alfred reminds us, the Haudenosaunee perspective on Alliance and relationship is that they are “naturally in a state of constant deterioration and in need of attention” (Regan, 2010; 154). Following the principles and perspectives of the OFIFC's USAI Research Framework, as well as the ACDE's Accord on Indigenous Education, informed by the Report of the RCAP, there are plenty of examples in the literature of the ways in which relationship with Aboriginal peoples and communities are important. Even in TCU's *Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training Policy Framework* there is a focus on relationships as being foundational to any Aboriginal postsecondary education policy.

Relationships can be strengthened by open and honest communication, as well as the trust that is afforded to partners such as the facilitator(s) of the ICE. We have to be open to having people do things

their way, and believing that it will improve not only our own educational processes, but the outcomes of the learners whom we support. Sharing is not only a way to provide each other with what we have, but also an acknowledgement of what each other needs. At this time it may be that the Elder or Traditional Teacher may be giving a little more to your Aboriginal Education process, but we must always be mindful of what we can give back.

An ICE may not be the first stage in the relationship and educational journey that you take at your institution, but just like any relationship that changes and grows over time, there are innumerable ways in which your relationship can bear fruit for not only students but also the larger community. With your commitment to relationship also comes personal growth, space for one to reflect on what that relationship means to your own personal and professional goals. Maintaining an Aboriginal Education process that emphasizes relationship, reciprocity and interconnectedness takes work, and a great deal of personal flexibility and reflexivity. But like any great tree, your relationship can start with the smallest seed, and it requires any number of optimal conditions and assistance from the natural world in order to fulfill its vision.

CONCLUSION

Lessons Learned

I need to be perfectly honest here, there will undoubtedly be those who have read this entire dissertation – or at least parts – and said to themselves, ‘sure, Aboriginal Education is important, but what about education about other minoritized people, surely those people deserve to be recognized as well, why do Aboriginal people get such a privileged position?’ This is a common response, and an understandable one, given the various ways in which many Canadians perceive Aboriginal people and Aboriginal rights. However, we must remember that there is no Canada without Aboriginal people, being Canadian means being in relationship to Aboriginal people and our shared history – there are very few ways around this. Hopefully some of these questions and concerns were answered in the first Part of this dissertation that is focused on our collective past, but I know that it likely is not enough. Really, all I can say to those who doubt the necessity of altering our position on Aboriginal Education – from learning about Aboriginal people, to learning about ourselves – is that we can achieve so much social justice if we do this work first. Also, we need to be patient.

I recall a teaching I received, that if it takes you two days to walk into the forest, it is going to take you two days to walk out. We have been undoing our relationship with Aboriginality for so long, we are at a point now where we likely do not even recognize that it is there anymore. Like I said about myself earlier in this thesis, I once did not know to care, and did not care to know – how many Canadians could say the same thing about themselves?

In this dissertation I have attempted to explain what I believe to be the greatest impediment to an ethical approach to Aboriginal Education – ignorance. This is not the simple ignorance about Aboriginal people, cultures and histories that we routinely identify, but rather ignorance about who we are. Unfortunately, one ignorance produces and perpetuates the other. “Our beliefs (stereotypes), emotionally charged attitudes (prejudices), and behaviour (discrimination) are related in many ways and often create

a set of complex knots that are hard to untie” (Schneider, 2004; 316). The more weight we place on knots, the tighter they get. In order to start to untie our beliefs, prejudices and discriminatory behaviours we need to release the weight – much of this is our own self-doubt and being overwhelmed by the task at hand.

We can also view ignorance as a fog, a passive product of conflicting positions – when cool air passes over warm water it produces a thick, low-lying cloud that serves to obscure both our view and those things hidden in the fog. Serendipitously, in conversation with a colleague months after I had originally written this notion about the fog, a lecture by Anishinaabe legal scholar John Borrows was brought up where he discussed various Anishinaabe concepts regarding fog. In later correspondence, he related to me that in his Anishinaabe dialect, the word for fog is *abawaa*, the word for standing fog is *awanigaabow* and fine mist translates to *awanibiisaa* (Borrows, 2014; personal correspondence). He went on to explain that:

There is a time in the early Ontario spring when cold and warm air masses intermingle, causing fine mists (water) to rise over the earth. The word used to describe this phenomenon is *aabawaa*, which means warm and mild. At these moments winter starts to loosen her grip on the land. The snows melt and waters start to flow. Sap can begin running through the trees as nature prepares to nurture new life. Interestingly, the Anishinaabe word for forgiveness is related to this moment in time; the word for forgiveness is *aabawaawendam*. Thus, forgiveness can be analogized to loosening one’s thoughts towards others; to letting relationships flow more easily, with fewer restrictions. Forgiveness is a state of being warmer and milder towards another; it signifies a warming trend in a relationship. Notice, that forgiveness, like the clearing of early spring mists, does not occur in an instant. Heat and the warmth need to be applied through a sustained period of time for mists to clear. Clarity of vision takes a while to develop as spring mists do not dissipate immediately; time is often needed to ‘clear the air’ and bring fairer views (Borrows, 2014).

It is not only clarity that occurs when the sun comes up, with its warming rays cutting through the fog, it also nurtures forgiveness for those things once obscured. If we can shine a light bright enough, the fog of ignorance will lift and release. Fog is a natural phenomenon, so it is unrealistic to expect that we should not see it again. However, if we can learn to forgive each other and ourselves we can more easily navigate that which obscures us.

Near the end of his book Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom, Taiaiake Alfred briefly discusses how Onkwehonwe people experience colonization like an addiction; the same principle can be applied to Settlers and their addictions to ignorance and privilege. We are addicted to the many ways in which we experience power and control over those whom we marginalize. This was a startling connection for me to make, for when I first read it I was just coming out of a tangential career as an addictions counselor. Fog is also a common metaphor in the understanding and treatment of addictions; so, if we can take Alfred's notion that we are addicted to our privilege (read, ignorance), and the idea that sunshine (read, experiential learning) can lift the fog, we might be getting somewhere.

There is also a common treatment approach in addictions that focus on the Stages of Change (Prochaska and DiClemente, 1983) where people go through various stages in making personal changes, from pre-contemplation to contemplation, preparation to action and maintenance of the changes made. This approach has significant potential for us to better understand anti-racist and anti-oppressive education practice, and how something like Aboriginal Education can move people through the Stages of Change. As we saw with the ICE participants, engaging with Aboriginal Elders caused people to consider their identity and privileges, moving them from a pre-contemplative state of their ignorance into contemplation. Further, the ICE prepared these pre-service teachers to take action in Aboriginal Education. This topic certainly deserves more space than this, and further inquiry in order to determine its appropriateness for application in Aboriginal Education, but we have to be committed to the notion that Aboriginal Education, in any incarnation, should be change-focused.

This dissertation has explored what it means to experience immersive cultural programming for Teacher Candidates, and how that will impact their personal lives and teaching practice, but my approach and perspective has significant limitations. Taking learners out of the classroom helps to define and set parameters for their experience, but since everything is experience, it is difficult to set aside and

define immersive cultural programming simply as ‘experience’. A number of questions arise when we start to look at experience, particularly when a research project attempts to define it and record it.

When does an experience begin—at the start of an activity? Does it include the planning and framing by leaders?... Once the “experience” begins, how does an individual, observer, researcher, participant, or leader identify “the” experience? How is an experience demarcated from the flow of life? How is any experience framed by the participant, leader, society, culture, or educational program? Who gets to say what is important about an experience? What if the leader and participant frame it differently? (Fox, 2008; 39).

I have attempted to not frame the experiences of the participants, preferring to let their comments and reflections speak for themselves. I told them that they would be having an experience, I never told them or knew what that experience might be. I was initially concerned with proving the utility of the experience in order to make it replicable in other contexts, but the undefinability of Aboriginal Education is its most useful trait. I know that 99 times out of 100 that the ICE I participated in would be just as successful because Wendy and Mark were the ones in control of the content and process, that is why relationship and collaboration is essential – and a new approach to Aboriginal Education is required. Adam reminds us “it’s not enough just to talk” about Aboriginal people and cultures in our classrooms, we need experience. Christie shares that when we can experience and relate to Aboriginality directly, it becomes something “more real” where she felt like she could “make a connection to what they were saying”, that she could “actually believe in what they’re saying.” This connection necessitates some self-reflection, on who we are and where we come from; something that we are often not required to think about and explore. Darcey considered that “distinguishing one’s self as non-Aboriginal is interesting because there are not very many situations where I’ve been asked that or had to consider that, ever. So that’s definitely something that I don’t know how to answer.”

Sometimes in the ICE, the participants found that their non-Aboriginality was not as relevant, such as with Jaclyn who reflected that: “I felt especially honoured that I was not allowed to enter the sweat lodge. For me, this was acknowledgement that I was a part of the community, a small way of welcoming me into the community, and that I was to respect their traditions and ways of living.” Perhaps no other

comment from the participants resonated with me as much as what Josh expressed when discussing constructing the teaching lodge. “We were building something”, he said; indeed we were, and hopefully still are. Finally, and fittingly, Nadine expresses the utility of the Immersive Cultural Experience and Aboriginal Education: “the classroom is not the only place to teach; it’s not the only way to teach.”

Just consider the implications of not just six but sixty Teacher Candidates expressing these same sentiments, or six hundred, or six thousand. What kind of education system would we have if every Teacher Candidate went through something such as the Immersive Cultural Experience? What social and political return could such an investment provide? What countless impacts – great and small – would we see in our lifetimes? Where an administrator or policymaker might see six thousand teachers with more knowledge about Aboriginal people, which will make them better teachers, I see six thousand teachers with more knowledge about themselves, which will make them better people. Cultural awareness, competency, sensitivity, or whatever you choose to call it, is only one small part of the work of intercultural engagement. I started this dissertation with a page of quotes that were particularly meaningful to me – the first one was from Art Solomon, celebrated Anishinaabe poet, scholar and teacher. He encouraged us that we have to do something about ourselves, when we see the way things are and do not know what to do, we can always do something about ourselves. Imagine thousands of Teacher Candidates graduating in this province every year, doing something about themselves – imagine the millions of lives that they alone will touch. That is not hyperbolic either; doing the rough math, it is millions of students who will see the benefit of Aboriginal Education.

Implications

Who I Am is Where I’ve Come From

I have benefitted from Aboriginal Education. That is the only reason that I had the opportunity or possibility to even write this dissertation. In taking this space to acknowledge my place in this research –

apart from being a writer, or a listener – I acknowledge that who I am is informed by where I have come from, my experiences in Aboriginal Education. Just as I noted earlier, that ‘change is the hallmark of nature’, the paper that you are reading is not the paper that I originally wrote – the person I was when I started is not the person that I am today, or on the day that you are reading these words. My original conception for this paper was to lay out a framework, or groundwork, for potential Allies to recognize what needs to be done to work towards decolonization. However, I realized that I could not do the groundwork for others because nobody did the groundwork for me. That process of moving forward together, learning, and experiencing is essential. There is no shortcut to Allyship, and there certainly is no shortcut to decolonizing ourselves, our communities and nations.

I am related to every written word in this dissertation, although I have chosen to not implicate myself in many of the topics that I discuss – which does not mean that I do not feel responsible or acknowledge my positionality and relationality to them. This dissertation, while conversational, is meant to be a projection, not a reflection. Taking myself out of much of this dissertation was not an exercise in objectivity, but rather an opportunity for the reader to see themselves in the topics that I discuss. The challenges and opportunities that I describe are not unique to me, nor will they be unique to you. I have provided some information and perspective, but have also asked difficult questions of the reader – difficult questions that I have repeatedly posed to myself.

My journey in Aboriginal Education has involved learning facts and figures, but it has also involved language and ceremony, laughter and heartache. It has taught me that the more I learn, the less I end up knowing – and I am grateful for that. Just like with ceremony and traditional teachings, there are things that cannot and should not be written down, so this dissertation has left a lot of important information out. Rather than be left to argue why such information and perspective has been left out, let us question why it should be included. If you want to know what was left out, perhaps one day we will

meet to discuss these issues, but in the meantime, make connections, learn and find those whom you can move forward with, together.

Moving Forward, Together

Education can be the treatment for systemic racism and oppression, knowledge can break apart ignorance, however experience and relationship truly is the closest thing we have to a cure. Despite all of our work, and all of our hopeful practice in creating a more equitable form of Aboriginal Education, we will never completely achieve our goals; “there is always more work to be done as we are ‘marinated in oppression’, we can never be completely rid of it” (Bishop, 2001; 114). Instead of being a deterrent, we can view collaboration as a challenge, view social justice as not an end but rather a means through which we can continually search for understanding – of each other and ourselves. In rising to meet this challenge, Seneca Faithkeeper Oren Lyons shares that “it is no time to be afraid. There is no time for fear. It is only time to be strong, only a time to think of the future and to challenge the destruction of your grandchildren” (Cajete, 1994; 76). The destruction he talks about can come in many forms, and it is not the product of a simple, linear interaction between colonizer and colonized. We saw the words of Albert Memmi at the beginning of this dissertation, “for if colonization destroys the colonized, it also rots the colonizer” (1965; xvi). The dialectics of cultural division are a product of the past, an irrelevant relic that serves no purpose but to keep people apart. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people have been connected, but distinct, since treaties were agreed to and signed on these lands, yet we continue to keep ourselves apart.

There have been a great number of issues in our past, there can be no denying that. Significant gains have been made in Aboriginal Education policy and practice since the advent of Residential Schools, but it has not been enough. We are not starting from scratch, but what we have now is an opportunity to reconcile all of those issues, and agree to share in the responsibility and possibility of a

future marked by respect, friendship and trust. “Now we must look to the future and try to imagine seven generations ahead. *Kiciwamanawak*, the future is ours to create. Choices we make in this moment will have consequences for our children, our grandchildren, our great grandchildren, and so on” (Johnson, 2007; 111 – emphasis original). History is made daily, there is no excuse that we let opportunities repeatedly pass us by. “Until the story of life in Canada, as Aboriginal people know it, finds a place in all Canadians’ knowledge of their past, the wounds from historical violence and neglect will continue to fester...” (RCAP, 1996; Volume 1:1, Part 4). The historical neglect that I have outlined in this dissertation is not necessarily the same disregard that RCAP addresses; but every month that passes without the necessary reconsideration of Aboriginal Education becomes a history tarnished by neglect.

The currently changing landscape of teacher education in this province provides us with numerous opportunities to invest in Aboriginal Education, and even if those changes in your context do not start now, or right away, a seed has been planted. I need to trust that there is enough fertile soil, or strong enough foundations at the various Faculties and Schools of Education for Aboriginal Education initiatives to take root, strengthen and grow. But alas, this is but one seed that I am attempting to plant, and any good farmer will tell you that the more seeds you sow, the more bountiful the harvest. It is my intention to follow up on the recommendations of this dissertation; to nurture those seeds that I have planted in order to work with the changing landscape, rather than against it.

In no other forum is the issue of working with the landscape more appropriate than when discussing technology – it is certainly not going away anytime soon, or reducing the role it plays in many of our lives. We have seen recently that the Idle No More movement largely sprang up and sustained itself through the use of social media. Media and technology have the potential to bring people closer together, however there are also significant limitations in regard to its use in the transmission of Indigenous Knowledge, and the disparate access that many Aboriginal people in remote communities experience. If used properly, social media and technology can teach us about each other and ourselves –

our shared cultures and histories – however they can not replace our relationships to land and each other, things that the Immersive Cultural Experience demonstrated.

We absolutely must know where we come from in order to know where we are going. It is my hope that this dissertation has been an exercise in reflection, on who we are and what it means to practice Aboriginal Education, but also that this writing be seen as a response to apathy and as an act of resistance – one that each of us can take up. I have been inspired by all of the Elders, teachers, scholars and writers whom I have cited throughout this thesis – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal – all of those who have taken action and stood up against what they perceived to be the great struggles of their times. I am sobered and humbled to acknowledge that some of their struggles are also mine, that we are still talking about racism in schools and the general disconnect that exists between Aboriginal and Settler people in this country. But, as I have been nourished by their words, we have also completed a cycle of understanding, which gives me hope; I have to believe that “a written work is not only an object but also an interaction between a writer and a reader, an event with real-life consequences” (Fagan, 2004; 24). Just like the rains become the waters that become the rains again, these discourses will persist.

Okanagan Chief Albert Saddleman reflected: “Some of the old people...talk about the water...and it is really nice to hear them talk about the whole cycle of water, where it all starts and where it all ends up” (RCAP, 1996; Volume 1, Part 1:3,2). In actuality, Aboriginal Education is a cyclical healing process, one marked by sharing and self-discovery, experience and emotion. The question that I have sought to ask in this dissertation – that I encourage you to respectfully consider, that I will leave you with – was shared with us by celebrated Mi’kmaq poet Rita Joe:

Wen net ki’l
Who are you?

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