

**Dancing to the Beat of Their Own Drum:
Incorporating Art, Dance and Music as Culturally Relevant Pedagogy for
Indigenous Students**

By

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Abstract

This research is an exploration into how a select group of educators in the TDSB are using art, dance and music as culturally relevant pedagogy for Indigenous students. This work has given insight into how to create relevant and meaningful educational experiences for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students, as well as how to transform “standard” classrooms to make academic success more accessible to these students. My research also explores the political implications of the government’s prioritization on aboriginal education, as well as the need for all teachers, regardless of their heritage, to serve as critical allies in order to decolonize education and promote an equitable and safe space for all students, and especially for Indigenous students. Themes explored include the importance of community partnerships and family connections, practical strategies for integrating arts-based education, the inherent connection to outdoor and place-based education, and the critical gains that can be made through using Indigenous story-telling traditions of art, dance and music as therapeutic, engaging and approachable avenues for realizing success in schools. Ultimately, my research proposes that self-identity cultivates self-efficacy, so as teachers we need to remember to celebrate culture within the classroom.

Key Words: arts integration, Indigenous education, culturally relevant pedagogy, STEM, outdoor education, community partnerships, meaningful learning opportunities, engaging Indigenous learners

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Preface: Language and Vocabulary Choices

Throughout this Master of Teaching Research Project (MTRP), I have chosen to use the language terms “Indigenous” and “FNMI” (referring to First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultures) instead of the term “Aboriginal”. The term Indigenous is used as an all-encompassing term that refers inclusively to First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultures as a whole. This was chosen because some scholars see the terms Indigenous and FNMI as more politically correct than the term Aboriginal, as it is felt that Aboriginal is a label forced upon members of First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultures by the Canadian government (Nardozi & Doran, 2015). Therefore, I will only use the term aboriginal when referring to governmental doctrines and/or when directly quoting an author who uses this term.

1.0 Introduction and Research Context

In 2007, the Ontario Ministry of Education established education for Indigenous students as one of their central priorities and created a program with a ten-year deadline to close the gap in academic achievement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous elementary and secondary learners (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). This deadline is imminent, yet research suggests that the strides for crucial gains in Indigenous education still have a long way to go. Research conducted within the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) in 2009-210, for example, found that schools were failing to provide Indigenous students with the educational environment and meaningful experiences that they need to achieve success (Dion, Johnston & Rice, 2010).

The findings of this critical report are extremely disparaging considering that the TDSB serves the largest urban Indigenous population in Canada (School Community Safety Advisory Panel, 2007). Within Ontario, 82% of all Indigenous students attend provincial publically funded off-reserve elementary and secondary schools, which accounts for 64,000 First Nations, Métis and Inuit students whose educational needs are not being met (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013).

Although 92% of elementary and 96% of high schools in Ontario have First Nations, Métis or Inuit (FNMI) students, a staggering 51% of elementary schools and 41% of secondary schools do not have Indigenous education opportunities for cultural support programming or professional development for teachers (Dion, Johnston & Rice, 2010). At the primary level, TDSB schools with larger proportions of Indigenous students have overall student enrollments that are one-third lower than the Ontario-wide average. As consequence, these schools are only half as likely as other schools with a lower proportion of Indigenous students to have specialist music or health and physical education teachers (Gallagher-Mackay, Kidder & Methot, 2013). The unfortunate implication of this finding suggests that the majority of Indigenous students do not benefit from adequate educational experiences within the realm of music and health and physical education.

1.1 Research Problem

Research and statistical analysis on students at the high school level show strong disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners. The dropout rate for FNMI secondary school students has decreased slightly, from 48% to 41%, yet this is still *much* higher than the national average of only 10% (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009).

One-third of all grade 9 Indigenous TDSB students are at risk of dropping out as a result of failing or quitting at least two subjects compared to 14% of non-Indigenous grade 9 students. TDSB secondary school suspension rates are highest for Indigenous students (School Community Safety Advisory Panel, 2007). As well, Indigenous students are three times more likely to be victims of violence compared to non-Indigenous students; specifically, FNMI youth aged 15-34 are the likeliest targets of violence, and are disproportionately at risk to be victimized while at school (Dion, Johnston & Rice, 2010).

Investigative exploration into this finding suggests that a lack of awareness of Indigenous culture and history amongst non-Indigenous students is a significant contributing factor to Indigenous student victimization (School Community Safety Advisory Panel, 2007). While Ontario has created a Native Studies curriculum to teach about FNMI cultures, contributions and histories, this curriculum is inconsistently applied (People for Education, 2013). This limited application is dismissively explained away by the fact that schools are not required to offer opportunities for learning about FNMI culture unless the school has what is considered a large number of Indigenous students (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). In this context, a large number refers to a school population comprised of at least 5% Indigenous students – a relatively small percentage, yet the majority of TDSB schools do not reach this proportion (People for Education, 2013).

Until recently, initial teacher candidates did not have any requirements to study Indigenous history, culture or education in Ontario as part of their teacher education program. As well, until very recently at the time of this study, initial teacher candidates did not have requirements to study Indigenous history, culture or education in Ontario as

part of their teacher education program (Mashford-Pringle & Nardozi, 2013). It is suggested that teachers' own lack of awareness of First Nations, Métis and Inuit culture is also a significant factor contributing to the academic gap for Indigenous students, leading to less Indigenous students pursuing post-secondary education (Dion, Johnston & Rice, 2010). As of 2012, it was found that less than half of all FNMI students in grade 9 take university-stream courses (compared to 72% of non-Indigenous students), which is why it is unfortunately not surprising that over 70% of Indigenous students do not apply to college or university, compared to 50% of non-Indigenous students (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014).

While the research into Indigenous students in the TDSB has highlighted the continual efforts still needed to create an equitable school environment for FNMI students, it has also determined key factors towards improvement (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). One key factor has been the formation of the TDSB Aboriginal Education Centre (AEC). The AEC offers a child-centered and holistic approach to enhance the overall achievement and opportunities for Indigenous students within the TDSB, with a focus on promoting voluntary self-identification of FNMI status to provide greater support to students within public schools (Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, 2014). The AEC's mandate is to institute consistent application of the Indigenous curriculum at both the elementary and secondary levels. Research suggests this will allow FNMI students to see their culture and role models reflected in their studies, and promote self-esteem and motivation for success in school. It is also believed that this is a critical step towards making non-Indigenous students aware of Indigenous culture to promote community inclusiveness (Aboriginal Education Centre, 2014). The

AEC states that the academic gap between Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students can be bridged by starting with young students by welcoming Indigenous students into a reflective and culturally relevant or responsive education system (People for Education, 2012).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy was made famous by Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings as a teaching methodology that strives for educators to acknowledge and uphold the diversity of their students and avoid encouraging homogenous viewpoints from Western society as universally held beliefs and values (Oran, 2009). It is defined by Ladson-Billings as a pedagogy that depends on three criteria: students must experience academic success, develop and/or maintain cultural competence, and develop a critical consciousness through which they question and challenge mainstream society (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In a culturally relevant pedagogy, teachers must value their students' skills and abilities, in conjunction with what the students find meaningful, and channel these in academically significant ways (Ibid). Cultural competence refers to the responsibility of teachers to maintain their students' cultural integrity and to utilize culture as a vehicle for learning (Ibid). Lastly, culturally relevant pedagogy means that teachers expect and encourage their students to engage critically with each other and the world, so that students can develop a larger sociopolitical consciousness with which they can critique the norms, values and institutions currently in society's status quo.

In regards to culturally relevant pedagogy with Indigenous students, Canadian studies at the Saskatoon school and board level have found that the more teachers are culturally competent – that is, they possess the ability to teach students from other cultures and take the time to develop this competence for their FNMI students – the more

likely it is that the school atmosphere will be positive and inclusive (Saskatoon Public Schools, 2008). Culturally relevant pedagogy for Indigenous students is also seen as holistic and inclusive, as it engages students on spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual levels, and instructional teachings are based on FNMI pedagogy, including mentoring, observing, project based learning, participation in ceremonies, and through the important act of storytelling (Ibid). MacLean and Wason-Ellam (2006) state that while storytelling was used to teach a multitude of core aspects in traditional times, such as values, beliefs, morals, history and life skills, it still holds value today in classrooms as it is a way of Indigenizing the curriculum. Furthermore, they found that storytelling fosters a caring community, teaches through analogy, professionalizes teachers and is indeed a way to facilitate culturally relevant teaching (MacLean & Wason-Ellam, 2006). Most important to this research is the fact that storytelling can be transformed beyond oral traditions, taking on unique forms when channeled into mediums of art, music and dance. The expression of FNMI song, dance, music, art, writing and performance tell stories that are rich in traditional culture and learning's (Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium, 2012). It has been found that engaging students through storytelling and its various forms can give students the freedom to reflect thoughtfully on their own lives (Ibid).

1.2 Research Purpose

In view of the sociopolitical context to reform FNMI education in Ontario, my research investigates how a select group of teachers and educators in the TDSB are integrating art, music and dance as culturally relevant teaching strategies for Indigenous school-aged students.

1.3 Research Questions

The overall question of this research is: how are a select group of educators in the TDSB integrating art, music, and dance as culturally relevant teaching strategies for Indigenous school-aged students? Guiding this one main research question are a select few sub-questions. Subsidiary questions include:

1. How do these teachers conceptualize culturally relevant teaching in theory and practice?
2. What experiences contributed to developing these teachers commitment to this practice, and to preparing them for this work?
3. What outcomes do these teachers observe from their Indigenous and non-Indigenous students?
4. What range of resources support these teachers in this practice, and what challenges do they encounter in this work?

1.4 Background of the Researcher

I am currently a Master of Teaching candidate in the Primary/Junior division at the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education (OISE) within the University of Toronto. As someone who has had the privilege of always feeling safe, supported and reflected in my school environment, at both the elementary and high school level, I am motivated to provide an equitable learning environment for students who are not afforded this privilege, and do not feel like they belong or are supported towards achievement within their school's environment.

As a third-generation Hungarian-Canadian, my European heritage was typically upheld and celebrated in my Ontario Catholic elementary school, and my private Anglican secondary school attracted a diverse population of students from over 40 countries and cultivated an all-inclusive community as well as having extensive resources for English language learners (ELL). I did not experience a lack of empathy or understanding about my cultural background and there were numerous positive role models reflected in my school's curriculum. However, I have not been immune to the negative effects of others experiencing a sense of alienation and subjugation based on their identity.

I loved school, but my experience would have been immensely different if my educational environment was not as readily accessible to me as it had been. It grieves me that there are students who are in schools that are unable to provide the support and motivation necessary to inspire learning, and that the ability to feel safe within a school environment is something that is taken for granted as a basic guarantee, when it is evident that a safe environment is a privilege that not all students experience. For this reason, I am an advocate for enhancing learning opportunities through adapting school environments to encourage success for neglected and marginalized students. I strongly feel that this type of institutional evolution must begin at the primary level in order for young learners to cultivate a deeply embedded sense of self-efficacy and cultural awareness to bridge the academic gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. I also suspect that the key to creating a better environment for Indigenous students is through integration of meaningful arts-based programming that motivate and support FNMI students, as Indigenous traditions are steeped in cultural and artistic story-telling.

Prior to attending OISE, I graduated from the University of Toronto with an Honors Bachelor of Science degree, specializing in psychology and criminology. My undergraduate work happily combined my passions for people and their stories by exploring the transformative power of personal narratives in psychotherapy, as well as my interest in how media stereotypes of young persons from minority backgrounds led to differential classification of deviance and subsequent differential treatment. After graduating, I completed a post-graduate program in Book and Magazine Publishing to study more about print and digital media literacy, and how communication and literacy can be a powerful tool for self-efficacy and motivated learning.

My extremely creative, eccentric mother raised me to appreciate how powerful art can be to motivate learning and create a sense of belonging. My mother has an enthusiastic love of the arts and passion for well being, having an extensive background in dance. She herself graduated from OISE's senior education division with a teachable in health and physical education, went on to assist in writing the Ontario dance curriculum, and created her own company, *Rainbow Artists*, which provided full and half-day arts programming for grades K-8 for students in the Niagara District School Board. Through this organization I have been able to work with primary students in visual arts and studio arts (print-making and sculpture), dance and drama. In addition to working with elementary students, I have had the opportunity to volunteer at Etobicoke School of the Arts (ESA) to work with secondary students at a specialized arts school.

1.5 Overview

To investigate my research questions I conducted a qualitative research study involving semi-structured interviews with educators who have experience teaching and working with Indigenous students within the TDSB.

Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature in the areas of prioritizing educational reform for Indigenous students, infusing meaning and motivation into education, and using art, music and dance as culturally responsive pedagogy. The literature shows what the Ministry of Education is working towards and what progress has been made to implement these changes within the TDSB. Chapter 3 describes the methods used in this study, introduces the participants, and discusses limitations of this study and consideration of areas for further research. In Chapter 4 I report the main findings from this research project by theme, and the findings as related to convergences and divergences from the existing literature. Chapter 5 includes a summary of the key research findings, and discusses implications and recommendations based on the findings for myself as a researcher and teacher, and for the educational community, including teachers, teacher practice, school boards and ministries of education, professional development organizations and Faculties of Education.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I introduce the three areas of the literature on the topic of Indigenous education that are pertinent to my study focus.

The first area, Prioritization of Education Reform for Indigenous Students, addresses the Canadian and Ontario governments' relatively recent call to action for improving education for First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) students attending public schools in Ontario. In this section, I review research and literature in the areas of challenges facing Indigenous students and teachers in Ontario public schools, the political reforms attempting to combat these challenges, and the research's criticism of these attempts to overcome challenges for Indigenous students.

The second area, Infusing Meaning and Motivation into Education, conducts a multi-perspective investigation through scholarly accounts of people who work directly with Indigenous students. In this section, I review research and literature in the areas of important considerations scholars argue are missing from the education reform, as well as the reform's best practices, and what educators have discovered as successful strategies for students following from both experience and research on particular practices and ways of avoiding appropriation, misrepresentation and tokenism.

The third and final area in the literature, Art, Dance and Music as Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, outlines the deeply embedded traditions of artistic story telling within Indigenous culture and encourages celebrating this richly artistic aspect of Indigenous heritage to cultivate deeper educational engagement. In this section, I review research and literature in the history of art, music, and dance, in Indigenous traditions of

storytelling, not only in the context of culturally responsive pedagogy for Indigenous students, but I also include what the research says about the benefits of these types of educational experiences and pedagogy, and the influence of art, music and dance for cultural self-expression and fostering self-efficacy.

Taken together, these three areas build towards further clarity in understanding the implications of acknowledging the Indigenous learner and integrating culturally relevant curriculum in Ontario schools for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

After examining these three areas of the literature relevant to my area of study, this chapter will conclude by stating how what I learned through this literature review is relevant to my own research, and how my research will contribute to this existing body of work.

2.1 Prioritization of Education Reform for Indigenous Students

This first area in the literature encompasses three connected sub-sections in the literature. The first sub-section is the problems hindering Indigenous students from achievement in our standards of Ontario public schools. The second sub-section is a discussion of the ongoing recent policy reforms attempting to fix these problems. The third sub-section is the scholarly criticisms lobbied at these reforms arguing that the new policy does not target many obstacles that still plague Indigenous students.

2.1.1 Problems Hindering Indigenous Students in Ontario Public Schools

There is extensive literature on how the Ontario public school system has traditionally isolated and disenfranchised Indigenous students at both the primary and secondary levels (Neegan, 2005; Cherubini & Hodson, 2008; Cherubini, Hodson, Manley-Casimir & Muir, 2010; St. Denis, 2011). There is an urgent necessity to improve

and expand upon FNMI education in the public system (St. Denis, 2010), especially as the Indigenous population has been identified to be the most rapidly growing population as well as the population with the largest number of young individuals within Canada (Mashford-Pringle & Nardozi, 2013). First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples comprise 4% of the Canadian population (approximately one million people) – a significant 45% increase within the last decade alone – with the greatest number of Indigenous people living in Ontario and Quebec (Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, 2014). The majority of Indigenous families no longer live on Native reserves, and have elected to send their children to off-reserve provincial public schools (Richards, 2008, p. 2).

Amongst both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, education has been determined as a critical route to success in the labour market, marked by the completion of high school, due to the fact that the Canadian employment rate “nearly doubles” with possession of a secondary school diploma (Richards, 2008). Higher income levels are associated with continued education with three-tenths of the differences in wages between FNMI and non-FNMI individuals credited to different education levels (Richards, 2008). Specifically for Indigenous peoples, pursuing education has been studied to be a valuable deterrent against negative consequences found in vulgar stereotypes associated with Native cultures: higher rates of poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, poor health and suicide (McIntosh, Moniz, Craft, Golby & Steinwand-Deschambeault, 2014). This fallacious stereotype is embedded in the poor Western portrayal of Indigenous culture that scholars argue have been perpetuated since the dawn of European colonization (Morrison, Morrison, Harriman & Jewell, 2008). The oppression the Eurocentric patriarchy coerced Indigenous groups into as well as the

failure of schools to provide an adequate education for Indigenous students is recorded throughout history in broken land treaties, forceful relocation of FNMI groups to bleak reservations, and forced residential schooling for Indigenous children where students learned through textbooks which vilified their own cultural identity as that of savages (St. Denis, 2010). Based on this longstanding history of educational oppression, it is argued that marginalized Indigenous communities can only escape poverty through an educational transformation (Richards, 2008).

Yet, there is continued evidence of the failure of public education to effectively integrate FNMI learners, including studies which have discovered a dramatically lower high school completion rate for Indigenous students, showcasing a critical lag behind the general Canadian norm (St. Denis, 2010). It has been found that across the country Indigenous students are consistently ranking lower in terms of achievement, arguably due to the inability of Canada's western-based and mainstream ideological curriculum, and its standardized expectations – which are delivered primarily by traditionally western-based and mainstream teachers – to resonate with and engage Indigenous students (Cherubini, 2014).

2.1.2 Critical Analysis of Ontario Education Reform for Indigenous Students

Scholars have identified this gap in education levels between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadian students as the most significant social policy challenge facing Canada (Hatcher, 2012). In 2003, in review of the mounting literature surrounding the educational gap and its associated tension, the Ontario Ministry of Education began working towards a solution, and in 2007 the Ministry launched a province-wide prioritization of Indigenous learners (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). This

prioritization is a result from both a historical and contemporary interpretation of developmental influences that have enabled the Ministry to create appropriate implementation strategies that can be situated within the broader context of FNMI socio-educational development (Cherubini, 2010).

In wielding this Aboriginal Education Strategy, the Ministry has been developing programming to increase student engagement and achievement (Hatcher, 2012). These initiatives are intended to create and implement curriculum resources for teachers to reach Indigenous students and to teach about FNMI cultures, traditions and histories (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009).

The Ministry has committed itself to fulfilling two main objectives by the ever-looming 2016. These objectives, reiterated in the most recently published updated report are 1) to improve FNMI student achievement and well-being, and 2) to close the achievement gap between Indigenous students and all students' (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). This recent update acknowledges the accomplishments of the Aboriginal Education Strategy thus far, as well as the extensive work still needing to be done, as FNMI education in Canada still remains far from a success story.

Validating this claim is the persistent gap in achievement levels between Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students seen in provincial data between 2011-2012 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) scores for Grade 3 and 6 reading show a disparity of 5-33 percentage points between Indigenous and English- and French-language students. Similarly, Grade 3 and 6 writing scores demonstrate a gap of 8-35 percentage points below and Grade 3

and 6 math scores have shown Indigenous students to be 6-51 percentage points below the national average. At the secondary level, there is a gap of up to 19 points for Grade 9 math, and a gap between 4-26 points between Indigenous and non-Indigenous student performance on the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). It should be noted that though these large disparities continue to exist, the proportion of Indigenous students who have completed high school has increased from 54% in 1999 to 66% in 2009, and the public image of FNMI culture is arguably more apparent and more honestly portrayed (Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, 2014).

2.1.3 Ongoing Issues Unaided by Ontario's Education Reform

It is important to speak to the history of residential schooling as part of the context for discussing education and Indigenous peoples in Canada. For three hundred years, Indigenous peoples who lived on the land that we now call Canada have suffered oppression due to contact with settler peoples (Nardozi & Mashford-Pringle, 2014). This oppression encompassed unjust treatment and trauma caused by the Western education system in the form of residential schooling beginning in the late 1800s, with the last residential school closing in 1996 (Ibid).

The trauma caused by this oppressive system has led to the need for mandates like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC). The TRC is a federal government mandate to inform all Canadians about the realities of residential schools by documenting statements that detail the experiences of First Nations, Métis and Inuit survivors, their families, communities and anyone who was affected by residential schools (TRC, 2016). It aims to encourage positive relationships between Indigenous

peoples and Canadians through a process of reconciliation based upon mutual respect and understanding (Ibid).

A significant aspect of this understanding is being aware that individuals who were traumatized by or had family who were traumatized by this education system may have a negative association with the education system we have today. They may choose to distance themselves or keep their children away from this schooling system, especially as it supports assimilation into Western mainstream society (Ibid). This negative association may coincide with the finding that older generations of Indigenous students were less invested in mainstream education than younger Indigenous students.

However, though younger Indigenous students are more invested in education than older generations, Indigenous youth have still not kept pace with the increase in education amongst other Canadians (Richards, 2008). Despite the commitment of the Ministry, progress towards building a respectful Indigenous-perspective has still been as distressingly slow today as it was in the past (Anderson & Pohl, 2002), as even with implementing Indigenous input into the Aboriginal Education Strategy change is still seen as slow in coming (Mashford-Pringle & Nardozi, 2013).

Nguyen proposes that a key issue continuing to plague the educational reform is that the federal government still holds final authority over partner programs co-created to aid the Aboriginal Education Strategy, and this prevents Indigenous voices from effectively having a full presence (Nguyen, 2014). This critique is in accordance with Cherubini's accumulating research of the past thirty years that has found subtle discourses disseminating the appeals of Indigenous peoples reveal how mainstream

western-based culture still dominates their linguistic and cultural traditions (Cherubini, 2008).

Another rationale for the remaining disparities is that the policy reform fails to address the issue of standardization. A one size fits all mentality has only silenced Indigenous voices as a symptom of privileged power, as Indigenous values, ideals and practices are not embedded in the standardized curriculum (Cherubini, 2014). The learning strengths and styles of FNMI students are not reflected in standardized tests, demonstrated in the struggles Indigenous students have had with Ontario curriculum language and writing standards. These provincial standards appear misaligned to Indigenous students' learning needs and preferences across all the primary, junior and intermediate levels (Cherubini, 2011).

A final explanation for why the Ministry has not been as effective is the idea that despite the intention to promote positive representations of Indigenous culture, the Ontario education system is rife with stereotypical images of what is called the invented Indian and there is very limited access to a safe community wherein students can assert their own exploration of self and identity (Dion & Salamanca, 2014).

Without a thorough pursuit of better outcomes in education for Indigenous students, this policy reform, if not made more effective, runs the risk of failing to make improvements in educational achievement and could assist the next generation of Indigenous students as inadequately as past governments have (Richards, 2008).

2.2 Infusing Meaning and Motivation into Education

This second area within the literature includes 2a) important considerations scholars argue are missing from the education reform; 2b) significant aspects of the policy that are effectively working towards bettering education for Indigenous students; and 2c) valuable practices for engaging Indigenous students in learning that educators have discovered through hands-on experience.

2.2.1 Ontario Education Policy for Indigenous Students – What is Missing?

Amidst the vast array of literature on FNMI education in Ontario, there is impressive scholarly research on the importance of on-going professional development for trained teachers to consistently support the integration of Indigenous content, as well as for providing training to teacher candidates in initial teacher education faculties. (Cherubini, 2008; St. Denis, 2010; Cherubini, 2011; Kanu, 2011; Deer, 2013; Mashford-Pringle & Nardozi, 2013; Cherubini, 2014).

While faculties of education for initial teacher training are beginning to respond to policy reform in Ontario, arguably they are not doing this as well or to the extent that they could be, considering that until recently at time of this study several reputable universities did not have any mandatory educational training in the area of Indigenous culture (Mashford-Pringle & Nardozi, 2013). Responses from teacher candidates in the form of written evaluation (questions, comments and observations) following a presentation on infusing Indigenous knowledge into education have indicated that the majority of OISE graduates between 2010-2011 received no formal instruction on Indigenous topics (Mashford-Pringle & Nardozi, 2013). A study that was designed to ascertain teacher candidates' exposure to Native Studies curriculum and pedagogy also

did not yield significant levels of training, and a significant number of participants reported feeling apprehensive about studying and delivering Indigenous perspectives as future teachers (Deer, 2013).

Reports have found that participants evaluate both their initial teacher education *and* their continuing professional development as certified teachers as having been less than effective in preparing them to address the needs of Indigenous students (Mashford-Pringle & Nardozi, 2013). This is crucial considering that this perceived lack of preparation has had serious implications for both teachers' pedagogy and understanding of Indigenous students' worldviews (Cherubini, 2011). Regarding certified teachers, educators have admitted to feeling ill-equipped to support Indigenous student growth because of a lack of awareness about the particular learning styles of FNMI students, and a lack of understanding within schools and school boards of Indigenous cultures, histories and perspectives (St. Denis, 2010; Cherubini, 2011; Mashford-Pringle & Nardozi, 2013; Deer, 2013; Cherubini, 2014). It has been found that teacher candidates and new teachers use the word "culture" as a way of explaining students' behaviours that teachers themselves do not understand and cannot explain otherwise (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

This lack of teacher awareness of the socio-historical and socio-cultural realities facing FNMI students contributes significantly to why these learning needs are not being fairly acknowledged and met (Cherubini, 2014). Cherubini (2011) finds the source of this problem as stemming from a lack of professional development for teachers within Indigenous education:

At no fault of their own, therefore, educators are seemingly resigned to plan for, deliver and evaluate FNMI students according to their unchallenged assumptions

of what it means to teach and learn. By not adopting a critical consciousness of culturally responsive pedagogy and teacher and student identity, educators unintentionally perpetuate the same epistemic practices that have marginalized Aboriginal students in varying degrees for over 200 years. (p. 16)

2.2.2 Ontario Education Policy for Indigenous Students – What Could

Work?

Despite its shortcomings, scholars have found some effective practices within the policy reform for encouraging FNMI student engagement and cultivating achievement. These solutions are identified as a meaningful and relevant combination of high-quality teaching, widespread awareness, respect for Indigenous history and culture, and strong relationships with students' parents (Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, 2014).

High-quality teaching includes educators who understand learner-centered instruction within an Indigenous context, which traditionally refers to the higher value FNMI families and students place on the community over each individual member. This understanding needs to be applied as a central pedagogical approach to create a community-focused environment that can empower Indigenous worldviews and allow students to explore and reflect within small-group activities (Cherubini, 2014). Placing pedagogy within a community-oriented perspective has encouraged students to be motivated by factors such as a welcoming school culture, meaningful learning opportunities, and positive personal influences beyond the classroom and school (Claypool, 2013). As community is integral to the Indigenous worldview, it is necessary to develop respectful relationships among all participants in the learning environment before any achievements in learning can be made. Furthermore, all children, including non-Indigenous students, benefit from a classroom environment that promotes mutual respect (Hatcher, 2012).

A second pedagogical strategy found to be effective is “ethical positioning” which encourages educators to become open to addressing and challenging racist values and attitudes that individuals often are unaware of holding. Ethical positioning has been seen to be beneficial for both initial teacher education, and for continual professional development by enabling people to move beyond ethnocentricity (O’Dowd, 2010).

A final strategy is the incorporation of “Two-Eyed Seeing”, which is a strategy that positions itself beside the Ontario curriculum instead of simply bringing out Indigenous values and practices for multicultural festivals as a means of adding on diversity in superficial ways (Hatcher, 2012). Developed by Mi’kmaw Elder Albert Marshall, Two-Eyed Seeing is an exercise in flexible perspective taking that enables the learner to cross cultural borders without sacrificing their own self-identity, and it works to build inclusive education by empowering Indigenous learners to see and interpret the world through their own eyes. This allows teachers to put their students at ease through bonding and focusing on the commonalities between Indigenous and Western pedagogical approaches and pursuits of knowledge (Hatcher, 2012).

2.2.3 Forget Policy – What do Educators Find Valuable for Indigenous Students?

My attention turns now to the research on solutions derived from hands-on teaching experience with students in a bottom-up approach, rather than a top-down, informed-by-policy approach.

In a study on the relationship between self-belief, academic achievement and behavioral development in Indigenous Canadian children, a team of scholars provided

significant evidence for the idea that the most beneficial learning community is one that provides opportunities for developing social skills and creating friendships and utilizes culturally appropriate interventions that support leadership and study skills necessary for school achievement (Baydala et al., 2009).

To create this kind of environment, Indigenous teachers believe educators must have an open mind, dedication, patience, compassion, humour, a love of learning, and high expectations for their students (St. Denis, 2010). Teachers also agree that the integration of FNMI content and perspectives into provincial education must happen every day, across all subject areas and be targeted towards all students, (St. Denis, 2010). Teachers also state that they should encourage their students to “acknowledge that each of the First Nations has a history, culture, language and tradition that has been in existence since the beginning of time and will continue for as long as the world continues” (Anderson & Pohl, 2002, p. 18).

Lastly, Indigenous educators firmly articulate that good teaching involves assisting students to find their true gifts, to develop pride and self-worth and engage in self-reflection and self-evaluation (St. Denis, 2010). It is argued that integrating Indigenous content into core curriculum can be achieved as long as it is carried out within a culturally relevant pedagogical approach that is both meaningful and relevant to the students (St. Denis, 2010).

Culturally relevant pedagogy is an equitable way of teaching that facilitates and encourages the achievement of all students through teaching in a learner-centered classroom context in which students can see their own strengths and identities reflected

and nurtured within their learning environment (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This type of pedagogy comprises three dimensions: institutional (policies and values of the administration), personal (the cognitive and emotional processes teachers need to engage in) and instructional (materials, strategies and activities for teaching). All three of these dimensions must interact in order to facilitate classroom learning that extends harmoniously to fit the students' home cultural and linguistic practices (Richards, Brown & Forde, 2007).

Richards, Brown and Ford (2007) make several suggestions for how educators can become culturally relevant. In order for teachers to become culturally relevant, they have to engage in reflective thinking and writing about their actions and interactions with their students. Teachers should also explore their own personal and family history to shed light on the roots of their own worldviews and to acknowledge membership in different groups. It is also crucial for teachers to educate themselves about the history and experiences of diverse groups, visit students' families and communities, familiarize themselves with successful teachers in different settings, and develop a deep appreciation for diversity. Lastly, teachers need to be active participants in reforming the traditional western-based school institution to be more inclusive through questioning standard policies and procedures (Richards, Brown & Forde, 2007). This area of research surrounding how Indigenous teachers are utilizing culturally relevant pedagogy effectively within elementary schools in Ontario is unfortunately brief and limited in scope, giving rise to the need for more awareness of culturally relevant pedagogy in action, as well as teacher insight into what is effective in Ontario.

2.3 Art, Music and Dance As Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

This last area of research explores the history of art, music and dance in Indigenous traditions of storytelling. This section describes the positive impact of modern works of art and performance created by young Indigenous individuals to uphold and express their culture. It also details the influence of art, music and dance for dynamic engagement and self-expression of cultural identity. As well, it suggests that promoting Indigenous traditions in teaching students reflective art, dance and music at a young age is crucial for fostering self-efficacy and self-identity that can lead to confidence in school success.

2.3.1 A Culture Steeped in Artistic Storytelling

Artistic expression is intrinsic to Indigenous tradition. Traditions of storytelling allow people to understand their roots to help determine both a person's cultural history, as well as form identity that will influence their own future endeavors (Anderson & Pohl, 2000). There has been a significant history of the relationship between education and cultural tradition, as FNMI groups have attempted to obtain educational experiences for their children to allow their children to recognize and to celebrate their culture's unique traditions and, in doing so, to enhance their sense of self-identity (Cherubini, 2014).

Ontario public school teachers can help with engagement and achievement by acknowledging Indigenous values that are beneficial to all students through the use of socio-cultural worldviews and traditions connected to Indigenous epistemologies, such as the Seven Grandfather Teachings within the classroom (Ibid). This has been found to be of considerable impact because Indigenous values are directly related to traditional knowledge (Ibid). It is beneficial to infuse traditional values into learning as prior studies have determined that children who are successful at school are mainly motivated by

values that are salient within the school context (McInerney, Hinkley & Dowson, 1998). As well, this connects with findings from Vygotsky (1986) that language and culture have a significant influence in a child's social and identity development and their construction of meaning as cultural traditions and social practices effect the way a child learns and thinks (Vgotsky, 1986). Building on this finding, it has been suggested that both language and ceremony are significant aspects of school that can enhance Indigenous students' voices by nurturing their confidence and creativity (Antone, 2000). There are also suggested implications for a child's self-esteem. A child's self-esteem has been found to be largely influenced by the ways in which the child and mainstream society perceives the cultural group to which the child belongs, and children use media – including stories on the news and children's books – to understand how their culture is viewed (Vgotsky, 1986). Taken together, the research makes clear that the stories and voices of Indigenous peoples must be heard in the school systems that FNMI students are attending so that students do not get trapped into inaccurate and negative representations of their culture (Antone, 2000).

Furthermore, traditions such as oral story telling are effective at building positive relationships among peers because they require people to have faith in the human consciousness (Hatcher, 2012). They also require trusting that other people are able to draw inferences from a story that is best for their own learning. These relationships must exist in a classroom before any effective learning can be achieved (Ibid). Trusting the audience to interpret the message is a crucial element within Indigenous story-telling traditions, with learners being allowed to make mistakes in order to facilitate deeper understanding of the content. This inherent flexibility of storytelling can be a very

successful education model (Ibid). In this transformative manner, learning through observation and interpretation becomes a reflective and spiritual experience that is best undertaken through metacognitive quests to understand spirituality within traditions. This is because the spirituality of Indigenous culture is connected through their languages, songs, stories, dances, and in their lifestyles, interactions and who or what they honor (Ibid).

In order to create a form of culturally relevant pedagogy, educators must integrate Indigenous content in explicitly meaningful and real ways that hold daily relevance for students. This can be attempted by promoting experiential learning with exciting hands-on activities such as oral story telling of history and culture, drumming and drum making, painting, carving, beadwork, and Indigenous dancing (St. Denis, 2012). It is important to address the risk of superficiality in attempting to integrate Indigenous content. Nieto (2010) states that the idea of culture is more complicated than approaches to multicultural education that simply focus on foods, festivals, folklore and fashion of a specific group. Integration of Indigenous perspectives that is done without complementing cultural activities with formal and consistent classroom learning opportunities runs the risk of being insincere and a cultural misappropriation.

2.3.2 The Rising Popularity of Modern Indigenous Youth Art Culture

Incidentally, while the economic, social, cultural and political conditions of Indigenous people in Canada have reached a tipping point, Canada is also witnessing a renaissance of contemporary Indigenous art (Nagam & Swanson, 2014). This may be explained by of Indigenous youth coming of age as artists with voices to be heard, and

the rise of Indigenous consciousness-raising music from Indigenous youth themselves, such as A Tribe Called Red.

Prior to any sort of educational reform, Indigenous peoples were subjected to school curriculum and practices that were “premised on the absence of Indigenous people” (Dion & Salamanca, 2014, p. 185). Rather than disappearing and participating in their own cultural erasure, this oppression meant Indigenous students had to speak back to the authority of Canada’s national narrative that was consistently excluding their culture (Dion & Salamanca, 2014). As explored with the inVISIBILITY exhibition featuring urban Indigenous artists, art is a method youth can use to assert their active presence while simultaneously communicating their own “stories of survivance” about their educational experiences (Dion & Salamanca, 2014, p. 186).

Other modern Indigenous artists have been integrating Indigenous ideologies and embodied knowledge to decolonize the Indigenous identity through a multidisciplinary convergence of performance, painting, music and new and digital media art, using art as a powerful tool for self-expression (Nagam & Swanson, 2014). One artist, Tanya Tagaq has catapulted herself into the public eye after beating out mainstream artists, including Canadian R&B golden boy Drake, to capture the 2014 Polaris Prize. Tagaq asserts an ability to control her identity, utilizing concepts of community, post-nationality, and appropriation of film to express both her individual and collective identity (Dial-Kay, 2013). She fully immerses herself in mass media arsenals to voice a new narrative of Indigenous culture that defies previous Eurocentric and repressive representation (Dial-Kay, 2013).

The presence of Indigenous artists reflected in pop culture and the media is important for visible representations of FNMI role models for young students. These artists confidently assert cultural opinions through an intersection of art and technology that empower critical discourse about identity, gender, sexual orientation, land rights and other socio-political issues (Nagam & Swanson, 2014).

2.3.3 Influence of Art, Dance and Music for Engagement and Expression of Identity

It has been found that incorporating Indigenous cultural traditions into the western-based, mainstream curriculum can work towards positively enhancing Indigenous students' self-esteem and sense of identity (Cherubini, 2014). Yet, mainstream provincial elementary schools are doing this only to a limited extent (Ibid). There are few examples of pedagogies that celebrate critical discussion and storytelling in mainstream classrooms, and as a result, students are not given the opportunity to become co-creators and facilitators of their own learning (Ibid).

Celebrating Indigenous identity would take strides towards creating what is known as holistic curriculum (Hatcher, 2012). The idea of the holistic classroom is an environment in which curriculum is predicated on the principles of connection, balance and inclusivity, and balance is achieved through differentiated instruction and lessons that tap into multiple intelligences (Ibid). An example of using multiple intelligences to promote a holistic classroom is connecting the body and mind through movement and dance (Ibid).

Dance and music can contribute to students learning authentic Indigenous content by requiring students to be active learners (St. Denis, 2010). It is through guiding student self-discovery towards their cultural identity that we can help Indigenous students achieve within the still-Eurocentric Ontario public school systems. Academic achievement is not the only criterion needed to fairly evaluate the educational accomplishments of Indigenous students (Richards, 2008). In recent years, Indigenous students have been able to learn much more about their culture and heritage than past generations could due to increased presence in the curriculum because of the Ministry of Education's policy reform. This has also increased exposure of Indigenous culture to non-Indigenous students. Studies have highlighted how meaningful and engaging pedagogical approaches deeply aligned with Indigenous values and practices, including place-based education, outdoor education and environmental education, are for all students, including those who are not a part of or familiar with Indigenous culture (Davidson-Hunt & O'Flaherty, 2007; Smith, 2002; Woodhouse & Knapp, 2000).

This has and is suggested to continue to positively affect self-efficacy in self-identifying as an Indigenous person, as it has shown support for the positive contributions Indigenous cultural groups have made to Canada and the Canadian identify throughout history (Richards, 2008). In order to further encourage a healthy relationship balance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups and counteract negative portrayals of Indigenous group members, society must promote a strong, positive Indigenous identity through school programs that serve as representational role models for Indigenous students using culturally relevant pedagogy (Antone, 2000).

When schools fail to incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy for FNMI students, there are numerous challenges that are explainable by cultural disconnect and a misalignment between school expectations and Indigenous cultural values (McIntosh, Moniz, Craft, Golby & Steinwand-Deschambeault, 2014). These cultural values should be infused throughout the curriculum to nurture students towards increasing self-esteem, taking responsibility for their actions, positively influencing peers, and showing more engaged and positive classroom behaviour (McIntosh, Moniz, Craft, Golby & Steinwand-Deschambeault, 2014).

In order for students to be able to possess this comfort and confidence within their classrooms, there needs to be a reconciliation between students' self-expression of their Indigenous identity and self-expression of Canadian identity. Research has shown that “as Canadians, we are endlessly defining ourselves, seeking to locate our sense of self in relation to some ‘Other’”, and too often in our national narrative this “Other” takes on the stereotyped form of an Indigenous person (Mannani & Thompson, 2012, p. 22). To contextualize values inherent in Indigenous education for *both* Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, teachers must celebrate the fact that Indigenous content *is* Canadian content (St. Denis, 2010).

Indigenous students must not be deprived of learning about their culture, history, values and worldview within school any longer. Research has found that if students are able to learn about their culture within their education, they will naturally develop a positive self-identity as an Indigenous group member (Faries, 2009). This self-identity allows students to take pride in who they are, which will help them to cultivate self-

esteem, which then can build self-confidence. This confidence has been shown to benefit students across all levels of education (Faries, 2009).

This self-efficacy and confidence integral to education flourishes within art, dance and music, as some Indigenous cultures hold the belief that art is related to their identity, and to the sustainable existence of their culture (Coleman, 2005). Dance specifically may be an empowering tool for positive identity formation. Dance has been found to be beneficial in enhancing positive perceptions, expanding self-expression, and encouraging communication (Ko, Lee, Boswell & Lee, 2013). The use of body language found in dance has been found to be a powerful way to stimulate students' self-expression, especially considering how dance as well as music play a critical role in embodying and expressing identity (Dueck, 2014).

2.3.4 Inspiring Young Minds to Connect Culturally for Confidence and Success in Schools

For Indigenous students, meaningful and relevant is embodied through traditional crafts and designs within art, songs and movement within music and dance, exploring geographical contours of nature through place-based and outdoor education, and within legends and oral history found in dramatic and language arts (Preston, Cottrell, Pelletier & Pearce, 2012). These meaningful and relevant activities are aspects of culturally relevant pedagogy that aim to promote self-identity, self-efficacy and motivation and resilience within learning.

Encouraging this resilience in student academic achievement through exploration of self-identity has been found to be most effective when schools start when the students

are as young as possible (Ungar & Liebenberg, 2013). Factors associated with resilience, such as cultural adherence and community involvement, affect how well FNMI students engage in school more than individual or family factors, with visible minority youth like young Indigenous children, susceptible to the most influence (Ibid). Improving school engagement for Indigenous children can also result from school-wide efforts to enhance children's experience of their culture and seeing cultural role models involved in community activities (Ibid).

The importance of instilling cultural identity and resilience within Canada's youngest population of Indigenous students is further evidenced by research suggesting that a key piece of the solution to school engagement lies within the early pre-school years (Preston, Cottrell, Pelletier & Pearce, 2012). As learning is said to begin immediately at birth, young children who learn within a stimulating environment are more likely to develop a range of positive personal, social and intellectual traits including self-confidence, mental health, and motivation to learn and are more likely to graduate from high school (Preston, Cottrell, Pelletier & Pearce, 2012). The significance of early childhood education is crucial for all children, but has been found to be especially pivotal for FNMI children since they are the most rapidly growing and youngest ethno-cultural group in the country (Preston, Cottrell, Pelletier & Pearce, 2012). Bearing these factors in mind it is hard to deny the transformative power of schools and school curriculum in shaping not only the identities of students but affecting their future and social and economic circumstances as well (Kanu, 2011).

2.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the extensive literature on Indigenous education illuminates why the Ontario Ministry of Education has called for a reform for culturally relevant pedagogy that will target the learning needs of Indigenous students. The literature in this review was selected for its relevance to my own area of focus, and included research into Indigenous artistic traditions of story-telling, and how contemporary Indigenous artists are using their craft to cultivate cultural awareness and to rewrite the national narrative so it is inclusive and anti-oppressive.

The focus of my own research intersects with the use of art, music and dance-based curriculum as culturally relevant pedagogy for young learners both inside and outside the traditional school classroom. My study also aims to explore the necessity of using art, music and dance as culturally relevant pedagogy with Indigenous students at TDSB schools. My research fits into the existing literature surrounding Indigenous education, arts education, place-based education, outdoor education, and environmental education, as well as research into self-efficacy, identity and culture by describing how two Indigenous educators working within the TDSB are using art, music and dance as culturally relevant pedagogy to engage and encourage achievement for their Indigenous students in elementary and high school. My work is founded on my belief that self-identity cultivates self-efficacy and as consequence teachers need to celebrate culture to create inclusive learning environments that can increase school engagement and accessible achievement.

CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This third chapter describes the research methodology comprising this study. It begins with a review of the chosen research approach and its subsequent proceedings, with an explanation as to why these were chosen for this study. The chapter then identifies and discusses the instruments of data collection, and the selection criteria implemented for determining an appropriate sampling of participants to interview. It continues on to detail the procedures used for data analysis and provide the mandated ethical considerations, outlining the actions carried out to establish strict adherence with ethical review procedures. Next, the chapter encompasses the limitations of the study, as well as highlighting the methodology's strengths. Finally, the chapter concludes with a synopsis of the key methodological decisions and the rationale behind these decisions given the research purpose and questions.

3.1 Research Approach & Procedures

Education is a self-reflective field in that in order to engage in the learning process, an individual must be willing to take a critical look at themselves and thoughtfully seek out why and what it is they wish to learn. It takes courage to engage in thoughtful inquiry of oneself and one's self-identity, indeed, one's entire existence, in relation to the world and the chaos of our collective daily life. Though daunting, this is how changes come about and self-improvement grows into reality. Merriam (2009) states that improving one's practice within the field of education is a consequence of asking these hard-hitting, researchable questions, and that this is best achieved through the lens of a qualitative research design. While research itself is the systematic investigation into what is

unknown, qualitative research in particular is meant to discover how people interpret their experiences and assign meaning to their life as they live through it (Merriam, 2009). This research study is a qualitative research inquiry into how educators working with Indigenous youth are integrating art, music and dance as a meaningful form of culturally relevant pedagogy, and to learn from them what outcomes they observe for their Indigenous students.

The research is structured by the following research question and related sub-questions:

1. How are teachers in the TDSB integrating art, music, and dance as culturally relevant teaching strategies for Indigenous school-aged students?

Sub-questions:

- a) How do these teachers conceptualize culturally relevant teaching in theory and practice?
- b) What experiences contributed to developing these teachers commitment to this practice, and to preparing them for this work?
- c) What outcomes do these teachers observe from their Indigenous and non-Indigenous students?
- d) What range of resources support these teachers in this practice, and what challenges do they encounter in this work?

Qualitative research – a focus on meaning in context, as Merriam (2009) writes – is

an appropriate approach for my research as it is the ideal praxis for understanding educational practice. This is because it is research centered on discovery, insight and understanding – the very tenets of self-reflection – from the worldviews of the participants involved (Merriam, 2009). As a result, qualitative research can increase the opportunity to make meaningful differences in the lives of individuals, instead of merely in theory. Qualitative research can help close this gap between theory and practice that can exist with using only quantitative research, for though there is an incredible amount to be gained from systematic and statistical analysis, numbers and calculations alone fail to capture and fully articulate the insights gleaned from vivid descriptions of lived experiences (Glaser & Strauss, 2012). From my own perspective, I am inclined to believe that qualitative research is a transformative piece to the entire puzzle, with its ability to articulate the elusive, picking up on the contours of the human experience with all the meaningful – and sometimes messy – manners we have of constructing knowledge and navigating the social and physical spheres that tie us to ourselves and to each other.

As my research purpose and question is an investigation into how educators working with Indigenous youth integrating art, music and dance as a meaningful form of culturally relevant pedagogy, I am dependent on the interpretations these teachers make of their experiences, and as such a qualitative research approach grants this study the ability to hear about rich descriptions and stories of teaching in practice that it requires. A qualitative design also allows for the acknowledgement of the philosophical assumptions that I bring to the study as researcher and interviewer, as well as the beliefs and values inherent in my participants as interviewees. Qualitative research maintains that people not only acknowledge and understand the philosophical assumptions that influence research,

but to move a meta-cognitive step beyond by including them in the research, through explicitly writing about them (Creswell, 2013).

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

The primary instrument of data collection used in the current study is the semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix B), which was created after being informed by a literature review. The literature review drew primarily from two sources. The first source was comprised of documents dictating previous and ongoing reformations to Indigenous education. The second source was comprised of peer-reviewed studies that had a thematic emphasis on the convergence on culturally responsive pedagogy, arts programming, unique pedagogical approaches, cross-curricular educational strategies and the links between self-identity and self-efficacy on students.

Guided by the current literature, semi-structured interviews were conducted with participating teachers. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), an interview is a conversation that contains both a structure and a purpose. Specifically, in a semi-structured interview the purpose is to explicitly learn from the participant's storied experiences in order to collect, interpret and analyze the conversation for meaning. An interview that takes the form of research is a professional conversation based on daily life that constructs knowledge out of the dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee. It is precisely an inter-change of views between two people having a conversation about a mutual interest. In an interview there is both a focus on the person interaction, and a later focus on the knowledge constructed during that dialogue (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Due to the qualitative approach to the research and the parameters of the ethical protocol, semi-structured interviews were selected as the most suitable process

for collecting data. The use of “semi-structured” refers to the balance struck between the interview’s adherence to a set list of the same prepared questions that all participants are asked, coupled with the flexibility of being able to ask follow-up questions to clarify and expand on the participant’s responses (Bernard, 2006). It also provides a more succinct timeframe than an unstructured conversation would warrant, allowing the interview to flow genuinely yet to run an efficient course (Ibid). Consequently, the semi-structured interview as a research method allows for the interview to avoid non sequitur deviations, while still favouring a natural progression of conversation that helps to make the interviewee feel safe and secure (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

The interviews were conducted in person and the conversations were digitally stored using audio recording software. The interviews were recorded to avoid the potential of distracting the participant with note taking while they spoke, to establish an authentic dialogue and relationship between interviewer and interviewee, and to have a verbatim account of each answer in order to minimize errors once the conversation was later transcribed (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). The interview began with a set of more colloquial “soft” questions about the participant’s background. This was done for two reasons: to gain introductory information to later form a “snapshot biography” of each person, and to familiarize the participant with the interview process to ease them into the conversation. With an increasing level of comfort, the questions became increasingly more specific and gave more space for self-reflection, personal opinions and examples from the participant’s life as they progressed into the remaining four sections of questions that struck at the heart of what the research aims to uncover: the teacher’s 1) practice; 2) beliefs and values; 3) challenges and influences; and 4) goal-setting and predictions for

the future. For the complete list of questions, please see Appendix B – Interview Protocol.

3.3 Participants

This section establishes and explains the sampling criteria created to identify teachers who would be suitable participants for the research study and includes the process of recruitment. The section introduces participants – who have each been assigned a pseudonym – in a “snapshot biography” collected from their background data.

3.3.1 Sampling Criteria

Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area, as well as the TDSB specifically, were chosen as the study’s setting since, as mentioned in Chapter 1, the TDSB serves the largest urban Indigenous population in all of Canada (School Community Safety Advisory Panel, 2007). As a provincial public school board, the TDSB falls under the Ontario political mandate for reforming FNMI education. As the largest board in Ontario, the TDSB is at the forefront for educational evolution, and consistently garners attention – and scrutiny – as a sounding board for what policy-derived implications are created and what their existence means for Ontario students and schools in general (Joshee, 2009).

The following criteria were used to determine appropriate research participants:

- They are educators who have a minimum of 2 years working with Indigenous students
- They must have demonstrated a commitment to integrating art, music and/or dance in their support of Indigenous students, and a commitment to culturally relevant pedagogy

- They must be currently applying culturally relevant pedagogical approaches to create meaningful learning environments for Indigenous students
- They must be educators within the TDSB working within off-reserve, public education

First, the research's criteria included educators who have a minimum of 2 years working with Indigenous students as this study is interested in learning about educators' perspectives on how the systematic approach to supporting Indigenous students has been influenced by the evolving policy for reforming Indigenous education. This included learning from educators who have been actively working with students for several years, as well as newer educators who have been ushered into the system in the midst of these political and policy changes.

Second, as the study aimed to uncover diverse ways for supporting Indigenous students, the educators interviewed must have a demonstrated commitment to integrating art, music and dance to support Indigenous students. A unique pedagogical approach also includes educators who work with and support Indigenous students beyond the typical classroom by integrating arts in spaces such as through outdoor education and/or involvement in their local Indigenous community.

Third, these educators must have demonstrated experience applying a culturally relevant teaching practice that is specifically targeted towards supporting Indigenous students so that I could learn from them what outcomes they observed from their students.

Lastly, these educators needed to be working within the TDSB, working within off-

reserve public education, as I was most interested in examining arts integration within this type of educational setting.

3.3.2 Sampling Procedures

The current study used both convenience and purposive sampling to determine suitable participants for inclusion. Convenience sampling was used by intentionally tapping into a large association of teachers that had the potential to contain appropriate participants, for example, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). Purposive sampling – non-random sampling based on the sampling criteria – was then used to narrow down potential participants into a smaller selection of teachers who had the most relevant experience. In order to recruit participants using both forms of sampling, existing contacts and new contacts were created primarily through involvement with schools and organizations supporting Indigenous students and parents in the community. In particular, contacts were made through teacher and principal connections within the TDSB’s pilot program for the FNMI March Break and Summer Camp Experiences, as well as by attending Indigenous education-related workshops hosted by school boards, professional associations, teacher education programs, and subject-area specialization organizations.

3.3.3 Participant Bios

Aimee

“Aimee” was an educator who identified most strongly as Indigenous, though her background had connections to other cultures as well. She had 37 years of experience working with Indigenous youth, from kindergarten to high school students. Fifteen of these years were within the TDSB. She had worked as a special needs assistant, a child

and youth worker, a certified child and youth counsellor within an Indigenous Children's Aid agency, and as a parent volunteer leading Indigenous art activities in her child's class. At the time of the research she was the educational programming coordinator for a school that is essential in facilitating Indigenous programming for Indigenous students. She played a vital role in running this school as well as teaching various subjects. She had a strong background in using visual arts – everything from painting to making medicines – within Indigenous education and within counseling sessions with Indigenous students.

Brooke

“Brooke” was an educator at the beginning of her career who identified most strongly with her First Nations culture, though she was also of Métis and Irish heritage. She had been working with Indigenous youth since she was a youth herself at 16 years old. She had been working with Indigenous youth for ten years in a peer support and mentorship role, and had been sharing teachings and Indigenous culture with youth consistently for the last five years. She had experience in outdoor education through her work as a camp counsellor, and previously toured western Canada with a national non-profit social justice organization leading workshops on Indigenous culture. At the time of the research Brooke was a Native Culture and Traditions instructor for the TDSB at two different schools she also played a significant role in working with Indigenous youth in schools across Toronto. She had a fine arts university degree in theatre and performance art, had toured as an actor with the oldest Indigenous performing arts company in Canada and was a celebrated singer and songwriter.

3.4 Data Analysis

The procedure of data analysis in the study began with transcribing each recorded participant interview. The interviews were studied and the text of the responses was coded into categories and thematic concepts using the overarching research question and subsequent questions as an interpretive instrument. Thematic analysis – using interconnected illustrations or symbols, known as thematic networks, to represent the main themes inherent in a text – has been found to be an assertive tool that is useful for organizing and presenting qualitative analysis in a systematic manner (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

The interviews were coded for both what the participants included in their responses to the interview questions, as well as what themes were not mentioned or explicitly excluded in their response (labeled as null). After each specific interview was studied, transcribed and coded into categories and themes based on the conceptual frameworks, topics and keywords from each participant were cross-referenced across all participants' interviews to provide a big picture assessment. This overview presented similarities and differences spanning across participants' backgrounds, practices and experiences, beliefs and values, challenges and influencing factors and goals for the future. This allowed for each participant's snapshot biography to be situated within the broader context in relation to the other teachers. Once this overall context was discovered, adopting subthemes into larger themes to synthesize the data completed the second level of data analysis. In a third and final level, the data was analyzed for meaning and implications for the broader educational community, which will be addressed in the next chapters.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

The current study conformed to the ethical review protocol dictated by the Master of Teaching program within the Curriculum, Teaching and Learning graduate department at OISE and the University of Toronto. Research ethics represent the specific principles, rules and guidelines within research that the research community upholds as appropriate (Hunt, 2012). Ethical research protocol is essential as it protects a participant's rights (Murphy & Dingwall, 2001) and ensures that researchers are conducting the study the way they claim to, including designing and collecting an approach that is "valid, reliable, legitimate and representative" (Hunt, 2012, p. 100).

For this study, participants were provided with a letter of consent (see Appendix A) to read and sign to give their explicit consent to be interviewed and well as auto-recorded before continuing in the interview process. This consent letter included an overview of the study, the ethical implications, and outlined the expectations of participation (one 45-60 minute semi-structured interview). I kept one copy of the signed letter, and the participant was given a second copy for their records. There are no known risks to participation in the study, and as a preventative measure I attempted to minimize any potential risks by reassuring the participant through the consent letter and during the interview that they had the right to refrain from answering any question, as well as reminding them of their right to withdraw from participation at any time. I attempted to create a relaxed and professional interview atmosphere to build a sense of mutual appreciation and trust for a positive rapport between interviewer and interviewee.

Participant protection and confidentiality were the fundamental ethical concern in the study. In regards to this concern, all participants were assigned a pseudonym to

preserve confidentiality and protection through anonymity. In addition, any identifying markers related to the participant's school or students were excluded to remain confidential. Post-interview, participants were offered the opportunity to review the interview transcripts and to clarify or retract any statements before data analysis was conducted. All data (audio recordings and transcripts) will be stored on my password-protected laptop/phone and are to be destroyed after 5 years. The only people who will have access to the data are my course instructor and myself.

I did not provide the interviewee with the list of questions ahead of time. This was purposefully done in order to not detract from the flow of having a natural conversation and to prevent the organic interview experience from being stilted by participants scripting their answers in advance.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

3.6.1 Limitations

The primary limitation of the study is the scope and sampling of the research, both in the size of the sample as well as who could be interviewed. First, the findings of the study cannot be generalized to the larger community. The findings from the study speak to the specific experiences of the topic, but are not a universal depiction of other teachers. A greater scope in terms of sample size would have allowed the study to have an enriched and broader context.

Second, this study would have benefitted from the ability to interview the students, parents and other adults in the community in addition to teachers. This would have granted the study a holistic account of the research question, taking in multiple

perspectives from people of all ages and life experiences. However, both of these sampling limitations were inevitable, given the time limit and that the ethical parameters mandated by this Master of Teaching program only authorized the interviewing of teachers. Consequently, it was not possible to interview students or parents, to conduct surveys or take classroom observations. These other methods are important for data collection in different ways. Observation creates space for accessing “backstage culture” (DeMunck & Sobo, 1998, p. 43) by giving the researcher the chance to view their participants in unscheduled and more natural settings than a semi-structured interview can afford (p. 43). Surveys are time and cost efficient and can provide the participant with a heightened sense of anonymity, possibly yielding more honest results than in a face-to-face interview (Fricker & Schonlau, 2002).

A second limitation is the reality of researcher bias, which inevitably filters into data interpretation and the resultant findings. Though it is not feasible to render the research completely devoid of biases, preventative measures to minimize these researcher biases were taken. First, philosophical assumptions about what I feel are important for teaching and learning were acknowledged and explicitly included in the approach. Second, to minimize biases in data collection, analysis and interpretation, the interview questions were reworked extensively to be clear and succinct to avoid miscommunication. For example, there were no leading questions or yes/no questions that did not prompt a thorough description in the participant’s response. Additionally, participants were interviewed individually rather than as a group, where they could have been tempted to alter their answers to align with the experiences of other participants.

3.6.2 Strengths

The fundamental strength of the study was its use of semi-structured interviews with teachers as a research approach. This resulted in a vividly descriptive and highly personalized qualitative exploration into the research questions. Semi-structured interviews gave the opportunity for the voices of teachers working at the ground level with Indigenous students to be heard. The stories told in the interviews probe more deeply than a survey would merit by letting the interviewee tell their story in detail and respond to naturally occurring follow-up questions that emerge as the interview progresses. The semi-structured interview empowers the teachers to speak for themselves and control the narrative and their representation, unlike in an observational study where the researcher watches and projects their own inferences about the participant's actions onto the participant. It also creates the critical space that is needed for teachers to speak up about what matters most to them in this field, and provides the opportunity to make meaning from their lived experience. Interviews also allow for teachers to reflect on their pedagogical approach and to discuss their conceptualization of the topic in theory as well as in practice.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the study's research approach from a review of its purpose and procedures, to its instruments for data collection and participant recruitment. It also detailed the sampling criteria enlisted to find appropriate participants, and provided snapshot biographies of the selected teachers who were interviewed. The chapter continued to include the process of data collection, which was completed by conducting semi-structured interviews with teachers that were recorded and transcribed.

The semi-structured interview was chosen for its ability to provide a consistency to the conversation yet allow it to progress naturally. Next, the chapter described the process of data analysis. The chapter then explained the ethical protocol and the ethical considerations taken to ensure the anonymity and protection of each participant. The chapter next identified the limitations and strengths of the study. Limitations included sample size and scope, and researcher biases. Strengths included the self-reflective and flexible process of the interview as a space for sharing descriptive and personalized experiences. Now, the study turns to the next chapter – Chapter 4 – wherein I report the research findings.

CHAPTER 4 – RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter I report and discuss the findings from the data collected during my semi-structured interviews with participants, as described in Chapter 3. Having analyzed the data for interrelated themes, the encoded data provided significant discoveries related to my main research question and four sub-questions guiding the research. These findings are organized in this chapter as responses to the questions and take on the form of seven themes that are used as chapter headers, and are broken down into sub-themes used as sub-headers to further clarify the data.

The first theme explains the three most influential factors that developed the educators' commitment to Indigenous education and prepared them to use arts-based CRP with Indigenous students. The second theme uncovers how educators conceptualize arts-based CRP in practice by upholding a unique school culture tailored to at-risk Indigenous youth. The third and fourth themes investigate how educators conceptualize arts-based CRP in practice through providing explicit care for students, and through integrating Indigenous arts-based learning experiences. The fifth theme explores the outcomes of engaging in arts-based pedagogical programming, including the various benefits for Indigenous youth. The sixth theme encompasses the support educators have received from their educational community for using arts-based CRP with Indigenous youth. Lastly, the challenges of using arts-based CRP with Indigenous students are identified in theme seven.

Each theme is described in terms of what was learned including practical and instructional strategies that I learned about as well as what surprised me and what suspicions were confirmed by the interview. These educators' quotes will be used to illuminate the findings. Each theme will also be discussion in terms of convergences and divergences from the existing literature, and provide rationale for what matters about these findings given what previous research has already learned. This chapter will conclude with a summary and look ahead to Chapter 5.

4.1 The most influential factors that developed these educators' commitment to Indigenous education and preparation for this work included their personal investments into Indigenous education, their extensive experience working with Indigenous youth and their wealth of arts-based knowledge

This first theme describes the three most influential factors that were found to guide educators towards working within Indigenous education and in preparing them to use arts-based CRP with Indigenous youth. These factors are important because they reveal the reasons why these educators have chosen to use arts-based CRP for success in working with Indigenous youth in schools and beyond school in the local community. These factors are also important to include because they provide a greater understanding of the context for how these educators began integrating the arts into working with Indigenous students. As well, they are important as they help inform how the education system could work to develop teachers' commitment and preparedness for this work, which are expanded upon in implications and recommendations presented in Chapter 5.

4.1.1 The first key factor that developed these educators' commitment to Indigenous education and prepared them for their work was their personal investments in Indigenous education, which were motivated by their own Indigenous cultural identities, their desire to make schools more equitable for Indigenous students, and the strong connections they had to their local Indigenous community

Through the interviews I learned that both educators had strong personal investments that developed their commitment to Indigenous education and helped to prepare them for their work with Indigenous youth. These investments manifested primarily in a three-fold way.

First, these educators had a strong sense of self-identity that was complex. They spoke about identifying strongly with their Indigenous culture but also having connections to other cultures. "Um, I guess, how do I identify? I identify as a human being," Aimee said, answering her own question with a laugh. This simple quote clearly and confidently articulated that regardless of skin colour, language, and where people are from, she firmly believed that at our core human beings are all the same. This quote also served as a preface to her facing the challenge of unpacking her own cultural identity, which took several minutes due to her unique multicultural backgrounds on both her parents' sides, including Mi'kmaq, Black, Chinese, Irish and Arawak (Indigenous people in the Caribbean). Brooke also revealed a complicated cultural background, stating that she's upfront about the fact that she is half-native and half-white, and that there are emotional struggles of identity that come with that: "I've learned on my journey to deny a part of yourself is perpetuating a culture of self-hate and all of us are mixed." Both of

these educators chronicled their self-identity actualization journey, and I was able to gain insight into the struggle and subjective nature that they faced in their own experiences of discovering their heritage and finding their sense of belonging.

Aimee used the medicine wheel as a metaphor for her cultural identity. She saw herself in the middle of the medicine wheel as she has all four cultures represented by the symbol – Indigenous, black, white and Asian – in her background. In acknowledging their multicultural backgrounds, both educators spoke about how they did not identify as any one single particular culture, however, they identified the most with their Indigenous roots. Spirituality was a significant factor in identifying as Indigenous, which as Brooke mentioned further complicates the relationship between Indigenous and Western society as Indigenous spirituality is not accepted in provincial school systems. For Brooke, spirituality is so important that she used her spirit name, given to her by an Elder in the community - in her professional work as a singer. I learned about her spiritual beliefs surrounding her spirit name, which include speaking her spirit name in ceremonies as a way to make her recognizable and responsible to the spirit realm for the words that she is speaking, which alludes to the importance of accountability and the power of words in Indigenous cultures.

Both Aimee and Brooke discussed how having a multi-faceted cultural identity that connects to many cultures can complicate self-identifying as an Indigenous person. Their own experiences identifying as Indigenous have made them aware both the pros and cons that accompany self-identification. This experience informs their own observations of why their students often do not self-identify as Indigenous within the school system. They have observed that students do not self-identify as Indigenous in schools because it

can make the school experience uncomfortable based on differential treatment from peers who believe in negative stereotypes of Indigenous people. Aimee and Brooke also observed that students do not feel comfortable self-identifying when they have heard stories of their parents and family members experiencing racism and discrimination based on being Indigenous.

The second personal investment illuminated through the interviews was the educators' desire to make schools more equitable for Indigenous students. Aimee spoke about how we are all people and everyone's experience should be valued. She shared her belief that we as humans all have the ability to connect to each other, but to do so we need to remove the social inequities that Indigenous students face. This motivation to engage in social justice work within Indigenous education was connected to three inequitable situations that Aimee and Brooke observed to be affecting Indigenous students in their schools, which were life expectancy of Indigenous peoples, mainstream misunderstanding of cultural beliefs and traditions, and geographical displacement of Indigenous students from familiar places to an unfamiliar city like Toronto.

One of these injustices is life expectancy because of the demographic disparity that exists between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. This disparity is that Indigenous people are the fastest growing population in Toronto but their life expectancy is shorter, especially for Indigenous men. This finding is verified in the research, but the research does not explain why this is occurring (Mashford-Pringle & Nardozi, 2013). Brooke and Aimee have observed reasons for why this is happening. Brooke attributed this to people from Indigenous cultures dying younger because of the lifestyle effects of

adjusting to living in a city. She mentioned how the city is especially difficult for Indigenous youth to thrive in because it is an urban environment instead of a natural one.

This links to the second inequitable situation: while the city is not a familiar natural environment, it is necessary for Indigenous peoples living off-reserve in southern Ontario to live and work close to the city in order to have access to critical resources like health care. This is further complicated by the fact that many Indigenous students live downtown Toronto, but some of the schools in the TDSB that have Indigenous programs and cater to Indigenous students are far out in Scarborough.

The city is also a challenge to social justice in connection to the third inequitable situation that Brooke and Aimee have observed. Both educators felt that the city is a place where mainstream culture misunderstands their Indigenous culture. “It is hard to live in a place where you feel very much the minority and you feel like your way of life is not respected or understood here at all,” Brooke explained, speaking from her own experience of being an Indigenous youth and student. This finding relates to the extensive literature on how the Ontario public school system has traditionally isolated and disenfranchised Indigenous students at both the primary and secondary levels (St. Denis, 2011; Cherubini, Hodson, Manley-Casimir & Muir, 2010; Cherubini & Hodson, 2008; Neegan, 2005).

The third and final personal investment determined through the interviews was the educators’ strong connection to their local Indigenous community. This sense of belonging was important in motivating both Aimee and Brooke to become invested in Indigenous education because they felt driven to provide better support and more

opportunities for success for youth in their community. Both educators became a part of their local Indigenous community after years of experiences of feeling left out or discriminated against in other communities.

Aimee explained that she did not feel welcome in either the black or white community due to her multicultural background and unique appearance that was difficult to categorize as one specific culture. She and her brother experienced judgment and felt unwelcome because people could not figure out what culture they were. Similarly, as a young child, Brooke faced discrimination within the First Nations community that was local to the town she grew up in because of her Métis heritage that also confused others and made it difficult for her to belong as she was referred to as “the little white girl” and a “half-breed”. This discrimination had deep roots as it also affected both of their families. Aimee’s great-grandmother was taken from her family and not allowed to speak about her Indigenous culture. This was oppressive as well as hypocritical: many people from all cultures in the town she lived in would seek out her help as an alternative doctor when they were ill because of her strong knowledge about how to make and use traditional medicines as healing treatments. This discrimination continued into the next generations. Aimee’s mother had to literally sneak onto the native reserve to receive traditional teachings because their culture had to be shrouded in secrecy to avoid being reprimanded. Likewise, Brooke’s mother did not grow up with her First Nations and Métis culture because it had been oppressed for so long that her mother was afraid of celebrating that part of her identity.

I learned that after experiencing exclusion, both educators had found a place to call home within the local Indigenous communities they belonged to now. They had become

immersed in the community. Aimee had worked in the community for over twenty years, having attended school from kindergarten to high school in the area and actually was an alumna of the high school where she worked. Brooke became involved in the Indigenous community through her mother's reclamation of her culture several years ago. Having her mother introduce the community to her made Brooke see the community as an extension of her family. Similarly, Aimee was inspired by own her mother having an instinctive connection to the community: the smell of sweet grass and of certain foods that permeated throughout this Indigenous community flooded her memory banks, awakening her own childhood. By being an active part of their local Indigenous community, both educators had built relationships with their students beyond the classroom, as many students' families are also active members of the community.

4.1.2 The second key factor that developed these educators' commitment to Indigenous education and prepared them for this work was their extensive experience working with Indigenous youth

The second factor found to guide educators towards working within Indigenous education and in preparing them to use arts-based CRP with Indigenous youth was that both educators had many years of experience working in what Aimee described as a "helping profession". Being involved in a helping profession included experience in a variety of roles across different capacities yet each encompassed educating and working with Indigenous youth. It was in working with these students that they observed that the standard curriculum was not reflective of Indigenous students and could not engage Indigenous youth. Both educators wanted to use relevant and motivating teaching methods to provide accessible learning opportunities for their students. Consequently,

each of their comprehensive experiences were important for inspiring their choice of arts-based CRP: it was through their work experiences with Indigenous students that they each developed an arts-based CRP integrated with Indigenous teachings as their pedagogical approach.

Aimee had 37 years of experience working with Indigenous youth from kindergarten to high school students. Fifteen of these years were within the TDSB. She had worked as a special needs assistant, a child and youth worker, a certified child and youth counsellor with an Indigenous Children's Aid agency, and as a parent volunteer leading Indigenous art activities in her child's class. As the educational programming coordinator for a school facilitating Indigenous programming for Indigenous students, at the time of the research she played a vital role in Indigenous education not only coordinating but teaching subjects as well.

Brooke had been working with Indigenous youth since she was a youth herself at 16 years old. She had been working with Indigenous youth for ten years in a peer support and mentorship role, and had been sharing teachings and Indigenous culture with youth consistently for the last five years. She had had experience in outdoor education through her work as a camp counsellor, and previously toured western Canada with a national non-profit social justice organization leading workshops on Indigenous culture. As a Native Culture and Traditions instructor for the TDSB at two different schools, at the time of the research she was also playing a significant role in working with Indigenous youth in schools across Toronto.

4.1.3 The third key factor that developed these educators' commitment to Indigenous education and prepared them for this work was their wealth of arts-based knowledge

The final factor found to guide these educators towards developing their commitment to Indigenous education and in preparing them to use arts-based CRP with Indigenous students was that both educators had a wealth of arts-based knowledge. Each educator had a very strong background in the arts. This was important for motivating both Aimee and Brooke to use an arts-based approach as CRP because they observed from their own experiences in the arts that art could be culturally focused when connected to their Indigenous traditions and teachings. They also observed that art could be a very engaging way for students to learn because it was seen to be meaningful and relevant. This wealth of arts-based knowledge set the stage for Aimee and Brooke to use arts-based CRP.

“I’ve always been an artist,” Aimee stated, taking pride in claiming this designation, while Brooke had an equally strong connection to the word as well: “I 100% have to be an artist; there’s no other way for me to live.” Aimee grew up learning intergenerational traditional arts-based teachings from her mother, grandmother and great-grandmother, all of whom lived in one house at a pivotal point in her life and passed these traditions down through experience. Ever since she was a child she was involved in art within the local community that she was raised in and still works in today. Her passion stemmed from her own learning experiences with a variety of visual art mediums that will be fully listed later on in this chapter and motivated her to want to teach art full-time and professionally.

Brooke taught art with youth “number one: because I love it; two: I think it’s integral to their development.” Coming from a university education in performance art within

theatre and film, she had worked as a professional actor with the oldest Indigenous performing arts company in Canada. She was also a singer and songwriter who performed at high-profile events across the city and had had poems published in Indigenous literary magazines. At the time of our interview she was finishing up her first full-length music album, which speaks to the discrimination, stereotypes and victimization Indigenous youth have faced.

These three factors of personal investments have developed Aimee and Brooke's commitment to Indigenous education and have appropriately prepared them for enacting arts-based CRP with Indigenous students because they have a substantial amount of lived experience to validate why arts-based CRP should be used, how it should be used, and for what purpose it should be used. Having deep-rooted knowledge of Indigenous identity and culture, the lived experience of being an Indigenous youth in Ontario, careers built on working within schools and Indigenous education, the desire to make school more equitable for current and future generations of Indigenous youth, the personal relationships with members of the Indigenous community, the professional relationships with Indigenous students in TDSB schools, and achieving wide-ranging success in the art and education industry has situated these educators to be key leaders to refer to when striving to use arts-based CRP with Indigenous youth. The next theme will center on how they conceptualized this pedagogy in theory first before putting them into practice.

4.2 These educators conceptualized arts-based CRP first in theory through emphasizing the significance of building a school culture specific to responding to the needs of at-risk Indigenous students through small classes within a culturally focused program, having accommodations that connect to Indigenous values, and bridging the students' home lives with their school lives

The second theme outlines how these educators conceptualize arts-based CRP in theory first before they put these beliefs into practice. It was found that in order for these educators to be able to use their approach, they first must establish a school culture specific to responding to the needs of at-risk Indigenous students. There are three components that were found to contribute to comprising this specific school context. This theme is organized using these three components as sub-themes. These components are: maintaining a unique cross-curricular and culturally-focused school setting for at-risk Indigenous youth; valuing Indigenous traditions through specific school accommodations; and bridging the student's home life with their school life to bring their Indigenous culture into the classroom. The educators have observed that all of these three factors were present in their school environments and provided the foundation on which their pedagogical theory is established. It is important to address how this theory is conceptualized before it is put into practice because teachers in the education community must understand a theory because they can use it in action. It is important to understand how Aimee and Brooke viewed arts-based CRP in theory in order to determine the foundational underpinnings of their approach to teaching Indigenous students. This is addressed here in the hopes that future teachers will be able to recreate this approach to increase the successful learning opportunities for Indigenous students.

4.2.1 Educators believed that the first component that was integral for building a school culture that is specific to responding to the needs at at-risk Indigenous youth was creating a program that is uniquely small in class size and has a culturally-focused foundation for learning

The first component that these educators observed was contributing to their specific school context was that the schools had established an Indigenous program that was culturally focused on Indigenous teachings and responded to the students' needs by being purposefully small in class size. The majority of schools in the TDSB do not currently offer an Indigenous program like these schools so it is important to provide some details about these school environments to understand how they are culturally focused. The schools' missions are aligned with some specific tenets of CRP: striving to value all cultures, setting high expectations for students and developing learning opportunities based on needs (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Brown-Jaffy & Cooper, 2011).

The school where Brooke worked part-time was an elementary school in a diverse neighbourhood that had a large Indigenous community. This school had been a leader in developing Indigenous education programs within an urban context and was known for its Ojibwa language instruction. It was a Model school with a focus on community partnerships with an Indigenous Children's Aid agency that provided social and cultural based services for Indigenous children and families. These partnerships also included bringing First Nation Elders into the balanced literacy and Reading Recovery program and encouraging parents to be involved in the school. These partnerships allowed the school to offer before and after school options, including a breakfast and snack program.

The school where Aimee worked full-time and Brooke worked part-time was an alternative high school for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students between the ages of 15-21 years old that offered courses from grades 9-12. It was a school created in partnership with the same Indigenous Children's Aid agency that was partnered with the elementary school. This school integrated traditional Indigenous cultural teachings into the daily learning context. Students worked towards obtaining their Ontario Secondary School Diploma with teachers while benefiting from a cultural program offered through community partnerships.

Another feature of the high school was the small class sizes the school provided so that students could receive more support than they could receive at a different high school. Both Aimee and Brooke explained the reason for small class sizes was because the students were considered to be either at-risk or high-risk because the students had obstacles and different barriers they faced in their home and community life that put them at risk to not get an education, to not have a healthy life style and to not live a long life. These difficulties included lack of nutrition, physical and emotional abuse, substance abuse, self-harm problems and not having a stable home environment, as Aimee illustrated when she said that "some of our kids our living on two hundred dollars a month; they're living in shelters and they're couch-surfing".

In order to respond to these types of obstacles, the school was dramatically different than many other schools. "This is not a traditional classroom at all," Aimee stated. This school environment was exactly the sort of school Aimee wanted to work with, as she wanted to work more one-on-one with students. Brooke felt the school environment was very supportive for youth because of its small size and emphasis on life

skills. Both educators stressed the importance of teaching students transferable life skills because they observed that many students do not know what they want to do with their lives. Brooke observed that her students do not see school as anything but a path that does not work for Indigenous youth. She herself was familiar with this mindset as she too was once an Indigenous student who hated school, but she got through it so she would not regret not getting an education. Thus, the importance of small class sizes for support within a culturally focused context was found to be necessary in order to respond to Indigenous students at-risk for dropping out.

4.2.2 Educators believed that the second component that was integral for building a school culture that is specific to responding to the needs at at-risk Indigenous youth was including accommodations that value Indigenous traditions and ways of life that students are familiar with

In order to make education more accessible and prevent students dropping out, Aimee and Brooke observed that the school culture was one that integrates Indigenous traditions that were familiar to students through specific accommodations. Both educators had included traditional practices in order to build inclusivity into the school context. These traditional practices included restorative practices, instead of punitive consequences, that uphold Indigenous cultural practices like a talking circle or a meeting with an elder, as well as holding students accountable for their actions by having an interview with administration or their parents about the incident.

Inclusive practices also included arts-based practices, such as those used by both educators. Brooke observed that Indigenous students were very likely to respond to arts-based pedagogy, especially oral story-telling traditions, as their ancestors were taught in

that way and she believed youth carry that familiarity with the arts in their blood. In order to integrate arts-based pedagogy and traditions to appeal to the students, the courses were fluid. Integrating arts-based traditional teachings was done to allow for cross-curricular learning opportunities and Brooke observed that students were more productive when learning connects across the curriculum. Brooke and Aimee each observed that in this approach there was flexibility in learning that they saw encouraged student participation. Participation was important because when students were participating in every class they were successful because this meant they would complete their academic year.

In addition to providing arts-based learning opportunities that connected to the students' Indigenous culture, Aimee and Brooke also accommodated students to build inclusion by teaching practical skills and knowledge that was closely connected to their way of life and home life. This was exemplified in Aimee's explanation that the school only taught the "most relevant stuff for their lifestyle". This was observed to build inclusion as all students could relate to the teachings and contribute to discussions and activities based on their lived experiences, while gaining life skills and survival skills.

Another way Aimee made the school community more inclusive for her students was by modifying the language of school policies to be more comprehensible to Indigenous youth. This idea was conceptualized through bolstering the larger high school's code of conduct with the Seven Grandfather Teachings. This allowed the code of conduct to resonate more with her students in her smaller school by making the school policies more relatable and transparent, while integrating Indigenous perspectives into the wider school community to make it more inclusive of Indigenous culture. She also found that this helped with student engagement and

achievement. The way Aimee utilized the traditions of the Seven Grandfather Teachings to benefit school-wide inclusion, engagement and achievement is connected to the research that suggests that acknowledging Indigenous values and traditions – like the Seven Grandfather Teachings – has a positive impact on student engagement and achievement in schools (Cherubini, 2014). It also supports the research finding from McNerney, Hinkley and Dowson (1998) that infusing traditional values into learning benefits student success by providing familiar factors – like well-known traditions from their culture – that served to motivate students in the school context.

4.2.3 Educators believed that the third component that was integral for building a school culture that was specific to responding to the needs at at-risk Indigenous youth was bridging the gap between students’ home life and school to bring students lives into the classroom

Arts-based CRP was conceptualized in theory to appeal to Indigenous students because of the enormous potential it had to connect students’ personal lives with their school environment through making space for culture. Both Aimee and Brooke observed that arts-based traditions were a valued way of connecting to Indigenous cultures. Brooke vocalized that art historically was and still was a part of daily life for Indigenous cultures. “Our original ways were all through the arts – we call them ‘the arts’ now; back then we called them ‘a way of living’”. Art forms like dance, singing and drumming were a part of everyday life and were still a part of ceremonies and celebrations. Honouring culture by connecting to students’ home life was one way Brooke saw that schools could attempt

to repair the very bad relationship many families have had with the school system due to the suffering from the residential school system. Because of this historical suffering, there was and still is great need to bridge the home life and school life of youth, as articulated in the literature as a tenet of CRP (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Aimee and Brooke's observations on bridging the gap that may exist between school and home life for students described why they felt this was an integral part of CRP. Consequently, this supported the existing literature from Richards, Brown and Ford (2007) that educators can become culturally relevant by visiting students' families and communities in order to educate themselves about the history and experiences of diverse groups. Both Aimee and Brooke provided specific rationale for why this connection between home and school was necessary, and detailed tangible ways to make these home – school connections, examples of which can be found below.

This connection is integral as I learned that many of their students had complicated home lives. Many youth had been placed in care under Children's Aid services. There were also many youth who had been adopted and were living away from their birth parents. Additionally, there were many young parents who needed to access resources to survive. This was why both educators stressed how it was crucial that learning at school be very practical and applicable to the students' lives. "For our classroom, everything that we do and every subject that we do has relevance to every child's life that's in here," Aimee expressed in communicating the importance of providing relevant learning and cultivating practical life skills for youth. Aimee conceptualized this in theory by infusing the school agenda with valuable information that was relevant to their lives beyond school. She altered the school agenda to include

Indigenous knowledge. This was observed as an important way to bridge school and home life for students and parents because instead of just having school-related content, the agenda now was now able to serve as a reference and guidebook for Indigenous teachings like the medicine wheel and smudging, traditions, ceremony protocol, healing circles and sweat lodge protocol, and protocol for approaching an elder. These teachings were valuable to students and their families because they could use the information in their life beyond school. It also made it so that families could see that their Indigenous lifestyle was being acknowledged and included in the school's context, so they could see their own culture reflected and welcomed within their children's school.

Having a strong foundation for conceptualizing arts-based culturally relevant pedagogy in theory allowed these educators to enact their unique pedagogical approach in practice, which will be detailed in the next theme.

4.3 These educators conceptualized arts-based CRP in practice through first building meaningful relationships with students using preconditions to pedagogy of explicitly communicating care for students, establishing trustworthiness and accessibility with students, and nurturing students' strengths and interests

The third theme explains how educators conceptualized arts-based CRP in practice with Indigenous students by first establishing preconditions that give rise to meaningful relationships and learning experiences. The educators observed three preconditions that helped cultivate these relationships, which are organized in this section as sub-themes. These preconditions were explicitly communicating genuine care and concern for students; engaging in supportive teaching practices to establish trustworthiness and accessibility with students; and nurturing strengths and interests to

spark students' passions to make them lifelong learners. It is important understand how Aimee and Brooke established these preconditions to build the meaningful relationships with their students that are necessary for successful learning opportunities to flourish. Without these relationships in place, teachers cannot begin to implement arts-based CRP in action, and so these preconditions for building relationships were integral to address in order to provide future educators working with Indigenous students with the steps that need to be taken in order to use this approach successfully.

4.3.1 The first precondition to pedagogy that was necessary for building meaningful relationships with students is explicitly communicating care for students

Both educators believed that in order to enact CRP they must first establish a relationship with the students in their school. Sometimes this required educators to explicitly communicate their care and concern for students, with students. Both Aimee and Brooke observed that not many of their students had a lot of supportive people at home who explicitly expressed care and concern for their wellbeing. Brooke argued strongly that "these kids need to be told that they're loved, and that there's nothing wrong with them". She wanted to communicate to these students that they are accepted and valued in her classroom, in order to improve their sense of self-worth. She believed that when students have a greater self-worth they felt more secure, and that feeling of security let the classroom be a safer space where they could learn.

Aimee also stated the significance of knowing students well and being observant of their lives. She felt it was important to show these students that she genuinely cared about what happened to them and what they did to themselves, such as in an instance

with a student who was battling self-harm issues and struggled as a cutter. “I see a situation happening and I try to turn it into something positive,” Aimee says of her decision to tell the youth explicitly that she did not want her to harm her body. In this instance, the girl was upset and Aimee was worried that she might harm herself over the long weekend, so she even went as far to take a photograph of the student’s wrists and arms, saying that she wanted them to look exactly the same when she arrived back at school the next week. Aimee provided the girl with a soapstone carving activity (using sandpaper but not anything sharp) for her to use as an artistic outlet for her emotions, instead of turning to self-harm. She provided all the materials for the youth in mini plastic bags because she knew the girl loved “little things like that”.

I learned a lot about the kind of strong and selfless teacher this educator was through listening to her speak about her students and especially about this student. The simple fact that she knew what her student liked as well as not judging her students was a large part of the deep relationship they have developed. Aimee’s ability to have such a clear and honest conversation with her student about such a heavy topic was also a testament to the strong relationship she had cultivated with that youth. She demonstrated a high level of genuine concern for that student, and appropriately articulated her strong concern for the student so that she would know she was cared for.

Brooke also demonstrated a strong concern for her students and felt that the school system tended to treat this integral part of being human as more taboo that it should be. She clearly outlined that there are definitely boundaries to showing students warmth and care. She had observed that many teachers were so afraid of being accused of

crossing lines into inappropriate territories that they could be too distant with their students.

Where teachers should exercise extreme caution though, she felt, is in being considerate and careful with how they engaged in and presented Indigenous activities. Brooke observed that not only was it important to communicate care for students' wellbeing to students, but that it was also important to communicate care and respect for students' Indigenous culture and history to students. It was crucial that educators show that they were not going to include Indigenous culture and history inappropriately with students in arts-based CRP. Aimee agreed, stating that while art activities can be beautiful, there was so much culture behind what she taught that non-Indigenous teachers needed to be mindful of. Teachers also needed to be careful of context when discussing Indigenous issues like residential schooling. Brooke faced an instance in the past where non-Indigenous teachers suggested discussing residential schools at a summer camp, which made her upset. She explained that she felt a summer camp was an inappropriate place for that discussion since students were there to have fun. From her own experiences, she felt strongly that all of their ancestors fought and suffered in order for the current generations to enjoy their lives and continue to make things more equitable, which is why she was a strong advocate for Indigenous youth and explicitly communicated care for students when she explained, "I'm in the place of power now. I was one of those youth who didn't have a voice. I have one now." Her care and concern allowed her to build relationships with youth as a mentor through engaging in supportive teaching, which are a part of the next sub-theme.

4.3.2 The second precondition to pedagogy that is necessary for building meaningful relationships with students was engaging in supportive teaching by establishing trustworthiness and accessibility with students

Both educators observed that the second precondition necessary to establish to build meaningful relationships with students in order to enact arts-based CRP in practice with Indigenous students was engaging in supportive teaching through cultivating trustworthiness and accessibility with youth.

The first facet of supportive teaching that was found was the trust factor. Both Aimee and Brooke communicated that they had trust in their students' ability to succeed on their own as well as heal from past traumas. In fact, Brooke purposefully placed her students in leadership and empowerment situations to have the youth prove to themselves that they could succeed, because it was their own insecurities and sense of doubt that needed to be convinced. Both educators engaged in trust-building activities with youth through using oral traditions of story telling. Oral story telling traditions were effective at building positive relationships among peers because Brooke observed that stories required students to have faith in the human consciousness in that they must listen and respect that the person has something to say that is worth listening to. She also observed that story telling required that she trusts that students were capable to relate to and draw inferences from a story that can help them in their own lives. This connected to the existing literature as articulated by Hatcher (2012) that story-telling is positive because of its ability to let people to draw their own meaning from what was said.

Storytelling was found to be extremely powerful for allowing for connection between both educators and youth and amongst youth themselves, and for allowing the

educators to share their experiences as teachings. Sharing personal stories in a circle with everyone sitting at the same level was found to make the teachers more relatable to their students and to make learning personal and real. “It makes it more human,” Aimee stated. She described that the youth respond warmly to her when she shares her experiences because they acknowledged that she had lived that experience so she knows what she is talking about and that she is giving them applicable knowledge for their own lives.

On the other hand, both educators observed that students might not necessarily connect with teachers who didn’t share their own stories. Brooke explained that she thought this was because of student learning styles, as “youth are visual; they want to hear a story and they almost need to hear themselves in the story for it to be relatable – you can not talk about something that’s out of touch.” She observed that she talked honestly to her students about her personal struggles so they realized that even the person they looked up to and think had everything going for them still has hardships just like they did. Additionally, as artists, both educators invoked storytelling as ways to indulge their creative sides and explore their lived experiences as an Indigenous person. As consequence, storytelling not only allowed the educators to hone their creative craft, but to do so in a way that established trusting relationships with youth. These beliefs about story telling are supported in the research, as literature suggests that these relationships must exist in a classroom before any effective learning can be achieved (Hatcher, 2012).

The second facet of supportive teaching that was found was the factor of making learning accessible to students. The most significant finding in this precondition of supportive teaching was that success of student learning was dependent on whether or not the students were ready and comfortable enough to be able to engage. Brooke eloquently

articulated this when she spoke that “art meets you where you’re at.” She was confident in the value of having acknowledged the barriers and challenges students are facing in order to be relatable and accessible. In this way, art allowed for accessible learning experiences for students, while also scaffolding students to further their learning.

Aimee’s own experiences doing spoken word poetry with the students supported this idea: while the students were not ready for that public level of this arts-based activity, she found they enjoyed writing down their poems and could engage in self-expression through art when it was made accessible to them. In this case, her accessible, supportive teaching style was observed to pave the way for arts-based CRP, as Brooke stated she could adapt any arts-based teaching to make it accessible and equitable for any student. As well, she spoke strongly about making learning accessible through always having clear reason behind her teachings and actions with students, stating that she never did things without reason or idly dictated to students.

4.3.3 The third precondition to pedagogy that is necessary for building meaningful relationships with students is nurturing students’ strengths and interests

The third precondition for pedagogy that Aimee and Brooke observed as integral for building meaningful relationships with students before enacting arts-based CRP was engaging in identifying students’ strengths and interests. Both educators felt that nurturing strengths and interests was important for learning because it engaged students by sparking a pursuit of individual passions. Aimee best articulates this ideological process in describing her work with students:

This is sort of what I do: I look at the strengths – even if it’s really hard to find something, there’s something that any of these students do well – and you look at that and you try to plant that seed and you try to nourish it by watering it, by feeding into the positive points, the positive things that that student does in that area, so they see that there’s potential and something for them.

As her words speak to, her “helping profession” allowed her to engage with students to get to know them, identify and nurture their talents, and build a meaningful relationship with them. The first step in the process was getting to know the youth in order to be aware of what they were interested in and what their strengths were. As she stated, each student had something they are good at and something they enjoy if you looked closely enough and spent enough time with them. Brooke spoke in accordance of this belief, stating that it was important to provide opportunities for students to do something they could excel at and that they can take pride in. She described this as giving youth the chance to shine, and she was adamant that every youth had the possibility of shining.

Aimee spoke to the power of nurturing students’ strengths as she recalled how her own talents as an artist were identified by her teacher and nurtured, right in the high school that she works in now. Before the days of cooperative opportunities (co-ops), her high school teacher saw her artistic skill and made it possible for her to go out into the community and teach art to other students, which greatly supported her along her own path. From this experience, she knew the importance of encouraging youth to expand and enrich their strengths, and pursuing their interests to lead to a tangible career.

Aimee credits some of the success she’s seen with students to students having “people encourage them to pursue careers that are based on sort of what they like to do.” One example of encouraging students to pursue careers based on their interests that she

observed was of a student in a business entrepreneurial program sponsored by former Prime Minister Paul Martin. This student loved to cook and dreamed of having his own food truck one day. Under this nurturing program, the student learned how he could own his own business because he learned the realities of owning a business and the practicalities he would need to achieve that, right down to walking him through the specific forms he has to fill out. She observed that this student went from not having any idea what he wanted to do with his life, to having a concrete plan for potential achievement in his field of interest that allowed him to see that potential and see there was something worthwhile waiting for him to contribute his strengths towards. Aimee used this example to stress the importance of exposing students towards paths they may not find on their own because they are not aware that specific school programs, jobs, and careers that they could be interested in even exist.

Both educators also highlighted the importance of nurturing creativity in guiding youth towards a potential fulfilling path. Brooke believed that youth must embrace creativity in order to embrace their passions and their true selves. Similarly, Aimee believed that creativity is really important yet a lot of people today have lost their creative spirit because they did not nurture it. Consequently, it was found that both educators felt that providing meaningful learning opportunities for students coincided with arts-based programming since this unique pedagogy combined creativity, artistic Indigenous traditions and flexibility to appeal to a variety of interests. This finding will be explored in the next theme.

4.4 These educators found three aspects of using arts-based CRP in practice to be the use of experiential learning through a variety of art mediums, engaging learning through nature, and by adapting standard forms of assessment to appropriately reflect Indigenous students' learning within these experiences of art and nature

The fourth theme investigates how – once the necessary preconditions for building relationships have been met – arts-based CRP was conceptualized in practice. The three aspects that Aimee and Brooke observed that they enacted in using arts-based CRP in practice organize this theme. These aspects are: facilitating experiential learning using a variety of art mediums; engaging learning through nature; and by adapting standard forms of assessment to meet their needs of capturing what Indigenous students have learned. It is important to address the ways in which Aimee and Brooke have used art, nature and assessment differently in their approach, in order to understand how future educators could also use an arts-based CRP approach to working with Indigenous students. It was be imprudent to not include details about the experiential learning environment that these educators created in order to engage their students in successful learning opportunities because without these details it would be unlikely that others could recreate a successful approach like Aimee and Brooke have developed. This theme is also important as it connected to the existing literature which suggested that, for Indigenous students, meaningful and relevant learning is embodied through traditional crafts and designs within art, songs and movement within music and dance, exploring geographical contours of nature through place-based and outdoor education, and within legends and oral history found in dramatic and language arts (Preston, Cottrell, Pelletier & Pearce, 2012). In the section below, both Aimee and Brooke have made extensive

contributions to the importance of using CRP combined with arts-based pedagogy in interesting ways that are unique to their lived experiences, as well as the importance of using place-based and outdoor education and learning through nature.

4.4.1 These educators found that the first aspect of using arts-based CRP in practice was to engage students in experiential learning opportunities with a variety of art mediums

As mentioned at the end of the previous theme, it was found that both educators felt that providing meaningful learning opportunities for students coincided with arts-based programming since this unique pedagogy combined creativity, artistic Indigenous traditions and flexibility to appeal to a variety of interests. This finding was consistent with Aimee's idea that "for Indigenous people, everything that we do has an artistic component to it and there's creativity". Brooke highlighted the spiritual significance of *experiencing* the creative process that is found in art by adding that there was a belief that when you are creating you are the closest you can be to Creator. Both educators felt it was critical to connect students to hands-on art learning opportunities through experiential learning. It was proposed that to properly teach an Indigenous art activity you had to experience it. Aimee advised to "throw away the textbooks" and "not go looking online for information on how to teach an aboriginal activity". Aimee asserted that while book knowledge is easier to come by – anyone can get it – the knowledge was transmitted in a static, non-human, non-experiential way that did not make it as valuable. Likewise, Brooke explained that when students ask questions she didn't know the answers to, she went looking for the answer, but never through online methods of searching: "I do not Google it".

Instead, both educators argued for the importance of going right to the source. They believed it was integral to receive teachings from elders and Indigenous members of the community who had experienced that teaching already. Aimee and Brooke believed that this person-to-person experiential learning was the only appropriate way to receive a teaching, because they felt that the experience of connecting to another human being to learn was necessary for a worthwhile and valuable understanding of Indigenous teachings. Otherwise, Aimee warned, the learner missed out on the human part of teaching, because they did not have that human connection. I understood why both educators felt this way when Aimee explained that she observed that the lack of human connection in learning to be just like how teaching with merely theory and not practice was irrelevant to the experiences of the students you were trying to connect with.

Both educators also spoke to their own preference for learning through experience. This preference was significant to the discussion on pedagogy because these teachers made decisions about their own pedagogical approaches and teaching styles that were informed by their own experiences as a learner, and what kind of teaching resonated with their own learning style. The fact that both educators preferred to learn through experience has influenced their own decision to teach their students through experiential learning. Brooke stated that she herself is a kinesthetic learner. She observed that engaging her students in experiential learning similarly helped them learn, and she perceived this is because they embodied the knowledge in their muscle memory through using their body, movement and doing. She believed music and dance – anything with rhythm – were especially effective for retaining and understanding knowledge because

each person had their own natural rhythm – their heartbeat – so she found it relevant to all learners and applicable to their lives.

These educators developed an arts-based CRP approach wherein students got to experience a variety of art mediums. These included: drumming and other musical instruments, dancing, singing (including traditional war cries), visual art (painting, drawing, doodling, colouring, sketching, etc.), found object sculpture making, carving (sticks and soapstone) spoken word, sewing, loom beading, bracelet making and cooking, to name a few. Aimee easily summed up the extensive and flexible list of activities these educators have used as arts-based pedagogy with Indigenous youth simply as “everything!”

4.4.2 These educators found that the second aspect of using arts-based CRP in practice was to engage students in learning through nature

Not only was it found that these educators taught a variety of arts-based programs with students, but they also taught beyond the classroom inspired by their belief that it was important to learn outdoors to have students experience the natural world. Brooke believed in “teaching outside as much as humanly possible, no matter what time of year.” She observed that once the students get outside – despite initial grumblings – their entire mood lifted up positively. In addition to improving students’ moods, she found learning off the land very important specifically because standard classrooms do not teach outdoors very much. Brooke found this to be a negative aspect of the standard classroom, as she explained that learning outside and from nature were important for their ancestors. She perceived that learning from the land was all people had originally, and so they learned everything by observing what was already here before them: Mother Earth, the

rocks, the water, the plants, and the animals. Brooke strongly felt that humans are inherently connected to nature:

All of us have a natural rhythm - it's our heartbeat. We were carried in our mother's womb listening to that heartbeat and Mother Earth has that heartbeat as well. That's why we are so much more at peace when we are on, right out on Mother Earth or out connecting to the water, to the sun, to the sky, the stars, the moon.

Having grown up learning in nature herself – her great-grandmother would send her out to pick roots and medicines to make salves and ointments with - Aimee also strongly supported learning in nature. She felt it was important to get students involved in nature-based creations through art, and to engage students in environmental and place-based learning. She shared the importance of studying nature in her own teachings with students. Furthermore, she focused on not just the idea of learning through nature, but learning directly *from* nature. In order to learn from nature, Aimee used nature-based art activities to teach her students about biomimicry, in order to bring relevance to their own lives. For example, before having students engage in a carving activity, she highlighted the bendy shape of the curly willow they were about to carve. She did this to inspire students to be more flexible in their own lives. Aimee also spoke about how exploring nature through art connected students to their families because she intentionally guided students in a variety of activities that focus on relationships. She presented naturally occurring relationships in the environment as metaphors for understanding the relationships students have with their families and community. She diversified her teachings by presenting relationships in environments that are both local and global, such as the Maori people who are Indigenous to New Zealand. In one activity, she had students study the koru, which is a plant shaped like a spiral that is often found in Maori

tattoos and artwork. The koru signifies life and the shape of each koru is one that is tightly connected to surrounding korus. She used this shape to encourage students to conceptualize nature in an unconventionally personal way that allowed them to pay more mindful attention to their own family dynamic and see themselves differently since they saw themselves being able to learn from their natural environment.

4.4.3 These educators found that the third aspect of using arts-based CRP in practice was to adapt standard forms of assessment to appropriately reflect Indigenous students' learning within these experiences of art and nature

Another significant difference that had been found within arts-based CRP was the unconventional way both educators used – or more appropriately, did not use – traditional forms of assessment. “To grade someone, I find that very hard. I never graded my students – I do not have to, it would go against my teachings. I do not know how you can quantify knowledge; it’s a qualitative thing.” Brooke felt that traditional assessment like quantitative grading can be an inauthentic measure of learning because students memorized information in a “retain and regurgitation” model that had no application to their life. She felt that the standards of grading as assessment were too rigid because grading simply cast students as right or wrong, and left not enough room for contributions from their own voice. She saw a rigid assessment tool like grading as something that wouldn’t help youth learn meaningful information to help them in their daily lives. Aimee also adhered to this philosophy, as she did not believe that anyone should really have the authority to assess creativity.

This sentiment also applied to individual testing. Brooke did not give her students tests because she did not want to teach students that they were all alone in their lives and

couldn't seek help from friends when they needed it. Brooke placed a higher value on community building and cohesiveness because she observed that "life was not meant to be walked alone."

Instead of assessing, testing and grading, students' progress within these arts-based approach was observed through participation, effort and sharing what they had created with their class community. Correspondingly, while students' art pieces weren't assigned a grade, whatever they created could count towards their Native Arts (NAT10) mark. As well, students could be asked to write reflections on their experience of creating that piece – what the teaching, activity and creative process meant to them – which could be used towards marks in other subjects, like English. Brooke spoke about having to navigate challenging attitudes from some students who didn't take aspects of her class as seriously because of the lack of assessment in it, yet explaining that not respecting the traditions would remove them from activities like drumming negated any behavioral problems. Moreover, it was found that because there was no external assessment, students turned towards intrinsic motivation for completion:

What happens is they actually end up governing themselves, because those who put so much effort and tried so hard feel *so* good about themselves when they share it. And those who didn't put as much effort do not feel as good, and they actually learn from that feeling and then the next time they want to put a little more effort.

This powerful motivation that stemmed from within each student was just one of the enormous benefits that arts-based culturally responsive pedagogy had for youth, as will be expanded upon in the next theme.

4.5 These educators observed that arts-based CRP had many benefits for Indigenous students including increasing student engagement within relevant learning experiences that help to cultivate life skills, providing students with flexible choices to let them learn through their interests and encourage creativity, and empowering students' voices to nurture wellbeing

The fifth theme describes the beneficial outcomes of engaging in arts-based CRP programming with Indigenous youth. Aimee and Brooke observed three main benefits that their pedagogical approach had for their students. This section is organized by these benefits, which are: the benefit of engaging students in relevant and practical learning experiences; the benefit of providing students with flexible choices to let them learn through their interests and encourage their creativity; and the benefit of nurturing students' voices and wellbeing. It is important to understand these benefits of enacting arts-based CRP for Indigenous students because educators should understand that these are the significant results of using this approach. It is necessary to address these benefits in order to explain why and towards what ends these educators in this study used this pedagogical approach, and why future teachers should consider using this approach as well. It is also important to understand what these educators saw as benefitting their students, in order for newcomer teachers to be able to see how Indigenous students want to be supported in their learning.

4.5.1 The first benefit these educators observed that arts-based CRP had for Indigenous students was increasing students engagement within relevant learning experiences that help to cultivate life skills

The first beneficial outcome that Aimee and Brooke observed was how arts-based CRP was capable of engaging students to participate in relevant learning experiences that were focused on cultivating life skills. Teachings were facilitated in a relevant way so that they purposefully spoke to the student as a human being, not a student, in order to set the stage for relatable learning opportunities. Brooke felt there is a meaningful difference between labeling young people as “youth” or as “students”. Brooke explained that because the young people she teaches will only be “students” when they are officially in school, she preferred to refer to them as “youth”. She felt this way because the youth she taught will only spend a relatively short time of their lives as “students”, so instead she had decided to call them “youth” because what she taught them was integral for their lives at any age and would be useful for their futures beyond school. She explained that she chose to speak about her “students” and to her “students” as the individuals and leaders they would be in order to show a greater level of respect for the youth she taught. She also explained that she wanted to avoid doing them a disservice by only teaching to the title of “student” that they currently had, by which she meant only teaching them subject matter and life skills mandated by the curriculum, instead of enriching their learning with survival skills that were necessary to have for their lives both at the time and once they left school.

Aimee referred to her students as “youth” as well, but unlike Brooke she used this term synonymously with the term “student”. However, regardless of the semantics,

Aimee also made thoughtful efforts to provide relevant and practical learning for her students. When she identified a talent for photography in a student, she made the decision to allocate funding on resources to provide cameras for her students. This decision sparked a passion for that student that took him from a path of simply liking to take pictures on his cell phone, to exhibiting his photographs in multiple OCAD shows and receiving a full scholarship to university to pursue photography, with new equipment included. The benefit of art to have transformed that student's life by paving a new road for him was seen as "opening doors for a whole bunch of kids". Specifically for that student, it proved to lead to an entire new journey for him, using art as a vehicle for a potentially interesting career and rewarding life.

Another way Aimee provided practical, relevant learning opportunities for her students was by teaching them how to make things they had use for and enjoyed making, like medicines, face scrubs and hand-carved jewelry. By teaching students how to create these items, the students gained tangible skills that catered to their interests and that they could use throughout their lives in various capacities. The same approach was taken with cooking. Cooking was also taught as an art form and as a practical survival skill, since most students lived alone and didn't have the means to provide nutritious meals for themselves. She taught her students practical applications of how to make a big meal for family and friends out of just a few ingredients, like "150 things to do with hamburger meat". Aimee and Brooke explained the value and importance of cultivating these kinds of life skills in school because they had observed that many students would not go on to higher education, making the skills that they learned in elementary and high school the skills they were going to use for their future. Both educators spoke of the continual value

of these skills as students got older because Aimee also taught these same skills to benefit adults.

Both educators also observed that students engaged with their teachings because nothing they taught the students was presented in a stereotypical or misappropriated way. It was found that arts-based CRP was used to provide cultural teachings about Indigenous histories and lifestyles that were also resistant to stereotypes. Brooke observed that the students were very aware of media portrayals of Indigenous people. These portrayals were often rife with negative connotations of “uneducated natives”. Aimee found that students did not want to engage in Indigenous activities that they saw associated with these negative stereotypes, like dream catchers: “We started doing them once and they were like ‘No, that’s too Indian’”. However, this did not prevent Aimee and Brooke from teaching what was rooted in their heritage. Brooke asserted that every single aspect of what the students learned was what they practiced in their home, or was something that was rooted in their ancestry. Whether it was a cultural practice, song, dance step or how to care for a sacred object, there was a relevant teaching within everything Brooke and Aimee taught that students could apply to their own life. Brooke had observed that students as young as grade one were able to communicate a thorough understanding of the medicine wheel because she taught them how the medicine wheel related to their life. For example, Brooke had these grade one students learn by going outside, facing each direction, closing their eyes, breathing in, and teaching them how each of the four directions are doorways that related to their life right at that moment. This relevance made learning engaging and self-referential, which aided in providing interest-based and flexible programming, as will be discussed in the next sub-theme.

4.5.2 The second benefit these educators observed that arts-based CRP had for Indigenous students was providing students with flexible choices to let them learn through their interests and encourage creativity

It was found that both educators enacted arts-based CRP with flexibility through cross-curricular learning, which could offer students choices in what activities they wanted to do and what topics they wanted to focus on. In this way, students were encouraged to “learn through their interests” because they were able to approach the curriculum in a way that engaged them, instead of being dictated the exact content they should have been learning. Instead, the focus was on building content knowledge and skills across the curriculum led by what was meaningful and relevant to the students. For example, in a photography class, Aimee took her students out to the greenbelt behind their school, gave them cameras and told them to “go crazy”. This freedom allowed students to get as creative as they wished because they were making their own choices. Aimee felt that creativity was the number one benefit of arts-based pedagogy because she observed that when students became more creative inside the classroom she also saw that they used their brains in new and positive ways outside of the classroom.

This arts-based CRP was also flexible because it was able to expand definitions of what was typically considered to fall under the category of creativity, as Aimee explained: “We sometimes get stuck in thinking that art only takes place when it’s visual or a performance or musical, but that’s not true”. Instead, both educators contended that creativity was found within cooking, math, construction, and even just having an idea. All of these nonstandard art forms – like opening your fridge to see what ingredients you can pull together to feed 15 people ASAP – included the creative process and were a

form of creation. Teaching students this flexible definition of creativity provided students with more options to explore in their learning by not putting limits on what types of creative activities could or could be included in their cross-curricular learning environment.

Brooke also embedded flexibility into her drum circles as she believed a drum circle should be different every time, dependent on the mood of the day and the students who are present: “You can never replicate because every person adds an energy to that circle, and even if just one of them is not there, it changes the whole dynamic of the circle.” Brooke observed that drum circles were especially flexible and holistic for students. She found drumming to be flexible because it appealed to different learning styles. Students were able to hear teachings in a different way when it was set to music, and students could contribute by drumming, singing, dancing, clapping, or simply just by being a part of the circle. She believed drumming also engaged youth holistically by engaging their body, mind, spirit and heart because she observed students acknowledging that their heartbeats connected to the rhythm. When students connected to the rhythm in this manner, Brooke felt that students could begin to see themselves reflected in the music. She observed that the flexible nature of the drum circle appealed to multiple learning styles. She found that it was especially beneficial for students who had behavioural issues and learning disorders because they could enjoy participating in the drum circle, it was accessible to all learners, and they were able to stay focused for longer than they could in a standard classroom setting. She observed all students experienced joy through drumming, dancing and singing, and she believed these are skills that could open students up to so many different possibilities.

By providing flexible choices both in teaching to students' different learning styles and in providing multiple options for participating in learning, both educators observed that art had been able to engage students in meaningful learning experiences that cultivated self-discovery. Aimee and Brooke observed that art had the tremendous ability to reveal insight into students' own internal beliefs and inspired them to make better choices for themselves. This self-discovery had been observed to help students find what they enjoy and follow their interests in order to harness the power of having a rewarding passion, like Brooke described:

I always tell them to choose what they love so that no matter what, they'll be able to handle it, cause I work in a school system that I do not believe in at all and I would never send my children to it... but I am able to do it because the work I'm doing I believe in so fully and so strongly that I couldn't be anywhere else. So as long as they study something they love, they'll be able to get through it.

This touched on the necessity of having a rewarding passion for communicating self-expression and developing positive wellbeing, which are explored in the third and final sub-theme.

4.5.3 The third benefit these educators observed that arts-based CRP had for Indigenous students was empowering students' voices to nurture wellbeing

The third benefit of engaging in arts-based CRP with Indigenous students was the benefit of empowering students' own voices in order to help nurture their wellbeing. This was found to have developed primarily through students being able to use art for self-expression and to use art as a cathartic approach for healing emotional distress. In particular, the belief in empowering students' voices connected to the literature in which the research made clear that the voices of Indigenous peoples must be heard in the school systems that Indigenous students were attending (Antone, 2000). These educators

demonstrated a strong advocacy for empowering students to speak up. Aimee and Brooke made unique contributions to the existing literature by extending this topic into practical examples of self-expression for leadership and healing opportunities, discussed below.

As mentioned, both educators found that their students had issues with appropriate expression of their emotions and thoughts. However, both observed that art had been successfully imbedded in their pedagogical approach as a way to allow students to open up (“It helps people express themselves”), to tell their stories – which was important for students to relate to each other – and to focus on listening to their inner voice. Aimee and Brooke both believed that students must use their inner voice to be heard, and to get their important messages out in the world to raise awareness about Indigenous culture. As an advocate for strengthening students’ voices to encourage them to trust their own guiding intuition, Brooke found art particularly stimulating for self-expression. She empowered youth to listen to their inner voice, to follow their truth and to be comfortable and confident within a community circle when they were voicing their opinions which could be different from other peoples’ but that didn’t make theirs wrong or less than. Brooke found drumming to be a transformative channel for students’ self-expression because “drumming allows you to stand, use your voice, be loud, be proud”. She saw how youth light up once they had cultivated this skill, and it inspired her to keep going to empower future generations of Indigenous leaders.

In another aspect of self-expression, Aimee attested to the power of using art in counseling for someone who couldn’t open up. Giving a crayon, marker or pen to someone who had so many feelings pent up inside of them allowed them to work on getting out what they want to get out on the page in front of them. The personal nature of

doing a nonverbal art activity like Aimee's koru art allowed students to express themselves without using words. Aimee observed that it could be a very therapeutic process for students. In this way, she used art as a tool for healing to improve students' wellbeing. For example, through providing an alternative outlet for the student who was engaging in self-harm, the soapstone carving activity allowed that student to transform a harmful action into a positive action. Aimee believed that this activity enabled that student to gain freedom from hurting herself.

Beyond this specific instance, Aimee had seen so much healing happen very quickly through working hands on with art. She observed art serve as a catalytic turning point when she was a young woman herself and was working with an insecure boy. She saw that an art activity called rug hooking helped to transform the boy's low self-esteem into confidence because in gaining this new skill, he also gained joy. This caused Aimee to reflect on the power of what she was teaching and made her think, "Wow, I'm 14 years old and I just changed somebody's life". Later on, as an adult, she used art within her counseling sessions with students and saw art serve as a happy distraction that let students speak freely. She explained that this freedom came from students feeling like they were just playing around, and so they were able to be unbridled from self-consciousness over what they were saying.

Drumming was also observed to be a way of using art for wellbeing. Brooke had experienced that there were different ways to heal and these ways included drumming, singing and screaming in songs that were war cries. She found drumming especially valuable for boys and young men because she observed that males were raised to not show their emotions in a society that saw this as a weakness. She observed that these

males were able to use drumming as an outlet for their emotions in a non-threatening way. Brooke also felt that students could use drumming to not be ashamed of who they were in order to finally celebrate their identity.

4.6 These educators identified that there were three sources of support that have helped their ability to use arts-based CRP: the community, specific teachers, and non-Indigenous students

The sixth theme details the three sources of support Aimee and Brooke observed that they had for using arts-based CRP with Indigenous students. This section is organized into sub-themes relating to these three supports, which are: support from the community; support from specific teachers; and support from non-Indigenous students in the larger school community. It is important to consider these sources of support for enacting arts-based CRP to understand how teachers, students, administration, school boards and communities can effectively contribute to making this approach to education successful, in order to help Indigenous students make achievements in learning. This is also important to address in order to understand how many non-Indigenous community members are supporting Indigenous education in order to decolonize education and make the school system more equitable. This understanding is needed in order to show teachers, administration and students see what it means to be a good ally to Indigenous students. Being a good ally is necessary to foster more equitable partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to support Indigenous students in the school system. This focus on support for arts-based CRP also connects to the scholarly research on the importance of on-going professional development for trained teachers to

consistently support the integration of Indigenous content, as well as for providing training to teacher candidates in initial teacher education faculties. (St. Denis, 2010).

4.6.1 The first source of support that these educators identified to have helped their ability to use arts-based CRP was encouragement from the local community

The first support for enacting arts-based CRP within Indigenous education was from the local community both educators worked within and belonged to at the time of this study. As mentioned previously, both Aimee and Brooke were immersed in their local Indigenous community, and the community showed a lot of support for their work. Community members who were integral to their programming included native education leaders who often were also elders. Elders had many teachings and experiences, which yielded a wealth of knowledge that both educators deferred to for their own learning. Unfortunately, there were not a lot of native education leaders within the school system, so while this was a high quality support, there were not many people in these roles on which to draw. Brooke's mother was also a significant support, having donated two suitcases full of Indigenous resources for her to use in her teachings and being there for her to approach with questions.

Within the larger high school community, there had been a lot of support for the program from some key people in administration: "The Vice Principal loved the Seven Grandfather Teachings" Aimee said, noting that he was a strong support for integrating the teachings into the school's code of conduct and policies for all students. Similarly, Brooke found support from parents through positive feedback. Parents had expressed that

their children loved her and her class, and that they would go home and teach their entire family traditional teachings about nature and the culture.

In the wider community, both educators observed that support was found through access to health care through Anishnawbe Health and other Indigenous-specific government agencies that served as resources for counseling, employment, etc. Brooke noted that while these organizations did not directly support her in using her pedagogical approach with Indigenous students, she stressed that these resources were critical for keeping her healthy and happy so that she could do her job, otherwise she would not be able to go to work, let alone enact arts-based CRP with her students.

4.6.2 The second source of support that these educators identified to have helped their ability to use arts-based CRP was encouragement from specific teachers

The second type of support for enacting arts-based CRP within Indigenous education was from particular teachers within the school and larger school environment. Aimee and Brooke observed that the Ojibwe language teachers were extremely supportive, which was not surprising given that most of these teachers also were elders. Both educators expressed that a lot of support came from non-Indigenous teachers that Aimee and Brooke considered to be “creative” because these teachers taught arts-related courses or enjoyed the arts. Additionally, both educators observed how the majority of non-Indigenous teachers were starting to understand their pedagogical approach more and more. Aimee and Brooke attributed this growing support to these teachers seeing the benefits to having the flexible, fluid program that arts-based CRP provided. They saw the students were happy and proud, and actually learned and completed schoolwork. Aimee

and Brooke observed that these teachers could see the attitudinal change in students. This change was powerful for these teachers to observe because some of them had never seen certain students smile before. While there were not many teachers who fully understood the arts-based approach and how these educators were working with the youth, Brooke stated that “there are wonderful staff who are so supportive, and so amazing and are amazing allies, and very considerate. And those people, I can tell you, make up for the ones who are extremely rude to me.”

4.6.3 The third source of support that these educators identified to have helped their ability to use arts-based CRP was encouragement from non-Indigenous students within the wider school community

The last source of support was generated from non-Indigenous students within the wider school community who had shown appreciation for Indigenous beliefs and art through natural exposure to the culture. Aimee and Brooke believed that this support stemmed from the natural way that Indigenous culture and art had been exposed to non-Indigenous students. Aimee experienced this natural exposure to Indigenous culture herself. Aimee was raised by the female Indigenous role models in her life and received Indigenous teachings passed down to her, yet as a child she never explicitly thought about what she was learning was Indigenous: “I didn’t know that was aboriginal, I just figured that was what they did in Nova Scotia.” Because of her own experience, she wanted to introduce Indigenous culture to non-Indigenous students in her school’s community to cultivate a school-wide acceptance and respect for the culture.

In accordance with how she was exposed to the culture, in integrating aboriginal education into the wider school community Aimee was careful in making sure that the

students did not feel like “this was being rammed down their throats”. For example, when she infused the Seven Grandfather Teachings into the school agenda that all students used, the teaching was not presented as an explicit Indigenous teaching. She purposefully did this because she wanted to enrich students’ lives with meaningful teachings that were applicable and relevant to any student regardless of their culture. This integration of the Seven Grandfather Teachings was a natural extension of the school’s existing framework as the Seven Grandfather Teachings follow the same character traits the school promoted. This had been a positive experience for the Indigenous students in her school to see their peers in the wider school community accept their teachings as values to live by. In addition, the wider school had added more Indigenous programs, which further demonstrated support and acceptance for Indigenous culture.

Brooke has also felt support from non-Indigenous students when she taught these students about Indigenous culture. She observed that some Indigenous educators do not want to teach non-Indigenous students Indigenous content because they felt that these students did not deserve to learn it. Brooke explained that these educators felt this way because they saw that because these students’ families were never forbidden to teach their culture, the students could not understand how valuable the teachings really were. However, Brooke felt the opposite way: “To teach these youth who are not native to be a good ally, wouldn’t you want them to understand and appreciate what was taken from us? The beauty of it?” Based off of her own teachings she felt that no one should be excluded. Instead, she felt that Indigenous teachings were meant to be a celebration of each person’s individuality and spirit. She observed keen support from non-Indigenous

students because they gained exposure to positive aspects of the culture, and they made connections to their own cultural backgrounds.

By making connections to their own culture, these students were able to begin to break down barriers and saw that the racism and stereotypes that had been put on Indigenous youth by the media was unfounded and unfair. Students were then able to learn together – as Brooke believed learning should be – and the outcomes were “very positive...I see them take pride, I see them shine, and then that gets carried into the rest of their day and their other work.” Both Aimee and Brooke had observed that there were mutual benefits to be made for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students through integrating arts-based CRP. However, not everyone had been supportive of this endeavor. I now turn to the documented challenges these educators have faced in applying this approach.

4.7 These educators identified that there were three sources of challenge that have hindered their ability to use arts-based CRP: a rigid academic environment in schools; a risk of misappropriation; and a lack of funding for Indigenous programs

The seventh and final theme identifies the challenges these educators have identified to be facing the use of arts-based CRP with Indigenous youth. This theme is organized by these three main challenges, which are: a rigid academic environment within schools; a risk of misappropriation; and a lack of funding for Indigenous programs. It is important to consider these sources of challenge for enacting arts-based CRP to understand the barriers that are in the way of this approach and can be hindering the success of using this approach to promote achievement in Indigenous education.

These challenges are also important to acknowledge in order for educators to become

aware of the ways in which Indigenous students may still be facing a lack of support within the school system. This awareness is integral for decolonizing education and striving to make the school system more equitable.

4.7.1 The first source of challenge that these educators identified to have hindered their ability to use arts-based CRP was a rigid academic environment within schools

Both educators faced resistant teachers who were unfamiliar with working with Indigenous youth and were unsupportive of Aimee and Brooke's arts-based CRP approach. These teachers were described to be unsupportive because they did not understand why an arts-based CRP approach was necessary. Instead, these teachers adhered rigidly to the standard academic environment found in most mainstream schools. Brooke found that the majority of resistance to her pedagogical approach was from the staff who worked in a system in which she believed she doesn't "represent where their comfort zone is, what they're used to" and who were not taught about Indigenous culture in their own education. Not only was she an educator who belonged to a different culture that had not primarily been seen in the classrooms of the past, but at the time of this study she was young, as well as an educator in a teaching role, but not a certified teacher.

She experienced teachers treating her as though she received her job easily and unfairly, and she also experienced a lack of respect for her cultural practices, including smudging. "Within this school system, I am faced with so much resistance. Teachers slamming the door on me like, 'Ugh! Can you open a window?' because I smudged. People saying I can not smudge." One teacher actually accused Brooke of smoking marijuana in school because that teacher mistook the smell of sage used for smudging for

the smell of marijuana. She attempted to hold a professional development (PD) session for the staff at her school to speak to them about smudging at the first staff meeting of the year. Unfortunately, her session was re-scheduled to the next staff meeting, which was months away and she had wanted to make staff aware of her practices from the beginning. Regarding PD, Brooke believed that in order to work with Indigenous students, all teachers should attend a mandatory cultural sensitivity PD session led by Indigenous people.

Besides being met with abrasive reactions, Brooke observed that some resistant teachers were also outwardly unsupportive of her teaching approach. Many teachers resented going outside to learn, even though learning from the land was a huge part of her teachings. She clashed with resistant teachers over using arts-based pedagogy like drumming because it meant the youth were moving around and using their voices, while traditional classrooms encouraged students to be quiet and seated. She also had teachers pull non-Indigenous students from her class because they told her they felt it was unnecessary for those students to be there. She even experienced teachers overriding her decision to book a room to have a space for a drum circle because they felt their needs were a higher priority than hers “because they have a Ph.D., and I have, what, nothing?” She also observed teachers who believed that because they changed their curriculum when teaching academic and applied streams of a subject that Brooke should change her teachings, too. She responded that she was not going to speak to her students in academic as if they were more intelligent than students who are in applied because those were not her teachings.

Aimee also experienced resistance from teachers who were not familiar with Indigenous culture and/or with arts-based pedagogy. This included supply teachers and math and science teachers. She felt this was the case because, unlike her approach towards cross-curricular fluid learning, learning in their subjects could be very rigid, and she felt this extended to their attitude. Aimee observed youth had a difficult time with a rigid curriculum and when they were not allowed to choose what they were interested in within reading materials and assignments.

Brooke credited this resistance to the fact that there were not very many Indigenous teachers working in the school system. This made it important for non-Indigenous teachers who wanted to work with Indigenous youth to be engaged in culturally sensitive and relevant learning opportunities about Indigenous culture so these teachers could understand their students. The educators advised to invest in culturally relevant teaching by reaching out to Indigenous people to receive teachings. They also suggested going to the source by attending ceremonies and being involved in communities. There was likely to be resistance that non-Indigenous teachers could face in this quest for knowledge, but it was necessary to be brave and try.

If you reach out, you're going to find the right people – if you are, it's going to happen, it'll come to you, you'll find the right person to talk to and then you can refer to them as a native person whom you work with. It's possible.

In addition to resistance from teachers, both educators also faced institutional resistance from the established school system that they worked in. Brooke observed that today's school system still dictated Western culture as the curriculum students needed to know to be “an assimilated, responsible citizen in society”. She made a poignant connection between this ideal and the public school system as being a direct product of

the residential school system. In order to stop Western culture from being the dominant discourse within Indigenous programming in the TDSB, Brooke argued that it should be Indigenous people who were directing and guiding the Indigenous education program, as at the time of this study the central coordinating principal for the Aboriginal Education Centre is non-Indigenous. She believed that the experiences of non-Indigenous people are still valuable, but that they are not able to fundamentally understand the level of inequity that Indigenous people have suffered through, and therefore are not the most appropriate or relevant choice to be leading aboriginal education – especially as they are often not part of the Indigenous community.

As not many Indigenous teachers are currently working in the TDSB, both educators felt like they were a minority facing a daunting colonized system. Brooke observed a contradiction in the school board's position on hiring more Indigenous educators: Indigenous educators who were knowledgeable about Indigenous culture and teaching often did not have a certified teaching degree and were dismissed as being not qualified. Brooke observed that this may have been because a lot of the people who were hired as teachers came from a place of privilege – since to study to be a teacher required a lot of financial obligations and supports that many Indigenous people have not had and still do not have access to.

Both educators believed that a lot of youth who were now young adults did not have the support to become certified teachers if they wanted to because the school system they went through did not acknowledge and provide accommodations for the wide-spread effects of what Brooke described as “ancestral trauma”. She believed that ancestral trauma was something that many Indigenous students faced because of their families’

history of suffering within residential schools, which impeded their ancestors' ability to succeed. Accordingly, Brooke observed that the lack of Indigenous teachers working in the school board could be perceived as a signal to Indigenous youth that the school system did not hire Indigenous people, but instead hired non-Indigenous people to present their cultural work and to share their cultural knowledge. Brooke felt that "when they see that, why the hell would they try?" This connected to the fact that youth needed to see themselves reflected in leadership roles in order to become future leaders. This was just one component of the challenges facing Indigenous educators using arts-based pedagogy; the remaining challenges are discussed in the next two sub-themes.

4.7.2 The second source of challenge that these educators identified to have hindered their ability to use arts-based CRP was a risk of misappropriation

The second challenge facing the use of arts-based CRP with Indigenous youth is the potential risk of misappropriation and tokenism. Brooke believes there isn't an authentic priority on Indigenous culture or education:

It is done in a tokenism way because the government mandated aboriginal education so now instead of Grade 9 Visual Art you have Grade 9 Aboriginal Expressions being taught by non-native people who have absolutely no knowledge of what our art represents.

This was a strong opinion that was divided in the literature. In contrast, Aimee stated that she did not feel there was a real risk in engaging in the creative process, besides the risk of tokenism. However, she observed that there was a risk in what

teachers did with tangible Indigenous art products. In her own experience, she observed that two years after she had completed an Indigenous art activity making bracelets with a class, she discovered that the teacher she had worked with had used the artwork to make a display showcasing Indigenous art. However well intentioned it was, the execution was poorly done: “the kids made up stories about what these bracelets signify. They called them wampums, and that was not correct, at all... it wasn’t a traditional wampum activity, it was all wrong”. While Aimee observed that this teacher felt she was doing relevant Indigenous programming, an elder saw the display and was “livid” because his perception of the activity was that this non-Indigenous teacher had misappropriated something that had such cultural significance to Indigenous culture, and it came across as if it were “a slap in the face”.

4.7.3 The third source of challenge that these educators identified to have hindered their ability to use arts-based CRP was a lack of funding for Indigenous programs

The final issue the educators observed to be facing the use of arts-based CRP with Indigenous students was a lack of funding to sustain their specific program into the future. Based on a longstanding history of educational oppression, the literature argues that the marginalized Indigenous community could only escape poverty through an educational transformation, including funding Indigenous education (Richards, 2008). This issue connects to the extensive research into the prioritization of funding aboriginal education. Aimee and Brooke’s lived experiences working within Indigenous education share their beliefs on the reality of funding based on their observations. Both educators

were concerned that the right supports were not in place to maintain their cultural programs. The perceived issue in funding was highlighted by the fact that neither Aimee nor Brooke could say with certainty where they were observing or experiencing the effects of the provincial funding that the Ontario government had mandated.

In the school's first year, it received a lot of funding to start their unique program. This led Aimee to initially think that there was a lot of money being put into Indigenous education. Yet, Aimee observed a sharp drop-off in funding in the next year: "This is our second year and there's no money." As mentioned, the school provided breakfast and lunch for all students. However, Aimee observed that her school did not get enough funding to actually feed their students, even though this was part of the program's mandate to accommodate at-risk students. Funding was seen as being not enough to cover these costs – "just going to the store to buy milk, eggs, just your staples on a weekly basis, is just over \$50" – so Aimee applied for assistance, got food from food banks, and grew to rely on donations.

Similarly, there was no funding to cover the hundreds of dollars it cost to have elders visit schools to provide cultural programming. Elders relied on this honorarium for their livelihood, so in order to raise these costs, the students and teachers ran fundraisers. However, being a part of the TDSB, the school was subjected to stringent limitations, like only fundraising a limited number of times a year, that made fundraising efforts feeble. Furthermore, since the school was a small community (15 students) with many students living on their own, there were not many people that they were able to raise funds from. Students could not approach their parents or friends for fundraising because "all the people they know are in the same situation as them."

The school also had limited outside resources. Both educators considered themselves to be their own biggest resource as the supplies they used in the classroom were often things Aimee and Brooke had purchased for students themselves – out of their own pockets. This lack of funding combined with other challenges of rigidity and misappropriation showed the discrepancies between what the government wanted to do in theory, and what effects were actually resonating positively within Indigenous education.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter described the interview findings in relation to the main and supplementary research questions guiding this study. The specific findings made a unique contribute to the existing research in the area of arts-based education and Indigenous education by describing the experiences of two educators who are working on a daily basis within both of these educational fields and doing so in a niche way. Consequently, their insights are valuable since they are people who are greatly committed to and invested in supporting Indigenous learners. These insights included what prepared them for their work with Indigenous students, how they enacted arts-based CRP in theory and in practice, the benefits of this approach, and the supports and challenges they faced in their approach to engaging Indigenous youth in learning in school are important to consider if educators want to make school a place where these students can be equitably set up for success. In the following fifth chapter I will speak to the significance of my findings for the educational community as well as for myself as a teacher and researcher. I will identify areas for future research and make recommendations based on these findings.

CHAPTER 5 – IMPLICATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This final chapter speaks to the importance of the findings detailed in the previous chapter. It begins with an overview of the seven key findings with an explanation of the significance of what I learned from these findings. It then turns to a discussion of the implications of these findings, first outlining the broad implications these findings have for the educational community, before exploring the narrow implications these findings have for me personally as a teacher and researcher. I make recommendations for teachers, school boards, professional development and teacher education based on what the research findings have revealed. I also identify questions that were raised for me through this study to address areas for future research that I believe scholars should direct their focus to next, and why I believe these areas warrant attention. This chapter concludes with a summary of the findings and speak to the significance of why this research matters and for whom it matters.

5.1 Overview of key findings and their significance

This research resulted in seven findings. These findings have culminated in the discovery of how an arts-based approach to culturally relevant pedagogy is being uniquely applied by specific Indigenous educators who are working with Indigenous elementary and high school schools within the TDSB.

The first key finding was significant because it articulated that there were three influential factors that developed Aimee and Brooke's commitment to Indigenous education and preparation for their work using arts-based CRP with Indigenous students.

I learned that both educators had personal investments that inspired them into doing the work they do. I also learned that they had developed their commitment to Indigenous education and were prepared for their work because of their extensive experience working with Indigenous youth and the wealth of arts-based knowledge that they possessed. This finding helped to explain why these educators began integrating arts-based CRP as their pedagogical approach with Indigenous students, why they had a strong commitment to Indigenous education in the first place, and how they were able to use the arts in a culturally appropriate, engaging way with students. It is important to understand Aimee and Brooke's mindsets and motivations to provide clarity on what characteristics and experiences can shape future educators to be capable of using this approach for creating successful learning opportunities with Indigenous students.

The second key finding was significant because it communicated that these educators conceptualized arts-based CRP first in theory through establishing a school context that can respond to the needs of at-risk Indigenous students. I learned that in order to build this specific context, the educators observed the importance of having small class sizes within a culturally focused program, accommodating students in a way that connected to their Indigenous values, and bridging students' home lives with their school lives. This finding demonstrates the importance of the school milieu in building a solid foundation for learning. These components are specific to the schools where Aimee and Brooke worked and have been intentionally put in place to improve Indigenous students success in schools. The fact that the majority of TDSB schools do not have these components suggests that it may be more difficult to implement an arts-based CRP at

most schools and highlights the fact that most schools are not providing specific components to respond to at-risk Indigenous youth.

The third key finding was significant because it conveyed the preconditions within building meaningful relationships with students these educators observed to be necessary before any learning could happen. I learned that both educators found that it was important to communicate care for students explicitly to students, establishing trustworthiness with students, and nurturing students' strengths and interests. This finding was significant because the educators suggested that arts-based CRP likely could not be implemented appropriately without having strong relationships with students.

The fourth key finding was significant because it expressed that these educators conceptualized arts-based CRP in practice by guiding students through experiential learning opportunities using a variety of art mediums, learning through nature, and adapting standard forms of assessment in order to accurately capture measures of students learning. This finding discussed the expanded definition of what art and creativity entails for Aimee and Brooke's approach and demonstrated the great potential to connect Indigenous education to place based, outdoor, and environmental education due to the connection between people and land honoured by Indigenous culture. This finding also explained how these educators assessed using participation and community building.

The fifth key finding was significant because it showcased the benefits these educators observed from using arts-based CRP with their students. I learned that these benefits were increased student engagement within relevant learning experiences, as well as providing students with choices and empowering students voices. These benefits were

significant to address because they explained why these educators felt so strongly about using arts-based pedagogy with students. It also explored how art can assist students in a myriad of ways, for example, by cultivating life skills, encouraging a creative mindset, and for catharsis.

The sixth key finding was significant because it revealed the sources of support that Aimee and Brooke observed as helping their ability to use arts-based CRP. I learned that the community, Ojibwa language and creative teachers, and non-Indigenous students within the wider school community all played a pivotal role in encouraging the educators' approach to working with Indigenous students. It is important to learn about these supports in order to cultivate understanding about what non-Indigenous people in education and the community can do to support Indigenous learners.

The last key finding was significant because it revealed the sources of challenge that both educators identified as hindering their approach. I learned that a rigid academic environment, a risk of misappropriating Indigenous culture and a lack of funding for Indigenous programs all make it difficult for Aimee and Brooke to use arts-based CRP effectively. This finding is important because it is necessary to acknowledge the challenges that are plaguing these educators' abilities to provide meaningful learning opportunities for Indigenous students to succeed in.

5.2 Implications

5.2.1 Broad

This research has broad implications for the educational community because it provided discussion on a unique pedagogical approach that educators could use to facilitate

learning with their students. This research also has the broad implication of providing a look at what Indigenous educators in Toronto actually find to be resonating with their Indigenous students. This matters for educational stakeholders because these educators described and explained how they are supporting Indigenous students in their classrooms by using arts-based CRP to improve engagement and achievement in order to make success in learning more accessible. Each finding was a crucial part of understanding what exactly it means to have an arts-based culturally relevant pedagogical approach, who some of the educators using this approach are, why these educators have chosen to use this approach, where and in what context this approach is being applied for work with Indigenous students, and how this approach has been observed to facilitate meaningful and relevant learning experiences for Indigenous students. It is possible that teachers, administration, school boards, and teacher education faculties can use this research as a guide for how to enact arts-based CRP with Indigenous students.

First, it is possible that teachers can use this research as a guide for how to enact arts-based CRP with Indigenous students. The research found that it was crucial for teachers to acknowledge their own learning styles in order to emphasize with the diversity of learning styles their Indigenous students may have. Teachers should reflect on how they themselves learn – kinesthetic, visual, etc. – and get to know their students to determine how they best learn, in order to set them up for success by facilitating and delivering lessons in the most accessible way possible. This ties in to another key finding from the study, which was the importance of teachers cultivating positive and trusting relationships with their students. These relationships were found to be critical for encouraging youth to engage with the teacher and in learning, and it is suggested that

teachers share stories – appropriate, of course – that will allow students to connect with them in a deeper way so that students respond more warmly to the teacher and to each other. This trusting relationship sets the stage for the classroom milieu: without this positive environment, engaging students was found to be much more difficult. This relationship allowed teachers to get to know their students and the research suggests that teachers should keep an eye on their students' interests and strengths in order to guide them towards opportunities that can help them engage and achieve. Teachers also need to have a wealth of experience in what they're teaching, the community they're teaching in, the cultural traditions of their students, and the arts-based practices that they want to use in order to effectively use arts-based CRP the way the educators in this study did.

Without this background knowledge, teachers cannot fully enact arts-based CRP in a meaningful and genuine way. For an authentic learning environment, this research advises to go directly to the source to get teachings, bring in Indigenous elders and members of the community who can speak with authority on what it is that you want the students to engage in and to be transparent in expressing the truth that as a teacher you do not know everything but that you are deferring to people who know more than you to appropriately teach something the best it can be taught. The research also suggests to bridge the gap between students' home lives and their lives at school. This can be approached by having an open door policy where teachers invite parents and family to come into the classroom, seeking out parental involvement in school, as well as the teacher immersing themselves into the local Indigenous community in order to show their students that they want to learn more about their students' culture and that they respect and are pursuing a growing understanding of it. This growing understanding connects to

the finding that including accommodations that value Indigenous traditions and ways of life that students are familiar with into schools. Non-Indigenous teachers can learn about Indigenous traditions and ways of life and both Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers can bring these practices – such as restorative justice and non-punitive consequences – into the classroom so the classroom is reflective of values that students are well acquainted with since they are the same values they have in their homes. The example of Aimee infusing the Seven Grandfather Teachings into her entire school's code of conduct shows how complementary Indigenous values and mainstream school values are, even if they are worded slightly differently. It is also important that teachers resist being rigid in their teaching style and allow students to learn through inquiry and experiential education. The research suggests that this can be done specifically by having students learn through creative practices like art, as well as getting outside to learn from nature, through nature and about nature, in order to connect to their sense of place and learning off the land. The research findings suggest that aspects of learning like participation, engagement, communication and teamwork be prioritized as more important than quantitative assessment. In this regard, formative and diagnostic “assessments” are still able to be ascertained by teachers, though this is more about gauging where students are in their learning to guide them towards meaningful next steps, instead of having just a mark on a report card. Another implication from this research is that teachers should look at the outcomes using arts-based CRP has for their students, as this can let teachers refine their pedagogy as needed. In terms of perceived benefits, teachers can acknowledge the benefits of this approach in order to encourage more teachers to use it!

In terms of school administration, administrators may use this research as a guide for why as well as how to enact arts-based CRP with Indigenous students in their school. Just like the Vice Principal in Aimee and Brooke's school noted how infusing Indigenous values into the whole school was a positive act for school morale, principals, vice principals, and other administration members can use this research to help support Indigenous learners. The research recommends actively but naturally infusing Indigenous histories, stories, symbols, teachings and traditions into the school environment in order to show support for Indigenous culture, make Indigenous students feel reflected in their school environment, and to introduce the culture to non-Indigenous students to break down barriers between cultural groups. Adopting school-wide policies like non-punitive consequences such as restorative justice, encouraging parent and family involvement in school and creating that welcome space for Indigenous elders, family and community members to share their stories and experiences are all positive suggestions that the research suggests would help close the gap between students' home and school lives and encourage students and their families to potentially see being more invested in the school system a worthwhile and effective cause.

At the level of school boards, a major implication from this study is how the size of classes dramatically affects the ability of teachers to enact arts-based CRP and affects how Indigenous students can successfully learn. Both educators worked in small classes and they believed this was crucial for attending to the needs of their students who were labeled as "at risk". However, to effectively integrate this arts-based approach to CRP, smaller class sizes are suggested regardless of whatever label the students may be considered. This is necessary because arts-based CRP requires a safe and comfortable

space with good working relationships between the teacher and fellow classmates in order to be done optimally. With too many students, this dynamic is more difficult to balance and this safe space can be harder to attain. This is why it is suggested that school boards have smaller classes in their schools in order for students to receive more attention from not just the teacher, but from their peers as well. It is also suggested that school boards strive to implement more Indigenous programs across more schools. In addition to having more schools with Indigenous programs available, location should also play a key factor. The research found that there are fewer Indigenous programs available at schools centrally located downtown, yet many students live downtown in order to be close to Indigenous resources that they need to access, like Anishnawbe Health. Making these programs available to students closer to where they live would make these schools physically more accessible.

Regarding teacher education faculties, a significant implication from this research is the continued need for teacher candidates to be engaged themselves in relevant and meaningful learning about Indigenous cultures, histories, stories, and how to engage and support Indigenous students. Teacher education faculties could do more in terms of making teacher candidates aware of the inequities Indigenous students, families and people in the community face, and teacher candidates should be taught to reflect on their own identity, place in society and the privileges that they hold in society that others do not. By illuminating these inequities earlier on, teacher education faculties can endeavor to produce assertive teachers who are aware of and committed to engaging in social justice work to further the education system along on its way to becoming a decolonized system. This would also assist teacher candidates in understanding how to use arts-based

CRP to meet students where they are at, as the research found, in order to find ways of teaching that resonate with Indigenous students.

5.2.2 Narrow

This research has narrow implications for me to reflect on as a researcher and teacher. As a researcher, I had to continuously reflect on the fact that as a settler person from a European heritage, I am conducting this research from a place of privilege that is not as accessible to other cultural groups, including Indigenous cultures. The deeper I dug into the literature and analysis of Aimee and Brooke's experiences, the more it was revealed that while this is important research to conduct, my life experiences are different than the stories of systemic disenfranchisement that I was decoding. This did not make the research any less critical. I was made more aware of injustice still facing Indigenous people today, like the level of discrimination hampering their success in school, and the inequitable dynamic occurring within different Indigenous cultures themselves, as I previously did not know the ramifications of not holding First Nations status. I learned that Métis people are often not afforded the same rights as a full-status First Nations person is. These insights highlighted the importance of teaching non-Indigenous people in the community and educators like myself about Indigenous history and ways of life. I learned how integral this understanding is for being a reliable ally that can forge partnerships with Indigenous educators and community members to work towards making schools a more equitable and engaging place for Indigenous students. I also learned that in striving to transform schools in this way, there are significant benefits for all students, regardless of their culture.

As a teacher I have learned more practically about the importance of building meaningful relationships with students. I will put Aimee and Brooke's observations of communicating care and concern, sharing my own stories, nurturing strengths interests to good use with my own students to build an inclusive class community. I will use arts-based CRP in my classroom because I have been made aware of the benefits. I will defer to the knowledge of elders, parents and community members by inviting them into the classroom, in order to teach students to learn from accurate and appropriate sources and to bridge the gap between school and home. I will enjoy facilitating learning through many different artistic mediums and continue to follow my passion for outdoor and environmental and sustainability education by encouraging students to learn through inquiry outside in nature. I will also try to be a good ally by supporting initiatives to encourage successful learning outcomes for Indigenous students.

5.3 Recommendations

I have a few recommendations based on what I have learned. First, I would like to recommend that teacher education faculties in Ontario and across Canada include more culturally diverse pedagogical approaches. The inclusion of an Indigenous education course in teacher education is slowly starting to permeate through the larger faculties, but this should also extend to encouraging teacher candidates the significance of adapting the Ontario curriculum to reflect learners from all backgrounds so that they can teach with respectful relevance to their students' lifestyles. While in theory it can be argued that many teacher education faculties do endorse CRP, in order to show evidence of taking this commitment more seriously there are particular types of learning experiences built into aspects of the program that I would recommend be done. Coursework should reflect

that students are learning about CRP both in theory and how to practically apply and utilize it successfully. Workshops on CRP, social justice and Indigenous education should be available for students as professional development opportunities. For example, the Deepening Knowledge Project at OISE provides excellent programming for teaching teacher candidates about Indigenous education. It should be mandatory that teacher candidates attend at least one of these workshops, and there should be an incentive that students who attend a certain number or all of these kinds of workshops receive a designation that they can put on their resume and a corresponding certificate use in their professional development dossier. At the time of this research, OISE has a co-curricular record that does just this, but though there are opportunities to attend and earn a PD designation in many fields from environmental and sustainability education to teaching mathematics, to social justice, there is not one specifically for Indigenous education.

In addition to teaching placement practicums, teacher candidates may benefit from getting exposure to the education field by engaging in service learning experiences within their communities. Service learning, when done in an appropriate, genuine way that allows the teacher candidate to be immersed in the community and for the community to benefit from their immersion, can be a great opportunity for future teachers to gain insight into teaching a variety of students and become a part of the local community space.

Second, I would like to recommend that school boards offer professional development workshops on working with Indigenous students that are taught by Indigenous people, including elders and members of the community and focus specifically on using arts-based CRP to engage and set up Indigenous K-12 students for success. From the research

I recommend that these PD sessions begin with everyone sitting in a community circle at the same level (if they are able to). The PD facilitator should be an Indigenous person who leads the session by first opening the circle with introducing attendees to smudging. The leader should explain exactly what smudging is, what its cultural significance is, what the traditional medicines that are used in the smudge are, and share the Ojibwe or Anishinaabe words for the four traditional medicines – sage (*mshkwaadewashk*), cedar (*kiishig*), sweetgrass (*wiingush*) and tobacco (*semaa*) – so teachers can become familiar with these words as well as the smell of smudge, just like Brooke wanted. With the assistance of a helper (*Oshkabaywis*) to take the smudge around to each attendee, the leader should model different ways that each person can appropriately engage in smudging, and how to say thank you (*Miigwech*) in Ojibwe after they are finished to express to the helper that they may move on to the next person in the circle.

The workshop should include learning about the Seven Grandfather Teachings and the medicine wheel in a way that connects personally in a relevant way to teachers' lives – the same way that they will want to teach their own students. The leader should also have attendees engage in the circle by asking a question and inviting everyone in the room to share one at a time as an eagle feather or talking stick is passed to them. This session should also include teaching about the history of Indigenous culture and sharing perspectives from Indigenous students about how they learn and what kind of qualities they want in their teacher. The importance of knowing what kind of teacher Indigenous students want to have in their classrooms was made apparent to me during a presentation I attended at the 2016 Canadian Student Outdoor Education Conference (aka the Horwood Conference) from Teach For Canada. Teach For Canada is a non-profit

organization that works with First Nations communities in northern Ontario to recruit and connect committed to teachings in these communities. In their presentation, their ambassadors showed a quote from the Feathers of Hope Report (2012) from Indigenous students that were interviewed that stated:

What we want is a teacher who is not prejudiced, wants to be in the community, is educated and willing to teach us, believes in us, is willing to talk and listen to us, and knows their teaching area.

Though this example is referring to students learning in First Nations communities on reserves, hearing from Indigenous students about what they wanted in a teacher helped me to reflect on and clarify my own teaching philosophy and it may be able to help teachers do the same.

Third, I would also like to recommend that school boards strive to hire more Indigenous teachers in teaching roles and non-certified but experienced educators in cultural instructor and administration roles in order to include Indigenous perspectives into the school system.

Finally, I recommend that all teachers open themselves up to pursuing a better understanding of Indigenous culture, and to the benefits of using arts integration for all students in order to enrich students lives in a meaningful way.

5.4 Areas for further research

Given the findings from this research, I believe that it is important for qualitative studies to look further into using arts-based CRP within Indigenous education. More research into this area, especially by Indigenous researchers, would contribute more perspectives on this approach to the literature in order to produce more findings into

using arts-based CRP with Indigenous students. I still have questions about how mainstream schools with Indigenous programs can adapt assessment to prioritize community building and participation while meeting standard school assessment requirements. Future research could address this to uncover more ways of making standard classrooms more equitable for capturing measures of Indigenous students' learning. I also feel it would be important for educational research scholars to focus on the relationship between Indigenous students and learning off the land to better understand the benefits or drawbacks of specifically using outdoor, environmental and/or place based education to engage Indigenous students in outdoor experiential learning opportunities.

5.5 Conclusion

These findings provided in-depth response to the research questions through critical and careful analysis. This research matters because it uses the experiences of committed Indigenous educators who work on a daily basis to decolonize education and guide Indigenous students towards success in order to move school boards like the TDSB further along on the equity continuum. It matters not just for Indigenous students, but also for all members of the education community. It was created with the intention of being able to help Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators work together as allies in a partnership towards the goal of making school a more socially just and safe space for all students.

Ultimately what I have learned from the experiences of these educators enacting arts-based CRP with Indigenous youth is how tightly knit the relationship between the arts and Indigenous culture is, and how integral culture is to encourage a sense of

belonging and facilitate achievement because culture and the arts can be seen as being rooted in identity. I will conclude with a metaphor for identity so eloquently articulated by Brooke to lend credence to the significance of this overarching finding:

I actually believe that why our culture and our heritage and why [rhythm's] so important – and the practices and bringing that into how we teach – is because it's rooted in our identity, in our history, and if you do not have that, you do not have roots, and a tree without roots is bound to fall.

This metaphor brings us full circle to the research problem this study set out to address in Chapter 1 – the evidence of the great extent that “trees” (students) are falling as a result of the structural inequities built into the education system. If schools are to help strengthen them, they need to focus more attention on identity.

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Appendix A: Letter of Consent



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
OISE | ONTARIO INSTITUTE
FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION

Date: _____,

Dear _____,

My name is Alysse Kennedy and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on how teachers are integrating art, music and dance as culturally responsive pedagogy to support Indigenous students in the TDSB. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have a minimum of two years teaching experience working with Indigenous students, have demonstrated an commitment to integrating art, music and/or dance in their support of Indigenous students, and a commitment to culturally responsive pedagogy. I believe your knowledge and experience will give insight into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a research conference or publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. This data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only people who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor, Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to participation, and I will share with you a copy of the transcript to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,

Alysse Kennedy
647.328.8242
alysse.kennedy@mail.utoronto.ca

Instructor's Name: Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic
Contact Info: angela.macdonald@utoronto.ca

Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Alysse Kennedy and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: _____

Name: (printed) _____

Date: _____

Appendix B: Interview Protocol



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
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Interview Questions

Introduction

Thank you so much for participating in this interview. I appreciate you taking the time to sit down with me and be a part of this research. The goal of this research is to learn how a select group of teachers are using art, music and dance as culturally responsive pedagogy to create meaningful and relevant learning experiences for Indigenous elementary school students. The interview should take approximately 45-60 minutes. I will ask you a series of 28 questions focused into 5 categories: 1) your background, 2) your beliefs and values, 3) your teacher practice, 4) influencing factors in your teaching, and 5) predicted next steps you foresee in this area of teaching. And of course, it is entirely your right to choose to not answer any question. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Section 1: Background Information

1. What is your name?
2. How many years have you been teaching?
3. What do you teach and what grades and subject areas have you previously taught?
4. Where do you teach? Can you tell me more about your school in terms of its size, community, demographics, program priorities, and ratio of Indigenous students to non-Indigenous students?
5. Where did you grow up? What is your cultural background? How do you describe your cultural identity?
6. As you know, I am interested in learning how teachers integrate art, music, and dance as culturally responsive pedagogy for Indigenous students. Can you tell me more about what personal, professional, and educational experiences have informed your interest in these areas, and contributed to preparing you for this work?
 - a. Let's start with the arts focus: How did you become involved in art, music, and/or dance?
 - b. And in terms of your commitment to supporting Indigenous students, approximately what percentage of your students, that you are aware of, are Indigenous? For how long have you worked with this demographic of students?

Section 2: Beliefs and Values

7. Why do you believe that arts-integration, generally speaking, is a valuable learning experience for students? In your experience, what are some of the benefits of arts education that you have observed?

8. More specifically, what do you believe are the benefits of arts integration for Indigenous students and why?
9. How do you feel that art, music and/or dance as a teaching approach appeals to Indigenous students' ways of knowing and learning styles?
10. What does culturally responsive pedagogy mean to you? What are some key components of this approach, in your view?
11. What forms of art, specifically, have you seen resonate for your FNMI students, and why do you think that is?
12. In your experience, what have you observed about the challenges confronting FNMI students in the Canadian education system?
13. In your view, how can arts integration respond to some of these challenges?
14. What concerns, if any, do you have about the quality of education for Indigenous students in Canada and why?
15. What do you believe all students can gain from culturally responsive learning through art, dance and music, regardless of their cultural background?
16. What do you believe are some potential risks or limitations of this approach? (E.g. tokenism, the soft "food, festivals, and fashion" approached to multicultural education that reinforce stereotypes...)
17. What concerns, if any, do you have concerning how non-Indigenous teachers integrate Indigenous perspectives into education, as they are required to do?

Section 3: Teacher Practice

18. How do you teach art, music, and dance in a culturally responsive way to support the learning needs of Indigenous students? Can you please give me some examples?
 - i. What are your learning goals?
 - ii. What opportunities for learning do you create? How?
 - iii. What instructional strategies and approaches do you take?
 - iv. What resources support you?
 - v. How do you assess this work?
19. Where in the curriculum do you locate this work and why? (grade, subject areas)
20. Why do you teach the forms of art, dance, and music that you do? What informs your decisions concerning what art, dance, and music are culturally responsive? How do you believe that they are?
21. How, if at all, do you work directly with FNMI communities to inform your teaching practice? How do you include their voices and perspectives on Indigenous ways of knowing?
22. What outcomes of your CRP practice do you observe for your Indigenous students? What outcomes do you observe for your non-Indigenous students? How do they respond to opportunities to learn about the art, music, and dance of Indigenous Peoples?

Section 4: Supports, Challenges and Influencing Factors

23. What factors and resources support you in your commitment to enacting an arts-based culturally responsive program in your classroom for Indigenous students?

24. How, if at all, has the provincial commitment to aboriginal education influenced the support you receive from the school board to continue your use of culturally responsive programming for your Indigenous students?
25. What obstacles or challenges have you faced when integrating the art, music, and dance as culturally responsive pedagogy with your Indigenous students? How do you respond to these challenges? How might the education system further support you in meeting these challenges?
26. What kind of feedback have you had from parents or other teachers in the school board or community regarding your teaching methods?

Section 5: Next Steps

27. What are your goals for supporting Indigenous students transition into higher forms of education? How do you believe these goals can be achieved?
28. What advice, if any, do you have for beginning teachers who are committed to enacting CRP with/for their Indigenous students?

Post-interview

Thank you so much for your time and willingness to participate in this research.