ASSEMBLING THE BRAID: ALDERVILLE FIRST NATION, LEARNING FROM THEIR WALK IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

ASSEMBLING THE BRAID: ALDERVILLE FIRST NATION, LEARNING FROM THEIR WALK IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Catherine Davis

Alderville First Nation is a small, dynamic Anishinaabe First Nation community in central Ontario with the distinction of having one of the first federal residential schools in Canada, established in 1838. Access to education, both on and off reserve, has been primarily through the provincial model. This study applies a weaving imagery of the Anishinaabe braided sweetgrass, and threads together three strands: (i) experiences in the education system, (ii) perspectives about learning, (iii) an exploration of future educational possibilities for Anishinaabe youth. Open-ended in-depth interviews were conducted with 25 members of varying ages, life experiences, geographical locations, spiritual beliefs, and backgrounds. Members shared experiences of racism and disengagement with the system. At times, classroom spaces were inhospitable spaces and relationships with teachers and peers proved difficult. As a member of Alderville First Nation, I draw on more than 20 years of experience as a community educator, and I am driven to understand why fundamental change has not happened. Though there have been surface changes, more profound transformation remains elusive. Consequently, the reconciliation project is a problematic endeavour for First Nations like Alderville. Our community, a microcosm of other First Nations and education systems, shares tensions between simultaneous, overlapping movements of reconciliation and resurgence. Nevertheless, it is our legacy to find a way forward for our youth.

Keywords: Anishinaabe, education, Indigenous learning, racism, reconciliation, resurgence, Alderville

Acknowledgement Page

In the preparation of any dissertation, more people are involved than the one who is called 'author' and this dissertation is no different. This study represents the contribution of members from Alderville First Nation, which includes members in the study, and others like April Smoke, Education Manager, who championed the work and supported it within the capacity of her role, colleague, and friend. The leadership of Alderville is to be commended for supporting student achievement and research such as this. Additionally, as I work towards improving my cultural knowledge, I have the community to thank. The pages would soon fill up if I were to name them all. To be sure, there would have been no study without the contribution of Alderville.

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When I decided to enter the Indigenous Ph.D. program at Trent, I am sure most of my family wondered about my apparent middle-life crisis. However, my husband of almost 40 years, Keith, has been my greatest supporter and even doubled as an early proof-reader of this work. My adult children, Charlie, and Joy, continue to inspire me with their kindness, good humour, and capacity to love. They walk their teachings every day. My mother, now in her eighties with fading memories, has been my greatest first teacher and will always be that beautiful, caring Algonquin lady, favourite auntie from Kipawa. With a colourful splash of a pink cowboy hat and dance-ready cowboy boots, she reminds me not to take life too seriously. We are all meant to laugh. My sister Joanne and her adult children, Rikki and Tyler, are important supporters, and I am privileged to be their auntie and even great auntie to Willow, whose presence extols why this kind of work is essential. I have met cherished friends along the way. Our Ph.D. cohort formed a tight bond and

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Part 1: Preparing the Soil

As a novice gardener, I have come to understand the first thing to consider before planning your garden is to understand the landscape on which it will be situated. The recent permaculture movement has grown to include well-designed zone-specific areas of potential landscapes, considering the orientation of hardscapes, the overall lay of the land, compositions of soil, weather patterns, and how the sun falls upon the space. This, all before a single seed is planted. From there, planting occurs with intention, accounting for its ability to coexist harmoniously and beneficially with others. A web of connections emerges from the life beneath the soil to the air above. It is reminiscent of our ceremonial opening prayer which offers thanks to all living things, even those presumed to be lifeless to the casual western observer- things like rocks, thunder, wind, water, and soil. Prayers are offered humbly with intention, carefully honouring tradition, having their own rhythm and order. It is a communal activity which reminds us of our original instructions; we offered the same protocols as a community when we developed the community garden.

Figure 1 - Preparing the Soil for the Alderville Community Garden

Note: This picture was taken just after the soil had been prepared for the community garden. We were in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic and conversations about food sovereignty crept into casual discourse (*picture taken by Naomibaa Taylor, permission given by Eldon Taylor*).

Spring is a spiritual time of rebirth, and I have truly been “bitten with the bug,” as Rick Beaver, local artist, and biologist, relayed on a recent visit to my garden. I long for that feel of dirt between my fingers as planting season arrives, my body yearning for that feeling after long Canadian winters. Any seasoned

gardener knows the value of good soil. We have yet to fully understand the ubiquitous nature of life below the soil surface and how it connects with life above it. Soil is understood to be alive and rich with life-giving force. Planting a garden, or, for my purposes here, the planting of sweetgrass specifically, requires that one considers the richness of soil from which sprouts life and meaningful intention.

Granjou & Salazar (2019) in "The Stuff of Soil," notes that soil embodies "permanent self-regeneration and self-transformation that is both highly connected to, and utterly different from, aboveground land and life" (p.43). Both Granjou and Salazar are Humanities professors from Alps University and Western Sydney University, respectively, who imagine a confluence of socio-environmentalism that intersects with concerns of ethics. Soils are not dead matter; they are, as Jane Bennett (2010) imagined, a demarcation between (dead) matter and (active) living beings. Below the surface level lives diverse communities; in fact, the density of life can be explored since "one to several billion bacteria are found in a single gram of soil" (Granjou & Salazar, 2019, p. 6), more so than any living cells above ground. Decay is actively regenerated, binding dead matter into living organisms. When soils are healthy, they are great regulators of the climate above ground.

Within the permaculture community, great effort is taken to mitigate the effects of tilled farming found to be excessively traumatic and ineffective in producing vibrant soil health. Much is going on below the surface. In my practice of no-tilling, arresting the spread of aggressive weeds is best done when smothering them with a top layer of natural cardboard. United Kingdom's 'No Till' guru, Charles Dowling (2020, March), describes the effect of tilling as "battering and bruising the soil," explaining that it is ineffective to invasive species like thistle and crabgrass because their parent roots are impervious to aggressive methods. Removing persistent weeds' access to light is best and tires out their root production. Removing cardboard applied to the top layer of soil displays healthy, moist soil, resplendent with worms and other living creatures, while discouraging more toxic plant production. This approach towards stamping out colonial weeds is gentler and more persistent. It allows preferred plants that can produce healthier relationships to flourish. I imagine colonialism among people in the same way.

Further to the discussion of soil communities are the value of non-human communities, “an agency of assemblages,” a term coined by Jane Bennett (2010), John Hopkins’ political theorist and author of *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Bennett advises that we abandon traditionally held ideas of binarism in favour of envisioning an assemblage of different communities which impact one another. These communities are in collaboration; soils are naturally relational, and there is synergistic energy between human and non-human matter.

This is what our original Indigenous teachings tell us – we have known this since time immemorial. Together, we have efficacy and a capacity to make things appear, and to create what Bennett (2010) refers to as crystallizing and to make willed intention concrete. Bennett likens this to the effect of a pebble dropped in a pond and its force radiating outward in centrifugal circles; I prefer to think of the cause and effect when weeding in my garden. Some weeds are incredibly unpleasant to human touch. As I type, I still feel the sting of nettles in my fingertips from a recent visit to my garden. These plant beings stubbornly insist on staying, rooting faster than other plants, and casting out needles to prevent eradication. They seem intent to take over and discourage other communities from establishing.

Our human notion of exceptionalism does not consider the power of below-the-soil communities. Bennett (2010) discusses assemblages as potential energy vibrations and describes how assemblances can take on quasi personalities, producing a myriad of results. It becomes useful to ask ourselves the nature of all our assemblages and what we hope to create with our intensions, knowing our actions affect one another. This, too, is part of our original teachings: to be kind and understand that we approach our intentions with kindness, and not run roughshod over others. We offer tobacco and gentle words for partnership. I do this every year before planting. I apologize for any mistakes I make an offer to pay attention and learn.

For this study, metaphorically preparing the soil is critical for a few reasons. First, it has been developed with kindness and care, bearing in mind the community’s many features which acknowledge the value of humans, other beings, and the spiritual beyond. Before we create, we humbly ask for inspiration

and know that it may come in multiple forms and from divergent sources. Reflection. Pause. Time. This is what I do as I water my garden, in both a metaphysical and physical presence. A watering visit provides that necessary element during dry periods, and as I water, I think. I consider what I have written while I check the vitality of plants, notice their reaction to what has happened, and thank them for being so industrious. During the past few trips of spring 2022, I watched as plant beings tried to recover from the recent high impact, record-setting May Canadian Derecho.[1] All around us, the effect can be seen. In my humble garden, spines bent, branches snapped, and attempts to flower were stunted. I acknowledge their beauty and try to coax them back to health. The birds are here in great numbers after finding small localities of positioned feeding stations. Their determination inspires me, and I accept their playfulness. If we breathe, there is hope.

Sweetgrass arrives early after lean, long, cold winters. Known as the 'kind medicine,' I imagine it imbued with hopeful intentions, persevering despite hardships. It resprouts once the ground is warm enough to work. It is a plucky plant that survives our winters well but is less tolerant of my clay-like soil found in Zone 5 Oak Ridges Moraine region.[2] A community-loving plant, it thrives better with its rhizomes in place as a plug, and has poor results grown from seed. Heathy sweetgrass should be harvested modestly once it covers a six-foot square and not pulled out by its roots (Aboriginal Multi-Media Society, n.d.). Though disputed by some, it is a teaching familiar to me that has been shared by women who pick sweetgrass. With the characteristics of sweetgrass in mind, this study acknowledges the value of community and considers the context of community assemblages we create.

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[1] A derecho is a widespread, long-lived, straight-line windstorm that is associated with a fast-moving group of severe thunderstorms known as a mesoscale convective system. Such a storm swept through the densely populated Quebec Windsor corridor on May 21st, 2022, leaving 3 southern Ontario cities in a state of emergency.

[2] The Oak Ridges Moraine is ecologically significant. The aquifers below it contributes to ground water, support wildlife diversity and is considered Ontario's vegetable basket. It covers 1900 sq. Km from Lake Simcoe to Lake Ontario (Greenbelt Foundation, 2020).

1.1 Community background

Before beginning this study, before growing sweetgrass, it is important to consider the soil, the essence of the community from which it grows. How the community became 'Alderville,' as it is known today, is an important context for introducing the study and the members descendants, who have contributed to the findings.

In brief, the Alderville First Nation is comprised of Michi Saagiig Anishinaabe people who were relocated from the Bay of Quinte area. They formed the Three Fires Confederacy and are part of the Ojibwbe[3] Nation who traveled the St. Lawrence River, 'the great river mouth.' Traditions, teachings, and stories were mainly passed down orally to generations, but they also had a system for recording significant information through birch bark scrolls, using pictography. As Anishinaabeg moved between summer and winter camps, they carried their meager possessions with purpose. Community organization followed through clan system responsibilities.

However, the arrival of Europeans resulted in change throughout all levels of their society and continues to impact the community today. Anishinaabemowin, the once first Anishinaabeg language of Michi Saagiig people, is now rarely spoken, and there are struggles with maintaining it even as a second language for residents. Christianity has also left its mark, for good or bad, depending on the view of individuals. The name 'Alderville' was given to the settlement as an acknowledgement to Reverend Alder, a secretary of the Methodist Church who had "visited and lived there" (Beaver, 2020, p. 19). [4] It was a common practice of 'important' European men to name places after themselves throughout Canadian history. However, Indigenous people named places according to their natural specificity.

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[3] This section explores historical references of Anishinaabeg. Depending on the sources, the spelling may differ. References may include "Ojibwa", "Ojibwe", "Ojibway" "Nishinaabeg" and "Nishnaabeg" In all references, they are referring to Anishinaabeg, a preferred spelling in our region, shared by Melody Crowe and Helen Roy (2022).

[4] "Alderville" was first called "Alder's Ville" (Beaver, 2020, p. 19). The name "Alderville" does not have any relation to the unique Anishinaabe people, their Anishinaabemowin language, or the diversity of the land. It simply was named after a church secretary who found himself in the area for a brief time.

Alderville, band number 160, is located in the Northumberland County of south-central Ontario (KNET, 2023). Dispersed on both sides of Hwy 45 as part of what is often referred to as a checkboard configuration, the First Nation is formed from six non-continuous areas in Alnwick/Haldimand township. The county of Northumberland itself is an area where English/ Irish people predominantly settled with place names like Cobourg, Campbellford, Port Hope, and Brighton (Figure 3). Alderville is broken up within Alnwick County and shares many borders with settler areas of Roseneath (Figure 4). Some of the earlier settler families continue to own property in the area. One small section of the southern tip of Rice Lake was set aside for Alderville First Nation. Early turn of the century photographs memorialize the vast patches of wild rice that once grew prolifically on the lake's surface. A valued, nutritionally dense food, wild rice was essential to the Anishinaabe diet. As settlers arrived, the lake became an important artery for travel, industry, and delivery of goods. The lake water level had to be managed to accommodate large boats which led to a lock construction (Government of Canada, 2023). Raising the water level of the lake meant flooding the wild rice beds which had a devastating impact on the Alderville people.

Figure 2 - Geographic visual of Alderville located with Alnwick Township of Northumberland County in Central Ontario[5]

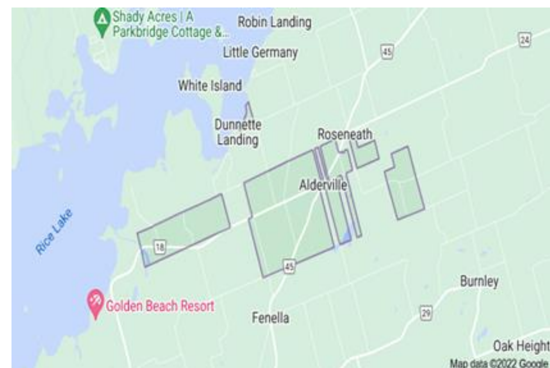

Figure 3 - Fragmented view of Alderville First Nation[6]

[5] (Rural Routes Ontario, 2014)

[6] (Google, n.d.) On the nature of the checkerboard configuration, Chief/historian Dave Mowat of Alderville (personal communication, 2022, June 15) shared there was an original East and West parcel in 1835. There were increases in land base with the purchase of Sugar Island and Vimy. However, concurrently, land was lost to enfranchisement of members. On the question of why there were two original blocks of land, Dave offered land was held privately, or by a

In 1878, Alnwick Township's historical records share that the First Nation was located in the northern part of the township, containing some "3,500 acres of the best land," a highly debatable statement given the soil's high rock yield and clay. Moreover, it states that:

> Christianity and civilization have not done much in elevating the character of the Indians of Alnwick and Rice Lake. They are, it is true, better protected in their rights, by the law; they have the advantage of a church and schools and religious teaching, but they have not risen in the social scale, nor has their material prosperity been advanced. (Ontario Genealogy, n.d.)

This brief reflection about the perceived character of Anishinaabe people from this area is indicative of their presumed moral deficiency shared among the pioneer gentry. Celebrated Canadian author, Suzanne Moodie, from our early Canadian canon of literature, was vicious in her view when she stated: "Mississauga Indians, perhaps the least attractive of all these wild people, both in regard to their physical and mental endowments" (Moodie, 1919, p. 296). As Alderville member and author, Leanne Simpson, noted, Suzanne held considerable disdain for the Indigenous people of the area: "She [Moodie] goes on to repeatedly position Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg as 'stupid and ugly'" (Simpson, 2017, p. 98). I have personally read Moodie's (1919) ramblings in *Roughing It in The Bush* and acknowledge this tone in the following passage from the chapter entitled "The Wilderness and Our Indian Friends":

> It was not long before we received visits from the Indians, a people whose beauty, talents and good qualities have been somewhat overrated, and invested with a poetical interest which they scarcely deserve…Their honesty and love of truth are the finest traits in character otherwise dark and unlovely. There never was a people more sensible of kindness, or more grateful for any little act of benevolence exercised towards them. We met them with confidence; our dealings with them were conducted with the strictest integrity; and they became attached to our persons, and in no single instance ever destroyed the good opinion we entertained of them. (pp. 295-296).

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land's company. Since there was no land entitlement in a continuous block, the reserve was created after the town had been already surveyed in 1826.

This is a curious passage that displays more about the author than the people described, as she presents a confusing appreciation of their high moral standard while opining on their presumed inferiority. For her, truth and kindness are further down the ladder of overall human development. Moodie commits inordinate space to describe physical features she finds repulsive. She is a product of the buttoned-up Victorian era and entirely out of her element, transplanted into the wild of the Canadian Shield. In this new place, her English snobbery held fast. It was ever-present in her writing, designed to be shared as truth with other settlers. Still, putting aside her shallow interpretation of the Anishinaabe people, she acknowledged their kindness and sense of integrity. She never worried about her interaction with them; she felt confident. Having no understanding of relationality and connection, she misinterpreted that they had become “attached to our persons” (Moodie, 1919, p. 296). The repeated insults are cruel, especially considering she had a “good opinion of them” (1919, p. 296) and called them “Indian friends,” a reference that is carried throughout the chapter entitled "The Wilderness and Our Indian Friends” (Moodie, 1913, pp. 289- 326). Really? Friends who were insulted, denigrated, and considered lower than her hired help? This is the attitude and knowledge she passed on to newly arrived settlers. Though challenged by some in our modern context, she is still upheld as a Canadian icon, her racism, as Simpson (2017) notes, “absent” and overlooked because of her importance in documenting settler experiences (p. 99). The settler experience replaced those of Indigenous people and became the Canadian experience, something this study seeks to challenge. Moodie’s writing represents a snapshot of the early relationship between settlers and Indigenous people of the region. It is a cold appraisal of people whose agency was removed, as vast parcels of their land were handed out to settler people.

As relationships soured with the Anishinaabe people, settlers armed themselves with the moral purpose of correcting the behaviour of their Indigenous neighbours. Their attention turned towards religion and education, and all the better when combined. Don Smith (2013), author, academic, and historian, has written widely about the early goals of education through the eyes of Peter Jones (Kahkewaquonaby), an Anishinaabe Mississauga leader. George Copway (Kahgegagahbowh) from Curve

Lake and John Sunday (Shawundais, a member of Alderville) are important historical figures in implementing Methodist secular values into education for this area. Traditional beliefs were forcibly suppressed as formal education masked in religious beliefs began the process of assimilation. It is relevant to acknowledge this history as the church has left an indelible presence that is still felt today. Alderville First Nation is no different than countless other First Nations navigating religious influence supplanted among Native traditional values and attempting to broker a challenging relationship between both.

Prominent figures of the time, Methodist ministers John Sunday, Alderville member, and William Case, pioneer Methodist missionary, advocated for the creation of an on-reserve school in Alderville, resulting in what is thought to be the first Industrial Indian Residential Day School in Canada. Hope MacLean (1978), in *The Hidden Agenda: Methodists Attitudes to the Ojibwa and the Development of Indian Schooling of Upper Canada 1821-1860,* wrote about the Methodist philosophy towards education which opted for a flexible approach, especially towards Indigenous people, thought to be better suited to their style of learning. Such flexibility was espoused by Pestalozzi, a Swiss educator whose system was a precursor to the modern Montessori learning system (p. 38). William Case had likely heard of the system during a trip to New York in 1828, as it was gaining popularity and considered vogue among American Methodists (p.38). This system did not solely rely on discipline and rote memory tasks for optimum learning. Instead, the Pestalozzi system espoused individualized learning at a student's pace. Pestalozzi believed that students' experiences were valuable, no matter where they came from, and they should not have alien concepts forced upon them (p.39). This system was taught in three major schools, Rice Lake being one of them (p. 40). Indigenous people initially supported efforts to educate children for several reasons to be explored later. At any rate, there is a journey from these earlier goals, through the residential day school, and finally to the provincially run schools of today. It is, after all, the soil that grounds the study.

1.2 Introduction and specific aims of this study

Alderville First Nation, of which I am a member, is a small dynamic First Nation community in central Ontario with the unique distinction of having one of the first industrial day schools in Canada,

established in 1838. More than half of the current 1300 members live off reserve, distanced to some degree from their community (Alderville First Nation, 2019, Administration Office). Access to education, both on and off-reserve, is primarily through the provincial, Westernized model of education. Learning and evolving one's understanding of the world is an essential aspect of knowledge; however, the concept of Indigenous learning differs from Western education practices. Indigenous culture conveys an understanding that learning is lifelong, from the cradle to the grave (Assembly of First Nations, 2010).

Learning within Western education systems adopts a presumptive approach that learning occurs at prescribed intervals, and that it is measurable and quantifiable. Indigenous ways of understanding encompass skills developed from listening, watching, and doing. Elder Dr. Shirley Williams, member of Wikwemikong First Nation and Professor Emeritus of Trent University's Indigenous Studies Department shares that learning is facilitated through "trial and error," predicated on making mistakes and practicing until one gets it right (Williams, 2020). As an Elder, she highlights the importance of learning through storytelling and shares that it is a kinder method of instruction to help "correct a behaviour or an attitude" (Williams, 2020). Along with this understanding is the view that the spirit of the child is paramount and should never be damaged in the learning process; that is never the goal of learning. One of our essential Anishinaabe teachings is about kindness and how to be gentle with one another. It does not require much reflection to know that Western schools' learning mandates have not always been delivered with kindness. Therein lies the troubling dilemma for education and Indigenous people in Canada. Generations after residential schools, the intergenerational impact is still felt as provincial school models broker new relationships with Indigenous people within the landscape of reconciliation.

Before running headlong into the reconciliation train, it is important to preface this new moment with truth-telling about Canada's educational system. There are no easy offramps, shortcuts, or express routes to shuttle us briskly to Reconciliation Road by avoiding the truth. Truth starts by being fully present and listening to the experiences of Indigenous people, such as those of Alderville First Nation. Qwal'

sih'yah'maht (Robin Anne Thomas), author and social work scholar, stated within the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's final report:

> Storytelling, despite all the struggles, enabled me to respect and honour the Ancestors and storytellers, while at the same time, sharing tragic traumatic inhumanely unbelievable truths that our people lived. When we make personal what we teach, we touch people in a different and more profound way. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 272)

This study involves one community, one small First Nation: Alderville. It will explore the educational experiences and perspectives of Alderville members, driven by the overall question: What are the educational experiences and perspectives of Alderville First Nation members and how can they contribute to the learning of Anishinaabe youth? The first component of this question focuses on Truth-telling; the second on constructing a new narrative of value and understanding.

The uniqueness of Alderville First Nation offers fresh insight; Robert Stake (1995), known best for his case study approach to human research, elaborated that particularization offers something that far reaching generalizations cannot. When we look deeply at one situation, Alderville in this instance, we "come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is, what it does" (p.8). Therein, I offer, lies rich Indigenous value and learning from this one community. Knowledge, therefore, is not oriented towards deductive reasoning widely brushed everywhere, applicable to all; rather, Stake acknowledged that something new, beyond consideration, could be discovered. In this sense, I hope to shed light on the phenomenon of education through the lens of one Anishinaabe community. This study explores the rich perspectives of Alderville members as it pertains to their educational experiences and how these reflections might shape current and future initiatives within the landscape of reconciliation.

1.3 Context

Alderville First Nation does not have its own school and, as a result, students attend schools that are within the region. The closest neighbouring school is Roseneath Elementary Public School, with grade levels from junior kindergarten to grade eight. Once students move on to grade nine, they are bussed into

the nearest town of Cobourg, where there are two public high schools. Tuition Agreements or Education Service Contracts are negotiated between Alderville First Nation and the local school boards, the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board (KPDSB) and Peterborough Victoria Northumberland and Clarington Catholic District School Board (PVNCCDSB). Tuition rates and the scope of services, such as Special Education Services, are outlined and agreed upon by both parties every two years. When Alderville students struggled, it was common practice to identify them as needing extra support, driving up overall education costs. There was little accountability about the nature of services and costs. In 1996, I was hired to review what Alderville viewed as an over-identification of their students that was deemed to be suspiciously high at 25 percent of the total Roseneath population of students. Interestingly, the school board of the day invoiced Alderville students needing Special Education Services at three times the tuition rate, which made student identification a lucrative practice. Costs, they felt, severely outweighed the services that were offered. My role was to explore student needs and services rendered at the school.

The practice of invoicing First Nations for Special Education Services was shared in other provinces. Kirkness (2013) notes similar practices in Manitoba where First Nation students were over-identified and labeled 'slow learners.' Provincial educational bodies were rarely held accountable for their invoices. However, First Nation educational services received disproportionally lower educational funding levels for which they were routinely over-administered with lengthy, time-consuming reporting. This was equally true in Ontario. I know this personally and professionally because I often completed such reports, only to be asked to resubmit said reports and recollect data multiple times. Within our community, we came to expect this – the Politics of Distraction – as another layer of bureaucracy that delayed receipt of much-needed federal funding. The implication was clear: First Nation communities could not be trusted to administer the funds responsibly. While federal departments turned their attention to budgets and accounting for every dollar, necessary services suffered from neglect. It trickled down to the classroom and our students. Alderville families shared feelings of disengagement with the local school, feeling

unwelcomed in the provincially funded elementary and secondary schools their children attended, labelled for services they supposedly required, but rarely received.

Following Prime Minister Stephen Harper's 2008 historic apology on behalf of the federal government to its Indigenous people, more promising partnerships began to emerge. It was to be the first time that many Canadians heard about residential schools, and they were ultimately forced to acknowledge a part of their Canadian history that was disconcerting. Following the 2008 apology, the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission did not fade from the news as the Commission touched down in communities to collect narratives of Indigenous peoples who were willing to share their experiences about residential schools. Something felt different, no matter how fleeting: Canada seemed to be experiencing simultaneous moments of learning and healing. Residential school content began to creep into provincial curriculum and educators had greater interest in accepting community participation. These were felt at the local level, which has led to increased support and improved student performance. However, these relationships and partnerships are still very much under construction.

A footnote to this occurred during the summer of 2021 as I conducted Alderville member interviews for this study (to be detailed in the strands of the braid, parts 4, 5, and 6). Ground penetrating radar had recently discovered the remains of 215 children buried at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School, confirming what First Nation peoples long declared. The discovery shattered many perceptions about settler-Indigenous relationships in Canada. Here in Alderville, and across Canada, marches were coordinated in solidarity with what was sure to be further discoveries. Alderville members assembled, wearing orange shirts and masking according to COVID-19 protocols. They marched in a vibrant show of support. Since then, the topic has threaded through many conversations, whether they are public, or personal. As an example of these conversations, I was personally asked to respond to a call-in segment with the CBC. A colleague and I were guests on morning radio programs for 24 locations across Canada. The conversations spilled over into private discourse. One non-Native neighbour arrived on my porch doorstep,

visibly shaken, wanting to learn more about something not taught when she was a student. It was a personal reckoning, a watershed moment for her.

Figure 4 - Alderville Canada Day July 1, 2021

Note**:** Dave Mowat, chief of Alderville First Nation requested that members and any interested people join in a march of support for BC's recent findings of buried residents school students. Several hundred people arrived from Alderville and surrounding areas to participate. *(Permission given by Dave Mowat)*

Better partnerships, certainly in our community, found their origin in genuine engagement with the First Nation community. This study acknowledges the importance of Alderville people being a part of the process and their relationship with educational systems for their children (discussed in further detail in the sections "Sweetgrass Knowing" and "Sweetgrass Dreaming." Being a community educator for over two decades gave me access to many members tied to my role. It also gave me a deeper understanding of the community and our/their issues.

This study acknowledges Indigenous Knowledge as a foundation for understanding First Nation people. Indigenous Knowledge organically exists and is transmitted through a network of relationships that include a connection to the land and are necessary towards understanding our human purpose. The approach is grounded in Indigenous philosophy, prefacing that Indigenous people have their own histories and intellectual systems for understanding the world. Such an approach takes the view that Indigenous

communities are rebuilding and defining their communities based on their values and traditions - specific to them and their place. For this study, Indigenous Knowledge orientates community rebuilding by "implementing Indigenous Knowledge to ensure economically, culturally, and environmentally sustainable development will benefit all future generations" (Manuel & Derrickson, 2015, p. 222). Commitment to relationality spreads across time and unborn generations. In this study, Indigenous Knowledge considers Anishinaabe culture at its core and is organized around cultural paradigms like the Medicine Wheel and the Seven Grandfather Teachings. Members who participated in the study understood their significance and referenced them often. For the reader, it is essential to understand their cultural value and, by association, the Alderville Anishinaabe people.

1.4 Situating self

Though I am a member of the Alderville First Nation community and know many of its members, I do not have direct lineage. I am ubiquitously oriented by understanding the solitary meanderings within an urban world, raised in the fringes of urban communities. Our family had migrated from Kipawa First Nation, Quebec, my mother's First Nation, but we have never lived there. I do not identify deeply with my father's European roots, which are Polish; not because I am ashamed, but more because his early exit rendered it that way. I am proud that I am a Native woman and identify with my mother's Algonquin lineage. We have been told she belonged to the Bear Clan and so that is good enough for me. I have also been told you can identify with your mother's clan or perhaps identify with more than one clan at a time. I consider myself a survivor since I survived a bout of cancer as a child and was carried in utero with the presence of Thalidomide coursing through my barely formed veins, and as such I feel that my well-defined 63 winters are well earned.

My mother came from a large family of eleven siblings. The story of their migration involves an exodus after the death of one of her brothers. Kipawa was their home where they enjoyed their established family trap line, a modest house, and a growing brood of children, often appearing one after the other in rapid succession. Still, it was less than idyllic; living on the reserve did not hold any promise or

future. They were beyond poor and alcohol addiction was becoming a serious threat to the well-being of their family. It is where they buried their son, Emile, and then packed up and left, making their new home in the urban corners of North Bay. I lived there, went to school there, and finally left as a young adult to work in larger centres like Toronto and Oshawa. There I met my husband, and we began to raise our family, eventually edging out to more rural areas and, by chance, Alderville.

Having transferred from the Algonquin Kipawa First Nation over 30 years ago, I consider Alderville my home. I am humbled by a community where I found a home when all I had known were urban spaces. I credit this First Nation for sharing with me what they had. I attended my first powwow here, began to learn some of the language, and was welcomed in cultural spaces as a member. It is also where I learned my spirit name, something I had secretly hoped for over many years: E-biimskobizod Migizi-kwe, meaning Circling Eagle Woman. It is a strong name, and I hope I can live up to it.

I offer that I am curiously orientated as both an insider and outsider. It requires the scholarly work, that I take on in this community, is prefaced with self-awareness; to situate self, understand context, and construct meaning from self-in-relation (Kovach, 2009, p.15). I am touched by both realities of insider-outsider orientation, and my understanding of belonging is understood differently. I was adopted into this First Nation by enough community votes for the motion to be carried. I have a duty to acknowledge this act of kindness. Previous to Alderville, my understanding of being Indigenous was negotiated in mainly inhospitable, economically disenfranchised urban regions. I grew to understand my Indigenous self through an Anishinaabe lens that was shared with me by Alderville members. I am neither a visitor, nor am I a member with direct lineage that stretches back generations. The first lesson for me to acknowledge is the teaching of humility. This helps to keep me humble and from this position; I take nothing for granted, sensitive to the rhythm of relationship building.

My experience as an educator took root in Alderville and through community support, I found relevance in serving the needs of its young people. Throughout my 20+ year tenure in this educator post, I interacted with provincial education administrators, classroom teachers, community members, and

parents. Additionally, while I was navigating the system as a community educator, I was also driven by my own parental realities. Throughout the entire span of my career, both of my children participated in all levels of provincial education and locally developed learning initiatives in Alderville. From this intersection of personal and public, I saw how education was rolled out to reach our students and developed community education programs to address the gaps. It is also where the origin of this dissertation took root.

While working for the community, in the capacity of an educator, I was met with the reality of student disengagement, leading, at times, to school failure. Battiste stated that "no force has been more effective in oppressing Indigenous knowledge and heritage than the educational system" (2000, p.86). It was not unusual for me to hear students and parents address what they perceived to be attacks on their identity; yet, the school, for the most part, considered themselves well beyond these sentiments and focused exclusively on what they called 'the achievement gap,' which references the lack of First Nation students to progress on a series of academic tests and metrics at the same rate as their non-Native counterparts.

My role was to advocate for Indigenous students within the system and to provide services and supports that scaffolded their learning to the next steps, paying close attention to the goals of achievement within a system oriented towards Western values and routine student testing. The nature of my assignment was to explore why Alderville students were overrepresented in Special Identification numbers, and then to develop support services needed to improve their performance. This pilot project accepted the 'gap narrative' view that a persistent achievement gap existed and required remediation. Young and inexperienced as I was, I will admit with embarrassment that I also held the view that our students needed some measure of intervention to move them closer to their Western peers. It seemed that this pervasive view was rather taken for granted. Alderville First Nation Education Services was not designed with full autonomy and still does not have full autonomy. Federal budgets for all program areas arrive according to carefully crafted guidelines, complete with eligibility criteria and reporting requirements. The First Nation

must attend to the terms and conditions of funding requirements before receiving their funding allocation. Provincial schools, however, can raise tuition rates at will, establish curriculum according to their set values and enter into agreements with federal bodies as recognized partners, without question. This is not the experience of First Nation Education Departments throughout Canada, something that Indigenous educator Verna Kirkness experienced and then lobbied to change (Kirkness, 2013, p. 83).

Early in my career, I witnessed a significant divide between the school community and Alderville First Nation. The separation stretched back generations, and while this reality was acknowledged within the Indigenous community, rotating educators were blissfully unaware. Discontent within the Native community was often expressed in exchanges of fractured trust. Alderville members were keen to know more about their history and culture. They generally supported school efforts where Indigenous content was included. Teachers, for their part, were often at odds with their lack of understanding, and while some teachers made the difficult journey to improve their level of knowledge, many did not. Relationship building was tenuous at best, and great effort was occasionally brokered to improve relations. Waves of reconciliation have since reached the local school community shores, and teachers are interested, but cautious, in expanding their curriculum to reflect more Indigenous content.

Shawn Wilson (2008) discusses the ever-present niggling bias, understanding that extraditing the author never moves one closer to a purified form of truth because: “researchers, no matter how objective they claim their methods and themselves to be, do bring with them their own set of biases” (p. 16). Bias is formed from a well-developed sense of self and though an individual can attempt to be impartial, it is not possible. Bias within this dissertation is informed from an Indigenous perspective linked to this community, my community. I am deeply connected to this research and acknowledge that the findings gathered should also serve the community. McIvor (2010), in *I Am My Subject,* reminded us that: “when conducting Indigenous research [it is important] to ponder the following questions: What brought you here? What do you feel you have/need to contribute to your people/community/nation? From what ‘place’ do you speak?” (p. 140). These broad questions are evocatively conceived and influence the question I ponder in

this study. It is why I will be writing in the first person because, as Wilson (2008) explains, "we cannot be separated from our work, nor should our writing be separated from ourselves, for example, we must write in first person rather than third" (as cited in McIvor, 2010. P.140). It will not be my goal to present this work as being dispassionately conceived; rather, it is, I hope, reflective of the community. What I will share here is derived from the experiences and perspectives of what was so generously shared with me.

1.5 Significance of the study

Education is vital to prepare youth as they transition into adulthood and find relevance within their communities. Though education is tremendously impactful, its methods are selective. Western education routinely leaves out Indigenous perspectives, experiences, and the understanding of education as a life-long process. Kovach (2009) writes that, "a decolonizing theoretical perspective is integral to Indigenous approach to research" (p. 48). Therefore, my dissertation incorporates an Indigenous approach, and the research gathered acknowledges understanding of First Nation experiences at a community level. Since the William's Treaty ratification in 2019, Alderville First Nation is at crossroads on several issues, and relevant education continues to be a priority.[7] This dissertation, therefore, finds its relevance and may even provide the community with important input regarding matters of education.

This study recognizes that Alderville First Nation's contribution is valued, and when shared, their contribution builds a deeper sense of learning. I am reminded of Wilson's (2008) words: "It is time for Indigenous peoples and Indigenous research to break free from the hegemony of the dominant system, into a place where we are deciding our own research agendas" (p. 17). The study is hybridized research developed mainly for the needs of Alderville First Nation but also in concert with university research goals. Trent University's Indigenous Ph.D. Program endeavors to support research from a community perspective, which also meets a Ph.D. program's academic requirements.

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[7] Williams Treaty of 1923 affected 7 Anishinaabe First Nations, the Chippewas of Lake Simcoe (Beausoleil, Georgina Island, and Rama) and the Mississaugas (Alderville, Curve Lake, Hiawatha, and Scugog Island). The treaty was re-negotiated after 20 years of litigation in 2018, settling the issue of land surrender and harvesting rights. (Government of Canada, n.d.b)

1.6 Implications

Ancillary to these goals is the impact this study could have locally and for communities beyond its borders, especially other First Nation communities. Though Alderville is unique, the community shares many similar challenges of other First Nations communities across Canada. This First Nation represents a microcosm of Indigenous shared experiences that includes the devastating impact of the Indian Act. As Indigenous peoples were summarily dispossessed from their lands, their futures were viewed as inconsequential since the goal was assimilation at any cost. However, they did not and will not.

As a result, First Nation communities across Canada are on a continuum of rebuilding from within; Alderville is not unique in this regard. Efforts in language renewal and land-based learning are common throughout Indigenous communities. Experiences with racism persist. As First Nations rebuild with internalized resurgent goals, there is an ongoing discussion regarding reconciliation as it plays out in every conceivable Canadian sector. A quick Google search for 'reconciliation' confirms this. This study contributes to the developing canon of reconciliation and resurgence topics. From the perspective of reconciliation, teachers may find this study of value in helping them understand the First Nation perspective. Conversely, as Indigenous communities explore innovative methods for rebuilding, this study (along with others) will find its place among those ongoing conversations.

1.7 Organization of the dissertation

As the idea for this study took root, I began to weave in an Anishinaabe metaphor capable of acknowledging interconnections made more powerful by their associations. The sweetgrass braid evolved organically with three perceived connecting strands: Alderville members experiences within the educational system, their perspectives on the role of learning, and their view for possibilities in the educational processes for Alderville students. These sections provide a metaphoric braid that is ultimately strengthened for students when strands are woven and experienced together.

This dissertation is organized around sections which consider the life journey of the sweetgrass braid from its humble root development to its culmination as a braid, ready for gift offering. The sections are organized accordingly: Preparing the Soil, Growing Roots, Tending to Sweetgrass, Smelling Sweetgrass,

Sweetgrass Knowing, Sweetgrass Dreaming, and ultimately, Braiding Sweetgrass. The first section, Preparing the Soil, involves considering what is already present before beginning the process of growing sweetgrass. This requires that the context of Alderville is understood, including its unique history, where it is located, and its various forms of education, both historical and contemporary. Also critical is the role of the researcher and knowing who is shaping what is interpreted by Alderville members.

In the Growing Roots section, literature about education is explored which is foundational to the findings. Within this section, requisite literature has been gathered to consider the important work of others and establish a place for this study. Since Anishinaabe understanding differs from Western models of education, it is helpful to understand divergent ideologies surrounding knowledge acquisition and education. There have been numerous studies conducted by researchers dealing with this; some delving into teacher attitudes, student deficit analyses, curriculum issues, and studying the overall function and purpose of education. These are relevant discussions about why Western educational approaches fail to ignite wonder for many Native students. There has been much written about reconciliation, some of it gathering dust on shelves, and one would not be out of line to ask: Why are we still having the conversation? When will we reach it? Quite simply, we, as Canadians, are a work in progress. Society is changing, and this kind of change sometimes feels like a slow crawl. I can attest to the changes from the apex of my 63 years of lived experience, but we have not finished the work of reconciliation.

Tending to Sweetgrass forms the third part of this thesis. There are ways, methodologies, in which to encourage the growth of sweetgrass. My relationship with sweetgrass has many twists and turns. To be clear, I have made many mistakes, but have leaned on the knowledge of others to produce satisfactory results. In terms of this research project, the metaphor continues. This section establishes the research design that guides the study and is fully transparent for the reader. The ideological framework is an Indigenous hybrid of both Indigenous understanding coupled with university realities. New learning is developed from members as they shared personal experiences and perspectives in trust in lengthy interviews. Within this nest of trust, necessary methods were taken to safeguard participants, which

included university ethical standards and community ethics. The study was developed during the height of the Covid pandemic, which impacted the study at all levels: from its inception to its conclusion, and then, the final written work.

The findings are explored in the sweetgrass strands of Smelling Sweetgrass, Sweetgrass Knowing, and Sweetgrass Dreaming, which form the three strands of the braid. The Smelling Sweetgrass section explores the memories and experiences shared by members. Members generously shared their school experiences, including reflections on teachers and classmates. The Sweetgrass Knowing section offers an opportunity for members to share their perspectives on learning and education and the purpose of a successful and meaningful life. Finally, Sweetgrass Dreaming is a section developed with our youth in mind. As we reflect on education and learning, themes of reconciliation and resurgence invariably emerge. Members varied in their sharing of the future of education and this needs to be considered in the final section of Braiding Sweetgrass.

The enjoyable part of growing sweetgrass is knowing that you have done things well and are rewarded with a harvest, the picking of sweetgrass. There was much hard work done, but now, there is a bounty to enjoy: to smell, to touch, to braid, and to contemplate for sharing. It requires that I, the researcher, organize discussions and analyses according to my interpretation, and by doing so ethically, to honour the contribution of Alderville members. The final section, Braiding Sweetgrass, explores the gift: the sweetgrass braid itself. Gifting is personal and is from the heart with sincere intention. Your giving says something about you, as one gives altruistically without expectation. Your giving symbolizes your vulnerability in your hope that it is received well. In the concluding chapter, I intend to outline the discussion towards knowledge mobilization and the next steps following this research. In this sense, the gift is for the community. This dissertation seeks to meet multiple spheres, which include the academy and its protocols, Alderville members and community expectations, and myself, the researcher, who must ultimately connect these worlds and share the new learning in meaningful ways.

Part 2: Growing Roots - Literature Review

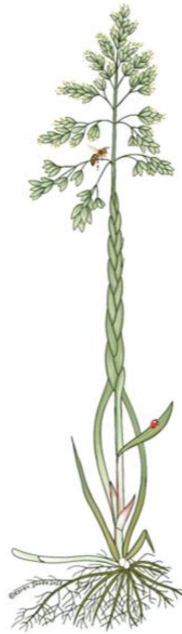

Figure 5 - Sweetgrass Growing Roots. Art rendering by Alderville Artist Koren Smoke

The literature review is arranged into three sections. The first section references the contours of colonizing education; the second section explores the dynamics of differing world views and how they anchor Indigenous learning; and the third section acknowledges Canada's current moment of decolonizing education which includes two main thrusts of reconciliation and resurgence. Within the first section, I recognize that Alderville is situated within the milieu of early Canada and the emergence of Indigenous education. Early approaches involved colonial conceptions of Industrial, Residential, and Indian Day Schools. Their impact was devastating for Indigenous communities like Alderville. As Canada became a Nation, the focus of educating its Indigenous populations grew to include shifting Indigenous students, on masse, to provincial school structures, which is largely the experience of current living members involved in the study. For Indigenous students, provincial school experiences were marked with disengagement from a

system that did not try to acknowledge them. The incongruence of Indigenous values and educational mandates become apparent throughout the study.

The second section of the literature review delves into Anishinaabe Indigenous worldviews regarding values, philosophy, and their incompatibility with Western systems. For decolonizing education to be successful, incorporating Indigenous Knowledge into Western education systems is critical. Unfortunately, performance metrics continue to dominate provincial curricula that are ultimately connected to the workplace norms that follow provincial education.

The final section is oriented with regards to present realities with a nod toward future threads of reconciliation and resurgence and how it impacts a small first nation like Alderville.

2.1 Colonizing education: history

The spirit of First Nation people evaporated when children were stolen and recycled into Indigenous people no longer recognized. Alderville First Nation is among seven Anishinaabeg Nations resettled from the Kingston/Belleville area to make room for growing settler populations. Formal education first arrived in 1839 through the Methodist Church, eventually leading to one of, if not the first, residential school(s) in Canada (Beaver, 2020). The formal education system has left an indelible mark and prefaced future engagement regarding education within the community. Like all schools for First Nation people, its purpose was to 'manage' Indigenous people and have them accept assimilation policies; their histories and cultures were deemed irrelevant and backward. First Nations' experience within the colonial state of Canada documents a long history of oppression.

Mills (2018), an essayist contributor to Resurgence and Reconciliation*,* asserts Indigenous Nations endured three waves of violence – the first attacked the individual, weakening their mind, body, and then spirit. The second wave was more 'group centered,' knocking out identity systems of language, tradition, and ceremony. Finally, the third wave forced complete acquiescence and redefined identities to Western frameworks (Ash, Borrows & Tully, 2018, p. 136). Such waves of institutionalized violence destabilized

Indigenous people, having all details of their existence regulated as though they were children, government wards with little agency of their own.

Imposed Westernized Industrial and Labour Schools supplanted Indigenous traditional learning systems following the Canadian 1842-1844 Bagot Commission. Historian and author John Milloy (1999), of *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System 1878-1986*, argued this early commission on Native education was heavily influenced by the *Report on Native Education*, written by then Superintendent of Education, Egerton Ryerson. Ryerson was acknowledged as the father of public education in Canada and was memorialized by the creation of Ryerson University. Though he was a proponent of public education, he held a different view towards educating Indigenous students. He proposed that separating children from their parents would achieve the best results for assimilation. These schools were structured around religious ideologies aimed at replacing Indigenous values; their curriculum was steeped in preparation for the agricultural trade. The learning goals were not designed to "contemplate anything more in respect to intellectual training than to give plain English education adapted to the working farmer" (Ryerson, 1847, p.73). Efforts were centred around limiting Indigenous people's movements, which was problematic for the hunting and gathering of the Indigenous people of Rice Lake.

Of late, Ryerson's historical significance in public education has slipped to the periphery with the renaming of Ryerson University to Toronto Metropolitan University (CBC News, 2022). His statue was defaced in the summer of 2021 with the findings of 215 buried graves of children at Kamloops Indian Residential School. Consequently, there was little national appetite to resurrect it and it was ultimately permanently replaced with a plaque that reads:

> This plaque serves as a reminder of Ryerson University's commitment to moving forward in the spirit of truth and reconciliation. Egerton Ryerson is widely known for his contributions to Ontario's public educational system. As Chief Superintendent of Education, Ryerson's recommendations were instrumental in the design and implementation of the Indian Residential School System. (Sloan, 2018)

Reverend Methodist William Case and Alderville Mississauga Missionary John Sunday had a vision for an Alderville school built in 1848 (Beaver, 2020, p. 25). The First Nation initially supported the endeavour, and one-quarter of their annuities were given in support. Hope Maclean (1978, 1981) uncovered that both Case and Sunday shared an earlier vision that followed the American Methodist 'Ojibwa' day schools, which offered bilingual instruction and employed teaching methods that were potentially better suited for Indigenous students. The schools employed some Indigenous teachers who went about translating materials in Anishinaabemowin (MacLean, 1978). What is notable, though, is there appeared to have been early partnerships between the Indigenous community and the Methodist church since Alderville First Nation people were intrigued by the "books that could talk" (David Mowat, personal communication, November 15, 2022). The community, Brian Beaver (2020) shares, was interested in education, but not at the cost of their identity as people: "They wanted schooling and not a fundamental change in their way of life" (p. 25). This experimental learning stage seems to have lasted only a few years as the church adopted more conservative values for mission schools, orienting them towards the goals of British General Superintendent Joseph Stinson, who desired an end to the earlier approach of Case (MacLean, 1978, p 53). Case still represented a religious orientation towards education, but his original views seemed open to flexible methods.

The Gradual Enfranchisement Act of 1857 included deeper methods to assimilate educated Indigenous people because, it was felt, they had now lifted themselves from under the veil of savagery at the behest of the government. As the Act continued into the next decade, it included more entrenched examples of colonial oppression of Canadian Indigenous people. Over time, Alderville First Nation withdrew its support of the school since members were disappointed with its results. The families felt administrators had developed a hardened attitude towards them. Students were casually overworked and growing sick from diseases.

Additionally, the nature of what students were learning had little value for their communities. The schools were intended to produce labourers, farmers, maids, and homemakers, all with a generous veneer

of religious instruction to replace their Indigenous ways. Eventually, Industrial Day Schools were concluded to be a failure. In a commissioner's report, "Indians" were identified as the rationale for their demise:

> The children remain too short a time…Their parents have in many cases prejudices against the schools, and remove their children after a very short residence. The pupils themselves too frequently abscond, and return to their homes without permission, finding the wholesome restraint on the school irksome. This evil is found impossible to prevent. (MacLean, 1978, p. 96).

The church and government did not see their culpability in the failure of these schools. Instead, they moved towards more aggressive educational models intended to destroy Indigenous communities. Residential schools and their assimilation practices can be further traced to Davin's 1879 Report on Industrial Schools for Indians and Half-Breeds*,* which advocated for "successful" American policies "with principal features of 'aggressive civilization'" (p.1). Davin noted that day schools were ineffective in replacing firmly entrenched Indigenous culture. The rational for the presence of Residential schools and aggressive Indigenous erasure gained traction and were ruthlessly implemented in policies pursued by Duncan Campbell Scott, Deputy Superintendent of the Department of Indian Affairs (Chater, 1999). Education was viewed as an effective agent to manage Indigenous children and to replace their Indigeneity. Though conveyed as a tool, it soon became evident that education was more of a weapon where discipline and compliance were meted out cruelly; "the pen is mightier than the sword," notes Regan (2010, p. 101).

Early Canada continued with its campaign against Indigenous people. With the 1867 Confederation of Canada, the Indian Act was created, and Indigenous people became 'wards of the state.' The Act controlled all aspects of an Indigenous person's life: their access to land, their movement, and even the eligibility of their members to belong. The provisions under the Act were enforced by Indian Agents who were logistically placed near Indigenous communities, often given large tracts of land for their efforts. Indigenous people would have to seek the permission of local Indian agents for all matters regarding their daily lives. During this time, the state of Canada engaged in treaty agreements to enable further access to vast tracts of land. The Williams Treaty, which greatly affected Alderville, was signed in 1923 (Surtees,

1986). Alderville people were severely prohibited from traditional hunting and gathering, which led to starvation. Older members have passed down stories about that difficult time, that 'dark time.' Owing to deceptive treaty negotiations, signatories thought they were in discussions about traplines north of Haliburton, not trading their ability to hunt and fish freely on their reserve lands. *Michi Saagig Nishnaabeg: This is our Territory* (Williams, 2018) confirms this and argues that ancestors "would have never given up their ability to feed themselves" (p. 78). The hardship leashed onto Anishinaabe people was devasting – Doug Williams (2018) writes:

> The trauma created by the 1923 Williams Treaty will be long lived. It lives in our hearts. It can never be repaid by the government no matter what they do. The damage has been done. Many people have lived through this trauma who have now passed on. I remember them dearly and I hope there are no game wardens in the Happy Hunting Grounds. (p.76)

Still, the engine of colonizing education powered through all of this, with schools evolving more quickly after Indigenous people converted to religious orders.

Though necessary and timely, the conversation paid to residential schools has cultivated a view that crowds out other government educational models imposed on the Indigenous people of Canada. *Indian Day Schools in Michi Saagiig Anishinaabeg Territory, 1899-1978* (Pind, 2021) discusses the realities of Indian Day Schools, such as those in Curve Lake and Alderville. The 1971 Hawthorne Survey of Contemporary Indians of Canada Part 2: Economic, Political and Educational Needs reported in 1962 that "approximately 44% of Indigenous Canadian students attended Indian Day Schools, while 25% attended Residential Schools, 40% integrated schools, and another 1% other types of schools" (Hawthorne, 1971, p. 90). Understanding the context of Indian Days Schools is critical as it represents an enormous mass of Indigenous students. Pind's (2021) recent extensive doctoral research of Curve Lake presents a microcosm of 699 Indian day schools across Canada, which were carelessly operated, and rife with incompetence (p. 331). They were chronically underfunded, devoid of anything approaching community consultation, with a

generally dismissive attitude preferring brisk assimilation. Staffing with competent teachers was an ongoing challenge, especially in rural locations. Anishinaabemowin was firmly discouraged.

For Alderville, on-reserve mission schools became the norm for successive decades. Alderville children attended what was called Alnwick Indian Day School. In rare class photos from the 1920s, it was called the Mississauga Indian Mission School (Beaver, 2020, p. 44). By the late 1930s, the name changed to the Alderville School, and Jack Loukes, an Alderville member, was the teacher. According to missionary reports, strategically training a member to lead as the community teacher was beneficial since they knew "the language, the character, and the habits of their own people, [which] give them an influence among the natives of the forest which no European can exercise" (MacLean, 1978, p.85). Further, *Teachers Amongst Our Own People* (Norman, 2017) argues this practice "was not a result of colonial officials believing that it would benefit the children to have an Indigenous teacher, but rather because they believed it would make the 'civilization' process more efficient" (p. 37). They, Indigenous teachers, were considered useful in that they encouraged a more positive attitude towards education. Melvin D. Steinhauer's *Shawahnekizhek* (2015), an autoethnography, discussed the accessibility afforded to his great grandfather, Methodist minister and teacher, as he ventured into Indigenous communities to proselytize and educate.[8] Steinhauer (2015) writes:

> Our work…would be better promoted with native agency employed in the work, such as those who can speak the language of the natives, who understand their native habits and sympathize with their miserable condition and would be impelled to promote their elevation in the scale of being. (p.44)

Not only does Steinhauer draw on the motivation for community families to align with Methodist ideology, but he also accounts for the philanthropic efforts of the Indigenous teacher to be morally invested in

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[8] Coincidently, Henry Steinhauer taught at the Alderville Mission School. He was raised by William Case and circulated in familiar circles with missionary John Sunday from Alderville. His facility in language made him a suitable candidate for converting biblical texts.

improving their people. Being highly educated in New York, Steinhauer still conveyed respect for Indigenous languages and on-the-land learning practices, which differentiated him from other non-Native teachers. However, Indigenous people were generally interested in educational efforts that could help them navigate an oppressive system impacting their communities. It would be a mistaken calculation to assume Indigenous people were flaccid victims in the process; in reality, they generally recognized the benefits of learning and were capable of strategizing on behalf of their communities. To be sure, trading in their culture and language was not an expected outcome they would accept easily. Thomas King (2012) offered this perspective on education and its costs to Indigenous communities:

> Here's the irony. Native people have never been resistant to education. We had been educating our children long before Europeans showed up. Nor were we against our children learning about white culture. Education is generally described in terms of 'benefit.' But why, in the name of education, should we have been required to give up everything we had, to give up who we were in order to become something we did not choose to be? Where was the benefit in that? (p. 119)

The Alderville Mission School burnt down in 1946, and a new one was constructed in 1949-1950 (Beaver, 2020, p. 60). In 1959, older grades 7 and 8 students were bussed into Central School in Cobourg (Beaver, 2020. P.61). For younger students, the on-reserve First Nation School, referred to as the Alnwick Indian Day School, remained in operation until it finally closed in 1966. John Loukes, the Alnwick Indian Day School teacher, retired after 26 years and was a part of negotiations that transferred Alderville students to Roseneath Public School (Beaver, 2020, p. 69). Though many older members remember Jack Loukes fondly as a welcome departure from some stern, even abusive teachers, the school was still very much developed from a Western perspective – its curriculum and methods prescribed by Indian Affairs. The Hawthorn Report (1971) assumed that school integration benefited Indigenous children: "the past ten years have seen a spectacular growth in the integration of Indian students into non-Indian schools" (p. 90). The report presented a view that encouraged the eventual departure with religious orders that previously assumed control within communities. Being funded by the federal government, religious orders within Indigenous

communities were now in question. It is a reasonable assumption that the federal government weighed the options and felt public education held more promise in assimilating Indigenous people:

> For this reason, the Indian Affairs Branch is not interested in continuing a school system which up to now, we must admit, has contributed to the cultural if not the economic evolution of Canadian Indians, but does not have the mechanisms for a gradual adaptation of Indians to modern industrial life in Canada. (Hawthorn Report, 1971, p.90)

2.2 Provincial education

Universal education emerged in England in the 1880s as a response to Fabian socialism (McKernan, 2013). It was linked to the Labour Party, where social injustices were its primary concern. The curriculum focused on practical education, moving away from elitist approaches. Human liberty explored "conscientization" that advocated for radical change in the students' perceptions (McKernan, 2013, p.10). The social structure of education was under examination, disrupted, and ultimately changed. A critical lens layered education, seemingly a powerful tool that perpetuated inequality. Thus, a movement towards standardized methods was of value with a rationale that everyone was receiving an equal chance. When Roseneath Public School opened in 1967, it was one of hundreds of centennial projects across Canada to commemorate the 100th year of confederation (Statistics Canada, 2009). The population was growing; by 1967, 70% of Canadians were living in cities or towns (Statistics Canada, 2009).

As a young child of this decade, I remember the excitement of this centennial year. No effort was spared to present Canada as a new modern nation that rose from its frosty landscape. Its attitude of modernity was expressed across Canada as the Confederation Train chugged along, coast to coast. I remember touring the train car exhibits at our local train station in North Bay. I vividly remember the 'pioneer car' and the persistent moaning of sickness in the audio feedback. There were other cars, but this one was memorable; it was a powerful narrative about the hard-working newly arrived Canadians in the throes of suffering. Somehow, these people that plucked along the Canadian Shield prevailed incredulously,

and we all became part of the vitality of this young Nation ready to host a huge international Exhibition, 'Montreal Expo 1967.'

Shortly after the party ended, the federal government, under Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau, tabled "the White Paper," outlining sweeping changes of their policy by ending the Indian Act and dissolving the Department of Indian Affairs. This was an attempt to sell the idea of equality by ultimately divesting their obligations, like treaties. Bowing out of the process meant it was kicked down to the provinces to figure it out. It failed. Against this backdrop of politics, education was discussed in response to assimilation strategies outlined by the liberal government's White Paper.

From dust, this political commotion grew into an essential response regarding Indigenous education in Canada. The National Indian Brotherhood (later renamed Assembly of First Nations) presented their 1972 *Policy Paper Indian Control of Education*. Education, they explained, should instill in the Native child "pride in oneself, understanding one's fellowman and living in harmony with nature" (p. 1). They further qualified that pride should encompass recognition of individual talents that would prepare children to function in the outside world and live in harmony with their teachings and environment. Interestingly, they addressed the differences between the two cultures, dominant Eurocentrism, and Indigenous perspectives:

> The gap between our people and those who have chosen, often gladly, to join us as residents of this beautiful and bountiful country, is vast when it comes to mutual understanding and appreciations of differences. To overcome this, it is essential that Canadian children of every racial origin have the opportunity during their school days to learn about the history, customs, and culture of this country's original inhabitants and first citizens. (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p. 2)

Since the National Indian Brotherhood presented the historical paper in 1972, The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) has updated it under *First Nations Control of First Nation Education; It's Our Vision, It's Our Time (2010).* The central values are still there and perhaps have gone further by discussing the lack of

commitment of the original 1972 policy paper since it was “never supported in a meaningful manner by federal, provincial and territorial governments” (AFN, 2010, p. 6). Their view on education included the following:

> lifelong learning…from prenatal to Elder level and [including] systems that are holistic, high quality, linguistic and culturally-based. First Nation lifelong learning systems must be founded on First Nation languages, cultures, histories, philosophies, world views and values, as these are the heart of our identity. (p. 8).

Within the document, they call for provincial systems to be inclusive of First Nation experience so as “to ensure all people of Canada have a high level of cultural competency regarding Indigenous people” (p. 13). They believe teachers are critical in the process, stating: “teachers and support staff must achieve cultural competency through ongoing Professional Development, designed and delivered by First Nation professionals and elders at the local and regional levels” (p. 14).

With the noble intentions of equality in public education, why did Native children fail to thrive? Foucault (1977) theorized that education operated on a “formula of domination” and complete acquiescence central to its success, especially for the uncolonized. It was not only a way of organizing knowledge but also a method of disciplining people and their bodies, controlling their “participation” more from the standpoint of enforced obedience. *Decolonizing Methodologies*, written by renowned New Zealand scholar L. Smith (2012), asserts:

> These forms of discipline were supported as necessary conditions which had to be met if Indigenous people want to become citizens. These forms of discipline affected people physically, emotionally, linguistically and culturally. They were designed to destroy every last remnant of alternative ways of knowing and living, to obliterate collective identities and memories and to impose a new order. (p. 72)

Colonized people make for poor students, but not for the reasons one would think. Being outside of colonial privilege, the colonized intuitively recognize a deeper purpose of formal education and actively

resist complete assimilation. They learn that full participation comes at a price and that their culture is under attack. To be with one, they understand, you must be at odds with the other. Scholarly studies about the efficacy of provincial education have delved into teacher attitudes, student deficit analysis, curriculum issues, and the overall function and purpose of education. These are relevant discussions about why western educational approaches fail many Indigenous students.

2.3 Challenges with the provincial classrooms

Education is considered the great equalizer, a place where differences are celebrated, potential realized, and society's best is given to the betterment of a collective shared future. However, an unwillingness for Indigenous youth to participate expresses an overall disengagement with the process. *The Coolangatta Statement on Indigenous Rights in Education* (Wallace, 1996) reframes the high dropout rates of Indigenous students in the United States to express high rejection rates, a refusal to participate in a system never meant to include them. Since there is an overwhelming lack of Indigenous inclusion, Wallace argues, students and their communities have given up on the system. In Canada, high rejection rates of mainstream education are evident; Nicole Bell (2006) concurs that the act of colonial resistance is reflected by the dropout rate (p.57).

Years later, the Assembly of First Nations shared a damning communique at their Chiefs Assembly on Education at the Chiefs Assembly on October 1-3, 2012. Indigenous graduation rates were estimated to lag at a dismal 36 percent compared to the Canadian average of 72 percent (p. 1). Chronic poor academic underperformance and even poorer attendance rates moved Native students permanently out the door. The response to these miserable statistics was to test and retest until a diagnosis could be found. This ultimately rendered a deficient analysis of the Native child, their family, and their community (Orlowski, 2011).

Ogbu (1978) wrote extensively on what he referred to as “involuntary minorities” and how their experience differed from minorities who wanted to integrate willingly into mainstream societies (as cited in Cummins, 1986, p. 18). Colonized groups with their culture disparaged and for whom equality is not

achievable become resistant to the goals of the colonizer and their systems (Ogbu, 1992). In this context, the Indigenous child begins to experience a profound disconnect between home and school life (Cummins, 2000; Kanu, 2006). Such students start to see these structures as irrelevant and work towards resisting them. Educators may view these students as behaviorally disordered and, "unintentionally or otherwise, draw lines in the sand that force troubling students out the door" (McCluskey et al., 2005, p. 331). Children from colonized backgrounds are not teacher-pleasers. Normalizing preferred student behaviour is the goal, with 'learning the rules' as part of the hidden curriculum. These students are groomed towards performing "according to prescribed criteria for a market environment over which they appear to have less and less control" (Whitty in Gale & Desmore, 2002, p. 19). The educational goals are therefore considered irrelevant and outside their communities.

2.4 Teachers

Fallacies about student deficit emerge when First Nation students fail to thrive. To redefine education, Mezirow (1997) claimed that teachers would need to change their "habits of the mind," meaning their beliefs and assumptions about learning that seem so natural they are accepted without question. This is the challenge: the changing of minds. Education has never been neutral. Our curriculum is shaped by European thought and absorbed as though it were something organically grown. Western practices are coercive and do not elicit collaboration; instead, they demand acquiescence. Leanne Simpson (2014) recalls:

> Learning was forced on me using the threat of emotional and physical violence. In post-secondary education, consent was coercive – if you want these credentials, this is what you have to do and this is what you have to endure. This is unthinkable within Nishnaabeg intelligence (p. 15).

Coercion is not among our Anishinaabe methods. Ogbu (1992) observed that minority children from colonized backgrounds often struggled to adapt to educational policies that were assimilative in their origin. Without trying to understand the realities of Native people, he found, educators deemed a lack of progress to be symptomatic of failure orientating from within the communities (Ogbu, 1992). Further,

Orlowski (2008, 2011) examined teachers' attitudes that had distilled from their frustration with their Indigenous students' failure to thrive, which ultimately trickled down to subjective opinions about their students and communities. He noted educators did not entertain serious inquiry about their teaching effectiveness. Teacher attitudes were troubling since they were explained away from a "culturally deficit" position (2011, p. 135). He noted when Native communities rejected conventional educational systems, teachers were mystified and devolved their criticism, painted with racial overtones, towards the communities they could not understand. According to Orlowski (2008), the classroom space was owned by the teacher and far away from the purview of the community and parents. Therefore, parental disengagement became a byproduct of their loss of control. Parents saw their involvement as restrictive and predefined from a patronizing veneer that demanded that they serve the teacher's needs.

Through his research, Orlowski (2008) worked with classroom teachers in British Columbia and found most were unaware that the environments they were creating for students were "power blind" (p. 115). Interestingly he concluded that while curriculum was opening up to include Indigenous perspectives, teachers had not progressed to match its intention (p. 127). Furthermore, teachers confused multiculturalism with Indigenous peoples and had grown wary of their perceived infringement on curriculum; one teacher concluded that adding Indigenous perspectives would be akin to "spoiling them a lot" (p.127). This overt dismissal of incorporating Indigenous content inspired the title of the published piece called *That Would Certainly Be Spoiling Them.* When queried on the long struggle of Aboriginal people in Canada and how teachers might make the curriculum more relevant, Orlowski (2008) found many educators were bereft of how to include perspectives. More critically, many did not see any problem with the current curriculum, preferring to interpret it as neutral and relevant contemporary education. The journey of transformational thinking was left to the individual teacher to navigate on their own, with little support.

Contesting Curriculum in the Schooling of Indigenous Children in Australia and the United States, by Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist (2003), discusses how pedagogy and practices are visibly out of sync with

Indigenous students. These authors argue against an accepted position called “white blindness” and its “historical patterns of injustice” where racism becomes institutionalized (p. 67). Furthermore, they assert the absence of Aboriginal experience within the curriculum as an obstacle to not only Native students learning about themselves, but to non-Indigenous people learning about their privilege and power. Their study examines curriculum and practices in both state-run and Aboriginally-run schools. State-run schools, it is noted, had an overpowering presence of “whiteness” and were insensitive to their history as conquerors. Instead, they told history entirely from the settlers’ point of view, as though history began when they arrived which served an agenda that "erase[d] dangerous historical memories" (Hickling-Hudson, & Ahlquist, 2003, p. 67). It assuaged any notion of accountability and possibility for social justice. The authors are clear in suggesting that perpetuating ignorance is a state-run initiative that protects white privilege and power.

There are similarities to be gleaned from Hickling-Hudson and Ahlquist’s observations in Australia and ours in Canada. Both Australian state and Ontario provincial schools share preferences for high student performance metrics distilled from frequent formal standardized testing, which ultimately crowds the curriculum. The curriculum is value-laden around issues of competition, excellence, and performance. The teaching methodology includes little collaborative learning and leans on “teacher as expert” delivery. Indigenous experience, as far as the mainstream curriculum is concerned, has been largely left out. Absenteeism is high, wherein educators decry the lack of parental involvement as the cause.

The results were dramatically different when state schools were juxtaposed with Aboriginal schools. When more Indigenous content was included, communities were invested in the schools, and the children thrived. However, these schools were threatened by reduced basic funding levels, an issue not experienced by state-run schools confident in their funding levels.

Canadian First Nation schools are chronically underfunded and do not match the levels routinely doled out to provincial schools (Porter, 2016). *The Debate on First Nations Education Funding: Mind the Gap Report* (Drummond, 2013) challenged the federal Indigenous Affairs Department, which claimed the

funding gap could not be measured. He argued the funding discrepancy was real and “in the vicinity of about a 30 percent gap” (Porter, 2016). This fact is well-known among First Nations and inhibits the potential for First Nations to explore innovative education options from within. I was employed with Alderville when the idea of having our own school was posed to the community. Our administration examined the efficacy of potential options which were being delivered in neighbouring First Nations. Unstable funding levels and student progress were of serious concern and for which there were no simple solutions. In Alderville’s case, the vote was not carried, though it was close, and the conversation was shelved. The general view was that there were too many risks with keeping a community school afloat, despite genuine interest.

2.5 Lack of Indigenous presence

The *First Nation control of First Nation education: It’s our vision; it’s our time* (AFN, 2010) report acknowledges that teachers are essential in the educational process. Teachers should “achieve cultural competency through ongoing Professional Development, designed and delivered by First Nation professionals and elders at the local and regional levels” (p. 14). The inclusion of Indigenous perspectives requires partnership with classroom teachers. *The Ontario Curriculum* (1998) attempted to include Indigenous content but adopted a short-sighted “add-on” approach (Bell, 2006, p.56). The added-on feature involved Western educators speaking for Indigenous people and interpreting what they did not fully understand. It was decontextualized from communities and led to further marginalization (Bell, 2006, p.59-60).

Inclusion of First Nation content has been shockingly low within typical provincial classrooms and has resulted in adults who are completely ignorant of the Indigenous people of Canada; moreover, less than one percent (0.02) of Ontario high students have taken a First Nation course (Godlewska et al, 2010, p. 436). Canadian curriculum is short on its Indigenous content yet generous in its stance as an honourable peacekeeping ally and humanitarian to the core. There is little, if anything, about Canada’s colonial history within the mainstream curriculum as it “excludes and marginalizes Aboriginal peoples in a variety of ways,

including omissions, and significant silences, nationalist self-congratulation, apology, problematic placement, the continuance of colonialist narratives" (Godlewska et al, 2010, p. 445).

Additionally, Godlewska et al (2010) argue that Canadian students receive a sanitized version of history which continues to place the colonizer as a virtuous hero. The curriculum is willfully and deliberately silent on First Nation peoples, producing adults embarrassingly ignorant of the history of Canada. The study found "72 percent of study respondents could not name a single Aboriginal group and their traditional territory… and over 98 percent were unaware of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples" (p. 435). Brian Beaver (2020), Alderville First Nation member and author of *Alderville First Nation…a history,* elaborates that, even when Indigenous history was included, it was not always necessarily accurate, nor did it come from an authentic source: "much has been written about our ancestors. Most have been written by non-Indigenous people for a non-Indigenous audience…Our perspective was not always included" (p. ii).

2.6 Curriculum

Teacher preparation requires dedicated attention to preparing learning activities. *Teacher Education and Aboriginal Opposition* (Hesch, 1995) explores the linear development of curriculum. All educational curriculum is developed from a structural framework that consists of four principles: possessive individualism, the Tyler rationale, canonical curriculum, and the presence of meritocracy (pp. 181-183). This framework is counterintuitive to Indigenous worldviews. Possessive individualism celebrates the value of the individual in relation to others and upholds competitiveness among students. The Tyler rationale refers to the bedrock of program development through the progression of deliberately stated objectives, activity development, and ever-important evaluative methods (Wraga, 2017; Tyler, 1949, 1950). The rigorous attention to developing an education model applicable for the masses became necessary as people migrated to urban centres following WW2. Public education required capacity from grade-to-grade transition and required quality control in terms of reliably measuring student success. Tyler (1949, 1950) believed that the curriculum was neutral, and students were passive and mouldable to societal goals. As a result, the public curriculum offered consistency across the masses. Bell (2006) discusses the issue of blind

compliance, where students are forced to accept ideas that function against their best interests; compliance is taught, enforced, and rewarded. “Success,” or doing well in the system, is seemingly translated into a willingness to be “educated against ourselves” (Lewis, 1993, p. 194).

Additionally, teachers’ use of canonical curriculum moves them to use English Eurocentric resources as standards, such as Shakespeare, which uphold hegemonic beliefs that marginalize other kinds of knowledge – they are safe choices that privilege Western views. This aspect of the framework ensures that the curriculum is carefully selected to reflect mainstream thought and values, with the delivered curriculum being understood as ‘overt’ in its openly intentional instructional agenda. In this regard, what is absent in the curriculum has presumed inferior rank. In other words, if it does not make the cut, it is not within the rank of knowledges needed to pass on to the next generation. Established values and retelling history from a preferred perspective are examples of a ‘hidden curriculum,’ but they are not always obvious.

These efforts to generalize education to be accessible for all runs contrary to Indigenous learning. Indigenous ways of knowing are not considered to be a part of the educational experience, largely left out and, if variously present, is an example of a null curriculum. This sends a message that certain content is unimportant and the messaging of its lack of value aligns with preferred content of importance (Eisner, 1994). In *Yearning, race, gender, and cultural politics*, bell hooks (1988) wrote about how teachers’ authority supplants marginalized people, activating a perception that silenced voices, relegated to the periphery, are not important enough to consider. She says: “domination is reinforced when the teacher’s authority is constituted by either the absence of the voices of the individuals whose experiences they seek to address or the dismissal of those voices as unimportant” (p.43).

The last point about the linear development of curricula refers to meritocracy, which rewards the highest-performing students assuming that hard work is matched by ability. The system is, therefore, deemed equitable and evenly available to everyone since each individual has been given the same chance. Hard work and ability separate the top from the bottom. This rationale has been used against Indigenous

students, suggesting that, if only they worked harder and were smarter, they could have reaped the rewards the system affords everyone.

2.7 Myths about Indigenous students

Student Success and Failure (Gale & Densmore, 2002) summarizes the "discourse of the disadvantaged" (p. 12). The authors allege that discourses about the disadvantaged nature of marginalized peoples are routinely located in the individual and their circle; they and their community are the authors of their misfortune. A student's failure to thrive is attributed to their lack of essential ability. When they ask questions like "why can't the child read?" (Gale & Densmore, 2002, p. 12), they look to the student's background for the answer and not the system's ability to effectively teach. Diagnosing for a problem becomes the preoccupation and when a diagnosis is found, it is often the child or their family who is responsible. I am reminded of how I found myself in the educational system working with Alderville families in the first place. None of the Special Education diagnoses made on behalf of Alderville children ever pointed in the direction of the education system.

Marker (2003) challenges us to look at the problem differently: Maybe putting students under a metaphorical magnifying glass to examine their perceived deficits does not adequately answer the question of why an Indigenous child cannot read or do specific academic tasks. Marker asks, "Why choose a magnifying glass when you ought to use a mirror?" (Marker, 2003, p. 386). The question aligns with Willy Ermine's (2007) idea of mirroring. To understand why Indigenous people of Canada are struggling, Ermine challenges us to view them as a mirror of the Canada's harsh policies towards Indigenous people. The settler teacher who has their magnifying glass replaced with a mirror is tasked with looking inwardly to find the answers to their questions.

Gale & Desmore (2002) view disadvantaged children to be vulnerable to this consistent attack. When students are believed to be without requisite ability, expectations are lowered and matched with reduced essential content. What they get is a watered-down education based on their 'perceived weakness.' The position is to blame marginalized students for a lack of progress in a system never meant to

include them. Furthermore, Gale & Densmore (2002) argue that 'the hidden curriculum,' in which all students learn to behave similarly and learn the same thing, contradicts a system that purports to celebrate individual merit. Within this understanding, Indigenous students have had no choice but to learn how to behave more like their successful white, middle-class counterparts, or simply not participate at all.

Disadvantaged students are routinely assessed according to successful school behaviours and less by their ability (Mykota & Schwean, 2006). From this stance, ability rankings are 'fairly' applied because, it is reasoned, everybody has a chance. Since we live in a capitalistic society, the curriculum is carefully selected to uphold capitalist ideals. Western systems covet competition with ability rankings; students rising to the top are celebrated apart from their peers. Anishinaabe communities are developed with integrative cooperative strategies for the health of the whole community. Though individual talent is desired, it is not ranked in value above others. There is interest in creating an environment where everyone is expected to discover the gifts they possess, develop them, and, more importantly, explore how they can share these talents within their community. All people, it is assumed, are born with gifts.

Rameka (2007) departs from the deficit model and shares a uniquely Māori view in *Māori Approaches to Assessment,* an article which describes the way in which a community of Māori people has abandoned an educational system that relies on 150 years of colonial oppression. In their new system, under a uniquely Indigenous lens, educational practices are organized around credit-based ideals, in which Māori people look carefully at a child's talents. Success is found, normalized, and organized around community values, including individual well-being, exploration of personal talents, communication ability, communal belonging, and group contribution. The Māori approach mirrors the Anishinaabe understanding towards learning through the Medicine Wheel, which builds on strengths, not weaknesses. Credit-based assessments are needed to help children discover their talents and teach them how they can share them with their community.

I was working within the education system when *Self Identification Policy Building Bridges to Success for First Nation, Metis, and Inuit students* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) came into

existence. A review of the document rationalizes the practice of building performance metrics found lacking in Indigenous students. There is a cursory acknowledgment of the Indigenous communities finding relevance in the process, citing that “consultation” had led to a potential for greater curriculum inclusion of Indigenous perspectives. Interestingly, the document referenced all their provincial schoolboard partners, including the one which serviced Alderville. Success was generated through Indigenous organizational bodies working cooperatively with schoolboards and not the communities directly, citing, “the perspective of many First Nation peoples in the school system has been strongly influenced by residential school experiences, which have led to an ’intergenerational’ distrust of the education system” (p. 13).

The opinions shared within the document take a sanitized version of what was happening at the community level. Parents were distrustful and voiced their concern about how data could be used, many refusing to participate. They did not believe the gathered data would change their children’s education in provincial classrooms and wondered if “unfavourable outcomes” would blame deficiencies on them since provincial testing was already in full practice. Truthfully, they had every reason to distrust the system because this did indeed happen. They were distrustful, not just because of traumas several generations removed – many had issues with the current administration. It is curious to note how the schoolboard insulated itself from any accountability with how relationships had eroded with the First Nation. While there are undoubtedly intergenerational traumas, school partners must fully account for their direct and current relationship with Indigenous communities.

2.8 Ethnostress

Indigenous people carry traumas experienced by their ancestors, which sometimes turn inward. In Mapping the Field of Indigenous Knowledge in Anti-Colonial Discourse, Wane, (2008) extended this idea to an understanding of what it means to be ‘colonized people.’ We are conditioned to internalize our rank as colonized people enough that our colonizers have less work to do. We have lost confidence in our inner capabilities, our value of Elders to guide us, and our systems of knowledge. Counsellors Antone and Hill’s (n.d.) essay “Ethnostress” describes a condition resulting from significant disruption in understanding self

within an Indigenous community. The authors discuss four conditions for ethnostress to be experienced: disruption of cultural beliefs, oppressive conditions, internalized negative experiences (often from persistent racism), and pervasive feelings of powerlessness. These four conditions can be experienced generationally and can ultimately lead to apathy with a warped view that this is how life truly operates. In the case of Indigenous peoples, disappearing access to land parallels a shrinkage of culture: culture is seen as frozen in time, not necessarily applicable to modern experiences. This drives individuals to avoid other Indigenous people, preferring the company of people outside their cultural group. Most troubling, though, is the refusal to support one another or the active undercutting of others in episodes of lateral violence and toxic microaggressions.

It is important to consider these dynamics within communities experiencing ethnostress. Communities that have lost faith in their efficacy to lead are set on a course of abuse and violence within an atmosphere of powerlessness and hopelessness. Much work needs to be done at the community level to identify these behaviours and actively work towards eliminating them so that communities can move forward, heal, and reimagine their future.

Prolific Ojibwe[9] author, Richard Wagamese (2013), once shared a story about a damaged community he visited and described how it hurt his soul to see them giving up on themselves. The incident happened in 2013 when he had visited a community to work with youth and provide mentorship. On this visit, he arrived and witnessed crippling malaise. No youth were signed up, no adults were available, and no social service workers and teachers were provided. No one seemed to know he was coming. When it was discovered that he was there to work with youth, young children of all ages were dropped off as though he was performing casual daycare. No adults offered to stick around to help. His plans to work with teens

[9] "Ojibwe" spelling will used in general terms and will follow in Alderville member reflections about language, using the online Ojibwe People's Dictionary https://ojibwe.lib.umn.edu/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&q=ojibwe&commit=Search&type=ojibwe.

quickly evaporated, and he abandoned that goal as he set to organizing painting activities for very young children. The session soon dissolved into chaos, and he was left feeling defeated. These are his words:

> The hardest battle in our fight to save our children is against ennui. If you haven't encountered the word before, it means something about a ton heavier and a lot deadlier than simple boredom. It means a lifelong sort of tiredness. It means a lassitude, an unrelenting feeling of nothingness. It means you give up trying, dreaming or seeing yourself doing something better…It's the system that brings people to that. It's the Indian Act. It's an imposed welfare mentality. It's generation after generation of crushing isolations and poverty. It's the deeply ingrained belief that there is nothing else possible and that no one sees us or cares about us in any way. It's the entire relationship of Canada and her relationships with Native people focused despairingly on our most vulnerable…Ennui. The acceptance that this is all there is and all there ever will be. Fighting that is where our greatest battle has yet to be fought. There is still much work to be done and we had better roll up our sleeves and get at it. (Wagamese, 2013)

What Wagamese describes here appears to be a community experiencing this idea of 'ethnostress,' wherein even opportunities brought to their doorsteps seem to be nothing more than a hassle. Wesley-Esquimaux (2009) comments similarly on the dilemma of First Nation people charging into the future with their traumas in play, citing that "First Nation people began to walk backwards into the future, unarmed with social and psychological strengths that would have been passed to their children if their societies remained intact" (p. 9).

People with their history behind them and future out of reach have difficulty re-imagining a different kind of future. In *An epidemiologic study of Aboriginal adolescent risk in Canada: The Meaning of Suicide*, McNeil (2008) argues the social impact of losing confidence writing, "a lack of cultural continuity creates a loss of confidence at the individual level in understanding how to live life and make decisions" (p. 6). Furthermore, MacNeil (2008) shares that 95% of American Indigenous people have been

disproportionately affected by family members' alcoholism, a trickle-down effect of intergenerational trauma (p. 8).

This is the reality of First Nation communities. We are all touched by members who are deeply struggling; these are family members, friends, and community members representing our lost potential. Cutcliffe (2005) notes that suicidal tendencies grow from these desperate attempts to end what he terms "psych-aches": lives filled with profound sadness and disillusionment render people mentally exhausted, especially when their misery has no perceivable end.

All manner of continuous assault has traumatized Indigenous communities enough that its descendants not only carry their stories but also embody their pain (Walters et al., 2011). It manifests in risk factors towards weakened physical and emotional health, and members caught in unhealthy cycles can be troubling. The impact is shoved intergenerationally down the line, creating iterative cycles that continue to tax Indigenous communities. For healing to work, it must come from within. Academic and human rights activist Erica-Irene Daes states: "You cannot be the doctor if you are the disease" (as cited in Monchalin, 2016, p. 69). For change to be effective, Western presence must retreat and accept that Indigenous communities have more effective alternatives that should be explored to rebuild their communities.

2.9 Different world views

The second section of the literature review delves into Anishinaabe World Views. Alderville members shared a dissonance with educational mainstream frameworks that left them disconnected. Specifically, competitive ideologies centered on the elevated state of some individuals is problematic for Indigenous people. Instead, Indigenous ideologies consider the value of the individual within the context of their community, where relationships among members are highly valued and vital to building cohesion. Moreover, capitalistic tendencies that threaten the environment's health require reflection and immediate remediation; conversely, connection to the land is central to Indigenous ways of being. Incohesive world views such as these examples work to create an often-insurmountable gap between what the Western way

of thinking 'expects' of its societal members, and how Indigenous people actually operate within the world and on this land.

2.9.1 Anishinaabe paradigms

Alderville members are influenced by ways of knowing that are developed from firmly held Anishinaabe paradigms. Members often address these paradigms by name, particularly the Seven Grandfather Teachings[10] and the Medicine Wheel.

Niizhwaaswi Gmishoomsinaa, the Seven Grandfather Teachings, are: Mnaadendmowin (respect for all of creation); Aakdehewin (bravery to face obstacles with courage); Gwekwaadziwin (honesty, to know it, speak it, live it); Zaagidwin (to live with love, to care, to know peace); Nbwaakaawin (wisdom, to cherish knowledge); Dbaadendizwin (humility, to be balanced and know equality); and Debwewin (truth, having integrity, being faithful to fact).[11]

The Seven Grandfather Teachings are considered principles that steer our behavioural conduct toward cultivating strong, mutually beneficial relationships, in simultaneously complex and straightforward ways. For instance, the teaching of love (Zaagidiwin) is one of our foundational Seven Grandfather teachings. Caring flows through the quality of all relationships: caring for the environment, for family, for the community, for people we do not know, for our ancestors, for the yet unborn, and for ourselves. The teaching of love calls upon us to care for others and to think and act beyond self-interest. It is the first teaching exhibited to us when we are most vulnerable as babies. Similarly, young students arrive in the learning process with their vulnerabilities, and teachers guide them with caring intentions. Moreover, the teaching of humility, Dbaadendizwin, is particularly relevant to leaders and teachers who might be tempted by seeing themselves as 'all-knowing entities.' This teaching reminds us that we are a part of a circle – all heads are at the same height when we sit in a circle. For this study, Gwekwaadziwin, the teaching of

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[10] The Seven Grandfather Teachings are also referred to The Seven Grandparent Teachings and The Seven Scared Teachings. In Alderville, it is more customary to hear them referred to as The Seven Grandfather Teachings.

[11] This written version of the Grandfather Teachings is taken from the song lyrics of Seven Grandfathers (Niizhwaaswi Gmishoomsinaa), provided by Anishinaabemowin language teacher Liz Ozwamick during 2008, when we were forming a hand drum group. Liz is a member of Anishinaabe Wikwemikong community.

honesty, is critical; it demands that we know ourselves deeply. Knowing ourselves, our purpose, and how we share our unique gifts back to our communities is the reason for our existence; the search for who you are is internal, and self-actualization is key.

The emblematic Medicine Wheel is a commonly circulated cultural paradigm shared throughout the Anishinaabe communities, and it is frequently used to demonstrate health and education frameworks. The presence of the Medicine Wheel signals a departure from linear thinking. The circle softens edges and re-interprets hard boundaries that serve to divide and section; there is a blending between the quadrants, a blending of totalities (Dumont, 1976; Waboose, 2016). The Medicine Wheel includes four spiritual medicines, four seasons, four cardinal directions, four winds, and four animal guides. It is a complex framework that considers balance and desired wholeness as optimal for human growth. When in alignment, Bimaadizwin is the outcome: “Anishinaabe Bimaadiziwin addresses the concept of the individual as having a spirit, heart, mind and body and therefore connects, feels, thinks and acts” (Bell, 2016). A state of equilibrium within an individual is preferred with an understanding that overall health is derived from balance; often, educational spaces are challenged because they do not represent these balanced spaces.

In *Just Do It: Providing Anishinaabe culture-based education*, Bell (2006) discusses the importance of the holism illustrated by the Medicine Wheel to develop grounded individuals. Traditional methodologies include informal practices of storytelling, observation, and practice. Early learning within Indigenous communities was practical, based on heightened survival skills. Though practical, they acknowledged spiritual significance as the creator was present everywhere. Learning was considered a “personal journey towards wholeness” (Bell, 2006, p. 46). In her doctoral work, Bell (2006) shares the shortcomings of her educational experiences: “First, I was overwhelmed by the absence of a spiritual connection to any of the subject areas. Second, the emphasis seems to be on fragmentation rather than holism. Third, when culture is addressed, I found myself asking ‘who’s culture?" (p. 63). Bell’s third point notes a relevant question to a system that values the pinnacle of learning to be housed in the intellectual domain, especially when storing and retrieving information on demand is the goal.

Unfolding the Medicine Wheel connects us to the Four Hills of Life, which can be further connected to the seven stages of life. Members used these interchangeably, shared by community registers of mutual understanding. The Four Hills of Life, developed from understanding the Medicine Wheel, describes the journey in terms of life experiences. The hills elicit the rising, falling, and plateaus of experiences that uniquely present the challenges of each path of our lives: child, youth, adult, and senior/Elder, each having their own unique obstacles (Johnston, 1976; Peacock & Wisuri, 2006). Simplified, children learn to trust and gain access to learning systems such as language and culture; youth must find their way and discover their gifts; adults learn responsibility and how to adapt their talents to serve their communities and families; and Elders come to understand the journey of life and pass on what they have learned.

These paths are further delineated into seven stages of life. Bell (2016) refers to them as "the good life, the fast life, the wandering and wondering life, the truth life, the planting life, the doing life and the Elder life" (p. 10). When separated into quadrants within a circle, there is room for another small wedge that closes the circle – this represents where the circle ends and begins with the spirit. The spirit enters with birth and departs with its passing back into the great unknown. As we walk these paths and life stages, we are expected to discover our purpose; this journey is supported by members and ceremonies which honour our evolving. Children and youth are expected to learn from doing, exploring, and visioning. It helps develop a sense of self, apart from family, an Anishinaabe path to learning. Holistic education takes into account relational qualities that foster the development of healthy children, families, communities, and nations; unfortunately, most public education systems do not.

Wisdom Sits Here (Basso, 1996) shares the insight of an Apache Elder: "You can't live long without water and you can't live long without wisdom. You need to drink both" (p. 122). Wisdom, knowledge about life's lessons, is akin to drinking water and necessary to the spirit as water is to the body. Western thinking continues to divide these parts of ourselves as though they operate independently.

For Anishinaabe people, learning and living within a balanced Anishinaabe world moves a human being toward the preferred goal of living the Good Life, Mino-Bimaadiziwin (L. Simpson, 2011; Settee, 2013;

Bell, 2016). Achieving “the good life” means walking in balance with all our Anishinaabe teachings and successfully navigating the terrain between our hearts and heads. The goal is to bring them into alignment, which Elders say is our most challenging journey that can take a lifetime. Mino-Bimaadiziwin, the Good Life, cherishes the knowledge that has spanned our life journeys, some even painful. Community, built on a foundation of trust, is essential in this healing journey. Living well is living in balance and walking gently. When we are in harmony, our relationship with ourselves is strong and guides us toward relating well with others. Yet, despite significant losses, the Anishinaabe people have held on to their traditional beliefs. To be fully immersed in Anishinaabe culture is to have some literacy of these paradigms, which members often reference in conversation.

2.9.2 Sources of knowledge

Brant Castellano (2000) discusses three Indigenous knowledge sources: traditional, empirical, and revealed knowledge. Traditional knowledge is passed down, of which Elders are carriers; empirical knowledge is gained through careful observation of the natural world; and revealed knowledge is spiritual in its orientation and gained through dreams, intuition, prayer, and ceremony. Shawanda (2020), an Anishinaabe scholar of *Baawaajige: Exploring Dreams as Academic References*, highlights the importance of dreaming as an essential means of gathering knowledge; she says: “dreaming is an element within our intellectual framework” (p. 38). Dreaming, like intuition, ceremony, and prayer, enriches understanding of ourselves as Anishinaabe; it is a validated and respected form for seeking knowledge, a space where profound messages from the great beyond are revealed.

Knowledge can be personal, and it is not always necessarily universal. This shreds the notion that knowledge is purified and can be distilled and repackaged for all. Indigenous people recognize the limit of printed books for acquiring knowledge. In this context, not all knowledge is housed in libraries, to be distributed evenly to everyone; instead, “the answers we have been seeking can be found within ourselves, within our communities” (Kirkness, 1998, p. 16). Human access to the spiritual realm reveals an understanding that the locus of knowledge comes from within.

As we grow into the people we are meant to be, our knowledge is layered from multiple experiences. When I inquired about the word “Bimaadiziwin” with Anishinaabemowin language teacher Helen Roy, she described it as “abimaadizi,” with a meaning more closely to “a continuing to do what we need to do as people, or what we were intended to do, learning by living” (Helen Roy, personal communication, July 18-22, 2022; Helen Roy, personal communication, August 4, 2022). The contours of our becoming are acquired through this idea of “learning by living.” Knowledge gathered this way would take a lifetime, our whole life journey, to understand. Reliving the residential experience, Waboose (2017), discusses forming knowledge layers that begin with our spiritual selves at birth. Understanding grows to include learned knowledge from our interactions. It culminates with enriched revealed knowledge, accessed from the spiritual realm through dreams and ceremony (Brant-Castellano, 2000). Grown experiential knowledge is bookended by the spiritual domain, of which we periodically receive glimpses. Infants and the Elderly are closest to this realm since they have recently left or are preparing for their return. Indigenous understanding includes a final layer of knowledge beyond our understanding of the great unknown (Waboose, 2017, p. 68). Indigenous people greatly value knowledges not typically accessed in books and libraries. They have no difficulty recognizing knowledge acquired through dreams or other less orthodox methods.

2.9.3 Understanding of self

Living the good life is often thought of as “having the highest thought” (Cajete, 2000, p. 276). Cajete (2000) explains how matching our lives with our holistic selves is important within Indigenous communities. He presents a trifecta of achieving knowledge, a braiding of finding face, heart, and foundation in unison. Battiste (2013) likens this to finding our identity, skills, and talents to engage our deepest passions (p. 19). Learning and living are inextricably bound. Living well means learning who we are within our community. Unifying a fractured sense of self is critical for the person whose understanding of self has been weakened; rebuilding a sense of self is best achieved through the service of others (Davis, 2017, p. 155). When we forget about ourselves a little bit, our suffering retreats, and other feelings take

root, which allows us to live more fully in the world. Moreover, Fox's (1995) interpretation of self-preservation finds healing in service. Gandhi, he illustrates, proselytizes: "I am here to serve no one else but myself, to find my own self-realization through the service of these village folk" (p. 11).

Before Richard Wagamese passed into the spirit world, he upheld an active Facebook page, and I was one of his many "friends." Richard shared his many discussions with spirit Elders who visited him in his creative internal world and taught him the value of service to others in the healing of self. It helped him to heal and find his exceptionally inspired voice. For example, with one Elder, he held the following conversation:

> **Richard**: How do I become a better person?
>
> **Old Woman**: If you want to help, reach out and help someone else. If you want to be happy, make someone else happy. If you want to know love in your life, show someone else love.
>
> **Richard**: What about me?
>
> **Old Woman**: Your life was never about you. It's always about others. If you remember that, then you will become a better person. (Wagamese Facebook post, 2015, September 30).

The value of the individual is not lost in a vibrant community; everyone has a purpose and a role. Bell (2006) states, "We must believe that one person can make a difference, for the individual effects change in the family, community, nation and global world" (p. 71). This is not just hopeful intention; the individual has relevance. It is why Indigenous people see potential tensions in the 'majority rules' of decision-making processes. The entire group can be wrong, and one person can potentially unlock knowledge. Consequently, consensus-building has a place, and relationship-building relies on the process. Steigelbauer (1992) shares this insight through his conversations with an Elder:

> When we walk this path, we carry with us all we have learned and are about to learn. We may walk this path as individuals, but we are never alone. We experience with others and learn from others. How we interpret and make use of this learning called experience. How we learn from our experience and use it in a good way is called wisdom. (p. 4)

Though we are expected to forge our paths and learn from our experiences, we are not expected to do this alone.

2.9.4 Relationality

Marie Battiste (2013) quotes Saulteaux Elder Danny Musqua's insight into the learning process, as he says: "learning is the purpose of our life journey," referring to the responsibility each of us has towards supporting ourselves and others in the journey of learning. Battiste (2013) references this Elder further with regards to developing our learning spirit:

> Learning is both difficult and enjoyable, but ultimately it helps us shape who we are. Knowledge is helped by the spirits, shared by the spirits, and comes from the spirits…our body then can be seen as a carrier of the learning spirit (p. 18).

Alderville Members shared educational experiences outside their desire to know themselves better. In other words, they would have preferred learning more about themselves, about what particular gifts they had to offer, instead of the confusing education provided. Social scientist Maslow outlined a hierarchy of needs, with self-actualization at the pinnacle of human knowledge. Though preferred, this highest level of self-development is impossible without satisfying other critical and basic human needs. Kirkness (1998) felt education often fell short of the highest level of self-actualization. She argued that we "must take a good, hard look at the education we are providing our communities" (Kirkness, 1998, p.14). Moreover, she felt we need to ask five simple, but potentially painful, questions about our communities:

1. Who are we now?
2. How did we get to where we are?
3. Where do we want to go?
4. How will we get to where we want to go?
5. How will we know when we are there? (p. 14).[12]

[12] These five questions are often quoted when exploring rebuilding Indigenous communities. The questions evolved from elders. Niigaan Sinclaire began his keynote address at the 2018 42nd Annual Elders' Gathering on March 3rd

Learning is always shared and responsibly flows into building strong communities. The foundation for interaction with others is expressed in the behavioural protocols found in the Seven Grandfather Teachings. Each individual is unique, yet part of a whole community, intrinsically interdependent. What affects one, affects others. Our existence depends on a web of interconnectivity between family, community, and our relations in nature. Graveline (1998), in *Circle Works; Transforming Eurocentric Consciousness*, challenges Western education systems with ideas of transformation, writing: "spiritual connection helps not only to integrate our self as a whole, but also to integrate the individual into the world as a whole…allowing the individual to move towards experiencing connection-to family, community, society and Mother Earth" (p.55). The reflections of older Alderville members well understood community connections; they were aware of the traditional role of grandmothers who watched for children's individual talents and personal qualities. They knew strong individuals were needed to build strong communities, and they understood children should be raised knowing they would assume adult responsibilities and have some relevant role in their community. Many lamented the departure of youth inclined to move to cities to share their talents and leave behind their community.

2.9.5 The land

For Indigenous people, the land, waters, and air are representative of life's various energies and our connection to them. Our opening prayers acknowledge them from the ground-up and then, inward-out; we have a deep connection to all that is around us. A recent Kent Monkman art installation at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), *Compositional Study for Our Stories Come from the Land* (as part of the Kent Monkman: Being Legendary exhibit, Royal Ontario Museum, 2022), is accompanied by the following quote: "We live in relationship with all beings. They are our teachers, but the most important teacher is the land." As an Anishinaabe kwe, I have always found healing from water, nibi. Being connected to our Anishinaabe ways of being anchors us and heals us when we have steered off course. As Manulani Meyer (2004), author

posing these questions with a goal of presenting on the theme of "Resistance, Resilience, Reclamation & Recognition, Then, Now, Forever."

and advocate of Hawaiian ideology, succinctly summarizes, “the land educates us" (p.8). Meyer (2004) is a strong advocate of returning to our ancient knowledges and states that Indigenous people must absolutely believe in their ability to lead the return to this type of learning. Imbedded in communities are not only knowledges, but the people who can lead, to create new system of learning. She asserts that our houses of learning must take on the challenge because this is how our children learn best: "this is how we will survive…let us shape our school lessons by this ideal and let us shape our lives accordingly” (p. 59).

The land is critical to our survival as people and calls for our return. *Reclaiming Biophilia*, written by Cajete (1999), is a study in remembering. The act of remembering is vital through our interaction with nature. Cajete suggests adding dance, ceremony, and art elements to heighten memory. Members shared how learning Anishinaabemowin songs on the hand drum is a very effective tool for learning the language. It is a gentle way of returning to what was lost. Cajete (1999) reminds us that “once people break those cycles of remembering, they begin to forget and start doing the kinds of things that have led to the crisis we see today ecologically” (p.197). Marginalized people begin to forget many things, with less emotional and physical capacity to focus on what binds them to their communities. Bell (2006) similarly foreshadows our lack of relationship with the natural world:

> When our children do not learn that they are connected to the trees, the animals, the plants, the sun, moon and the water, how will we survive as a people, as a global world? Our survival as children of the earth is dependent on our ability to understand all of the parts that makeup the whole. (p.60)

Along the lines of Cajete’s understanding of place, *Memories: Steps to Sociology of the Past*, by Zerubavel (1996), references how the landscape holds memories. He likens landscapes to mnemonic devices, which immediately function as reference points for shared memories. The Native person, physically positioned in their traditional landscape, passes knowledge from one person to another, from generation to generation, "to allow future generations mnemonic access to their collective past” (Zerubavel, 1996, p. 292). In *Wisdom sits in places,* Basso (1996), notes the importance of land among the Apache people and how the landscape

holds memories and stories that “go to work on you like arrows” (p. 38). in this work, knowing the names of places anchored the stories, with the landscape becoming a library of knowledge. The retelling of land stories holds wisdom that continues to guide the moral conduct of people in their contemporary context. These stories create:

> A lasting bond between that person and the site or sites at which events in the tale took place…I know that place. It stalks me every day. This is what we know about our stories. They go to work on you mind and make you think about your life. (Basso, 1996, p. 55-58)

Basso’s learned wisdom from the Apache people is enlightening. In relation to his understanding of the interwoven nature of place and spirit, he shared: “when places are actively sensed, the physical landscape becomes wedded to the landscape of the mind, to the roving imagination, and where the latter may lead is anyone’s guess” (Basso, 1996, p. 107).

Knowledge is highly dependent on our relationship with the natural world. Deloria (1999), in *Spirit & Reason*, discusses in greater detail the significance of these Indigenous philosophies, and argues that the Western world's focus to subdue nature has led to our reliance on technology that attempts to manufacture order. He states, "we become slaves of the technology by which the task is accomplished and surrender not only our freedom but also the luxury of reflection about our experiences that a natural relationship with the world had given us" (Deloria, 1999, p. 4). The journey of knowledge is a study in maturation and travels "from information to knowledge to wisdom" (Deloria, 1999, p. 14). It follows the journey of the Medicine Wheel and echoes the life cycle of people. It is why, Deloria (1999) offers, Western civilizations are intensely focused on youth: "Western society concentrates so heavily on information and theory, its product youth, not maturity" and why they "have not yet crossed the emotional barriers that bar us from understanding and experiencing maturity" (p. 15).

The physical world exists to verify and assist in knowledge transfer but is limited without the wisdom gathered from people connected to the rhythm of the land. As Anishinaabeg, we carry those teachings but denigration of our ways of knowing have caused us to doubt our rich knowledge about how

to live cooperatively with our environment. Manulani Meyer (2004) directly addresses Indigenous people when she states, “get rid of the belief, I mean really get rid of it, that we are somehow inferior” (p.7). Our knowledge and philosophies are powerful and continue to have an essential role in our modern world.

2.10 Decolonizing education

2.10.1 Different approaches

The purpose of Indigenous education is understood differently within Native and non-Native communities, evidenced by conflicting mandates from both spheres. Learning and gaining knowledge are highly valued within Indigenous cultures, though are not always congruous with Western expectations of learning. The Anishinaabemowin word “Kaandossowin” means ‘how we come to know’ and refers to a desired state of being (Absolon, 2011). Anishinaabe’s understanding of learning is based on a lifelong personal journey towards enlightenment reflected by *First Nations Control of First Nation Education; It’s Our Vision, It’s Our Time* (Assembly of First Nations, 2010). The central goal of learning is its accessibility for everyone, no matter their age or ability. The statement reads:

> Lifelong learning…from prenatal to Elder level and [including] systems that are holistic, high quality, linguistic and culturally-based. First Nation lifelong learning systems must be founded on First Nation languages, cultures, histories, philosophies, world views and values, as these are the heart of our identity. (p. 8)

Within the document, the AFN call for provincial systems to include First Nation experience to ensure greater competency and engagement from First Nation people. Teachers, whom the report addresses, are critical in the process and must reflect Indigenous presence for Native students to succeed. In contrast, the provincial curriculum is highly prescribed with regular mandated standardized testing intervals highlighting learning grade level benchmarks. in the Ontario Ministry of Educations report, The Implementation Plan: Ontario First Nation, Metis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework (2014), the vision statement for Indigenous education includes:

> First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students in Ontario will have the knowledge, skills, and confidence they need to successfully complete their elementary and secondary education in order to pursue

> postsecondary education or training and/or to enter the workforce. They will have the traditional and contemporary knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to be socially contributive, politically active, and economically prosperous citizens of the world. All students in Ontario will have knowledge and appreciation of contemporary and traditional First Nation, Métis, and Inuit traditions, cultures, and perspectives (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014).

A closer reading of both mandates reveals a different understanding of the purpose of education. Indigenous perspectives are oriented towards holistic, culturally-based methods that ensure young people learn within the context of community values. Conversely, provincial models seek to 'close the gap' and prepare youngsters for their role in a capitalist society. They qualify learning in their system includes traditional knowledge, which is a stretch, especially given that learning philosophies are at odds. The last sentence demonstrates a commitment to the reconciliation project for a province-wide understanding of Indigenous people. The Indigenous mandate is more aligned with resurgent goals within the community.

Battiste (2013) states that we are currently in the moment of decolonizing education in Canada, but with an important caveat: "decolonization of education is not just about changing a system for Indigenous people, but for everyone. We all will benefit by it" (p. 22). This quote invokes two critical themes in this final section of the literature review: reconciliation and resurgence discussed in the section, Dreaming about Sweetgrass. Of late, Canadians are beginning to relearn their history from the context of a conquering people; the story about Canada goes beyond the narratives of resolute explorers and hard-working settlers. However, stretched over time, most modern Canadians have little understanding of why their relationship with Indigenous people has taken such a dark turn. Until recently, not much challenged our national identity and our preference for myths that paint Canada as a tolerant, exceedingly polite, fair, and selfless nation of multicultural people. This myth is woven into the Canadian psyche, and it is carried with pride throughout the world, suggesting that "the peacemaker myth is an epitomizing characteristic of Canadian national identity and history…we cast ourselves as heroes" (Regan, 2010, p. 34). The Canadian settler is moved to innocence by "settler denial and moral indifference [that is] closely linked to

expressions of ‘violent innocence’ in which individuals, organizations, or whole societies take on an ‘innocent gaze’… a way of proclaiming our ignorance because ‘we didn’t know.’” (Regan, 2010 p. 41).

Just over one-third of Canadians are aware of the dark history of Canadian residential schools and only “seven percent knew that the goal of the schools was, at a minimum, assimilation into mainstream society” (Regan, 2010, p. 42). From the stance of ignorance, few Canadians understand First Nation issues. Such systemic ignorance is simply not justifiable in a country with a serious commitment to public education. A more recent Paulette Regan with Aimee Craft (2020), *Pathways of Reconciliation* reiterates the reconciliation journey that must include non-Indigenous people being "responsible and accountable for undertaking their own decolonization" (p. xiii). As reconciliation topics work their way into mainstream discourse, they are truncated by a 'fait-accompli' approach that renders the discussion finished, box ticked, and the goals of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission achieved. Regan & Craft argue that this is a "liberal form of reconciliation that enables the Canadian settler state to make modest adjustments to 'recognize' and 'accommodate' Indigenous people "in ways that ultimately perpetuate colonialism" (2020, p. xiii). During my research, one Alderville youth member reflected on current trends to preface land acknowledgements routinely which end up being "floppy" without any real intention toward the people of the land. Comedian Cliff Cardinal (2023), with a dash of wit, claims land acknowledgements "help white people feel good about themselves." In this sense they do not serve the purpose of recognizing the natural inhabitants of the land in meaningful ways and may further perpetuate ignorance with inaccurate information.

Within the province of Ontario alone, education holds the second largest portfolio, with more than 29 billion dollars spent annually, second only to health (Thomas, 2018). Canadians are steadfast in their value of public education; therefore, perpetuating ignorance about its colonial past is untenable in any ideation turned towards reconciliation. It is curious to note that while Canada protects its ‘not knowing’ through educational structures, this practice also prevents Indigenous people from knowing their own histories.

Yatta Kanu (2006), professor in the Education department at the University of Manitoba and author of *Getting Them Through the College Pipeline: Critical Elements of Instruction Influencing School Success Among Native Canadian High School Students*, noted that a contradiction between the Native student's home life and school life presented a serious obstacle; enough that to belong to one, the other would need to be discounted. Kanu's study follows the in-depth approach of two secondary school teachers as they taught their grade nine Native Studies course using same board textbook. One teacher chose to deliver the curriculum in a traditional format, preferring to keep an arm's length from the content. He readily shared his lack of confidence regarding First Nation issues. He felt that too much adaptation was required and insufficient resources were available. The other teacher taught from a uniquely different perspective and infused Indigenous perspectives as underpinnings of all the learning in his classroom. As a result, his students significantly outperformed the other group. Both teachers were non-Native, but one had a sincere belief he could do it and did so with interest. What is clear from the study is the importance of a teacher's attitude; they need both a sense of efficacy and the capacity to succeed (Kanu, 2006, pp. 131-132).

Teachers, therefore, need to believe they can do it and must have the ability to carry it out. It is what I have observed with teachers during my 20 years in education. They do not have to be Native (though that is great news if more Indigenous students have a calling towards the profession). Teachers need a willing spirit and strong dedication to teaching. A curious attitude will move them towards seeking resources, changing their format, developing their knowledge, and engaging their students. I see these teachers in the educational system, but I see the others even more.

Transformational learning relates to learning challenged to its core or, as Mezirow (1997) challenges, an accepted safe view of "habits of the mind" (p. 5). Education operates from a predominantly Eurocentric point of reference. It is innocuously articulated as neutral in its position, but nothing could be farther from the truth. For these rather firmly entrenched ideas to be changed, they must first be acknowledged. Our curriculum is shaped by European thought; its preference is for telling history from the

settlers' point of view, its pedagogical practice of dividing disciplines and reordering their value, and its dynamic in placing worthwhile knowledge in books with teachers as its primary purveyors.

Part of my dismay as a community educator took root from directly witnessing how little Alderville history young First Nation students from this community knew. Fed a steady diet of provincial curriculum, there is little learning from a First Nation community perspective since the curriculum had been airbrushed from dominant education narratives. In the case of Alderville First Nation, the very ground on which the school was built was given over in trust from Alderville First Nation for a period of time so that students from both Alderville and Roseneath communities could experience quality education together. Still, generations later, few remember this or learn about it. Troubling is the lack of knowledge about the Alderville community, its history, treaty, culture, and, most critically, its Anishinaabemowin language, for future generations. It is vital that Alderville First Nation students learn about their community from an Indigenous perspective to balance narratives about who they are as people; it is a way to know who they are by "retelling the past in ways that provide an alternative account of the present" (Rifkin, 2017, p. 32). Battiste (1995) argues for changes in Western educational practices to include Alderville community perspectives. She found that educational outcomes for students were more favourable when they connected to their community in the education process.

Canada could boast about being distinguished in areas of life expectancy, education, and income; in fact, one might claim Canada ranks first. That would be until its First Nation people were factored in, who rank 48th using the same criteria (Episkenew, 2009, p.71). It is a convenient myth that is well crafted and part of the 'made in Canada' industry. In *Toward a Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education,* Brayboy (2005) suggests that Native people have become highly politicized. Yet without power or autonomy to control the arc of their colonizer, they are caught in a complicated struggle for legitimacy (p. 433). Their energies are committed to finding relevance with dreary tasks designed to keep them busy. G. Smith (2003) writes about the obstacle, 'The Politics of Distraction,' imposed for First Nation autonomy. I drifted in and out of education for years, finally finding myself in a tiny hospitable reserve that I have come to consider home. I

fulfilled my teaching credentials with no real plan and began working for my home First Nation. I fell into the comfortable rhythm of chasing down the next dollar and busily attending to regulations, policies, and reporting restrictions. Without really seeing it happen, I became a willing cog in the engine of the "Politics of Distraction." Our days are filled with requisite reporting tasks which keep our minds busy, our hearts empty, and our actions depleted to the detriment of attending to community issues.

2.10.2 Important influences in the discussion of Indigenous education

The 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (RCAP) was an extensive coast-to-coast study that reviewed Canada's contentious relationship with its Indigenous peoples, ending with five volumes and 4000 pages of content exploring various issues (Government of Canada, 1996). The sheer density of the study explores educational reform built on three broad principles. It imagined "self-starting initiatives" that could be phased in, with core support, following "the conclusion of treaties" (The Institute on Governance, April 1997, p. 23). This progressive approach was ambitious and presumed that brisk action would follow once Canada structured a necessary response to outstanding issues regarding its Indigenous people. Brave in its scope, it argued educational efforts were not benign; instead, they were riddled with eurocentrism built and baked into its foundation.

The post-colonial agenda for transformation produced in the *Gathering Strength* document was equally determined but largely ignored. Of its many recommendations, Canada has not closed the door on treaty negotiations. There is improvement in post-secondary programs offering more Indigenous content, though that has been slower than anticipated. The study was a massive undertaking and presented an interesting mirror of Canada's relationship with its Indigenous people, both in what the report contained and the limits of its dissemination, a chronic disappointing reality for Indigenous people. However, years later, it was dusted off and reviewed for negotiation of the residential survivors' compensation process – the 2005 Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement.

*The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People*s (Sept 2008) was adopted by General Assembly Resolution 61/295. Article 14 delves into educational sovereignty, with a view that

"Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning" (United Nations, 2007). Moreover, it stated how all levels of education should be free of discrimination and be accessible to students outside their home communities. Furthermore, Article 15 supported the diversity of Indigenous children's culture. It recommended that it be reflected in public education to support Indigenous students and improve relationships with other members of society. Additionally, Article 25 was evident in supporting the spiritual association Indigenous people had with the land and connection to future generations:

> Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard" (United Nations, 2007, p. 10).

The Council of Ministers of Education Canada (CMEC, 2004) felt Indigenous education was a priority and suggested improvement in the following critical areas: early childhood education, Indigenous partnership, teacher recruitment, information sharing, accountability, and eliminating inequitable band funding. However, the achievement gap became its focus in subsequent reports, once again focusing on Westernized methods of quantifying achievements.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) grew out of the Residential School Settlement Agreement. Between 2007 to 2017, the commission heard the account of 6500 witnesses across Canada that covered the abuses and legacy of the residential schools (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). The TRC (2015) released a six-volume report which summarized its findings and presented 94 Calls to Action to partner sectors, education being one of them. Justice Murray Sinclair, Chair of the TRC, stated, "Education is the key to reconciliation" (Bennett, 2018). Education is a focus; Calls to Action 6-12 directly address education; 13-17 focus on language and culture; and Calls to Action 62-65 are concerned with coordinating Education and Reconciliation.

In summary, the Calls to Action underscore the need to refocus on education. They call for equitable funding at all levels for Indigenous students, including improvement in essential teacher training. The Calls to Action are explicit: the endeavour to close the achievement gap, promote and protect Indigenous languages, develop age and grade-appropriate curricula that include transformative teaching methods that have Indigenous knowledge, and encourage improved partnerships with families and communities. Funding should be no obstacle as this vision is carried out through all levels of education. To ensure its success, in collaboration with Indigenous people and partner institutions, the recommendations include establishing a national research program with provided multi-year funding to advance reconciliation understanding. One by one, the studies have laid the groundwork for presenting the issues; now Canada must follow through, but as the old saying goes, it is easier said than done.

2.10.3 Reconciliation

Dr. Marie Battiste (2013), Mi'kmaw educator and author, a maverick within Indigenous education circles, shared that postcolonial approaches have impacted colonial education. Postmodernism is an arm of critical theory; consequently, it is driven by "multiple ways to understand oppression, its consequences, and its strategies for transformation" (Battiste, 2013, p. 6). Where critical theory examines the colonial impact, postcolonial positions offer a modicum of hopeful intention. It seeks to effect change in a reality not yet experienced. The discussion of reconciliation is working its way into education, and change is happening, but "not fast enough" (Bell, 2006, p 57). Though challenges are occurring, Native people need to "see education as having hope for their future" (Battiste, 2013, P. 72). Change is proving to be not straightforward, and **"**even though feelings of regret may exist, individuals from White-privileged culture may not see how they are responsible or what they can do" (Bell, 2006, p. 86). It is a rationale for continued slow progress, with a broad sentiment of apathy that overwhelms teachers and threatens to produce a lack of connection or responsibility to the process.

Though we are in the era of Truth and Reconciliation, our provincial curriculum is proving sturdy to the core and struggling to keep pace. Teacher education remains a goal. In *Liberal Discourses about*

Aboriginal Students; A Case Study of Power Blindness, Orlowski (2012) notes that Canadian teachers are slow to change. The movement to alter curriculum is perceived as "some sort of movement steeped in political correctness," (p. 123) and that teaching about the wrongs of the past is "tantamount to creating victimization" (Orlowski, 2011, p. 123). Similarly, the view was that curriculum was neutral and policy makers were wary to make significant changes to their practices; reconciliation being a new trend to be quickly abandoned later in favour something shinier. Such casual dismissal affects Native communities in many ways. It does little to affirm the findings of any of the multiple reports, and not does suggest anything new on the horizon is happening. Kidder, a well-known education advocate, claimed:

> Many teachers say that they don't know enough about Indigenous issues because they won't be teaching in areas where there are many First Nation students, but the TRC has called for a change to everyone's education, that's how we get true reconciliation. (As cited in Brown, 2016)

Teacher education, she felt, should include helping teachers navigate this area. A coordinated effort needs to be evident from both the Ministry of Education and teacher education bodies. Before their assignments, teachers should be retaught First Nation Canadian history and how their classrooms could be more reflective and inclusive. Currently, Lakehead University has moved ahead with its two-year teaching program, which consists of a mandatory Indigenous course for student-teachers – perceived to be on the cutting edge. Several universities are following suit, though many critical factors need review to evaluate their success, not the least of which is the university's overall commitment to the process in meaningful ways.

Of late, there has been an increase in including First Nation perspectives. Still, it is a work in progress and largely left to individual schools and teachers. Regrettably, though not surprising, upon Premier Doug Ford's victory in 2018, he quickly scrapped initiatives that would boost Indigenous content in the Ontario curriculum (Christou, 2018). The reason – it was not cost-effective. It was a bold move, signalling the provincial government's priorities and values. The same premier had to find another, more sensitive response, when the discovery of 215 children's bodies were uncovered at the former Kamloops

Residential School in BC during the summer of 2020 (perhaps a watershed moment for some Canadians). His response was as follows:

> Like all Ontarians, I was heartbroken by the news of a burial site containing the remains of 215 Indigenous children at the former Indian Residential School in Kamloops, British Columbia. That is why our government is partnering with Indigenous communities to address the loss of generations who are no longer with us, and the continued loss experienced by residential school survivors and their families. As we advance meaningful reconciliation, it is important that all of us continue to deepen our collective understanding of the legacy of the Indian Residential School system. (Ministry of Ontario, 2021)

How can our collective understanding be achieved with such little engagement from the Ontario Government? First Nation communities are very familiar with how this lack of accountability is left dangling for individual communities, school boards, and teachers to solve. The individual classroom teacher might be left feeling the same abandonment. As priorities shift, shrink, disappear, and reappear with incoming governmental agendas, reconciliation engagement is truly reactive to flavour-of-the-day politics built on news cycles and bubbled up tensions.

This reveals how little the average Canadian knows about its colonizing history. *Cultivating Ignorance of Aboriginal Realities* (Godlewska et al, 2010) notes that “ignorance is a powerful social force, especially when combined with mythology and unexamined ideology” (p. 436). In fact, it is a concurrent theme that is evident and felt across classrooms in provinces. First Nation experience is not present or variously optional. The inclusion of First Nation presence is shockingly low within typical provincial classrooms. It results in adults who are all but ignorant of the topic. Less than one percent (0.02) of Ontario high students have taken a First Nation course (Godlewska et al, 2010, p. 430). The study found that 72 percent (of study respondents) could not name an Indigenous group and their traditional territory (p. 429). There is little, if anything, about Canada’s colonial history in the curriculum since it “still excludes and marginalizes Aboriginal peoples in a variety of ways, including omissions, and significant silences,

nationalist self-congratulation, problematic placement, the continuance of colonialist narratives and relegation of Aboriginal Peoples to primitive place/time" (Godlewska et al, 2010, p. 436).

While marginalizing First Nations people within the curriculum, the Ministry of Education has turned its attention to celebrating patriotic heroism; Canada was a "partner in war efforts, a peacekeeper and middle power, a leader in humanitarian causes" (Godlewska et al, 2010, p. 431). The 'humanitarian Canadian' is a preferred narrative. Canadian curriculum is short on its First Nation content, yet generous in its stance of perpetrating the story of Canada built from a nation of humanitarian, internationally faithful allies. As a result, our educational system has produced adults who are embarrassingly ignorant about First Nations people and their contribution to Canadian history. Added to existing stereotypes and outright racism, this forms a potent toxic cocktail that is both beguiling and comforting, holding transformation at bay. There is hope, though, that since then, and with the presence of the TRC, this bleak statistic will improve in more updated studies, though challenges persist.

More than ten years later, *On the peripheries of education: (Not) Learning about Indigenous Peoples in the 1995-2010 British Columbia Curriculum* (Lamb & Godlewska, 2021), focuses on British Columbia's commitment and its pace with the reconciliation project apparent in its elementary curriculum, and examines its overall effectiveness of decolonizing education. They argue that the province's voluntarist approach "gives the impression that First Nation perspectives and issues were only considered appropriate and valuable for elementary and middle levels of education" (p.110). This approach also relies on volunteers from the Indigenous communities to donate their time and services and leaves unsupported teachers to know figure out significant actors to ask when developing Indigenous perspectives for their classrooms. It is a profoundly lazy, uninspiring approach that kicks the responsibility of reconciliation down to others to figure out. Moreover, "the limited coverage of Indigenous content in required courses contradicts the Ministry's stated intent to educate all students" (p.113). In other words, though the ministry may be talking 'the talk' about reconciliation, they are not 'walking the walk.' The Ministry of British Columbia's Department of Education acknowledges the goal of reconciliation and even articulates it;

however, it has offloaded the responsibility onto others. The authors conclude that reconciliation for the masses is no small feat, and it remains an unmet goal with limited effectiveness.

2.10.4 Indigenous-settler relations

In *Decolonization is Not a Metaphor,* Tuck & Yang, (2012) caution how the term 'decolonization' could become a superfluous, symbolic metaphor devoid of value that prevents serious discussions about social justice. It is in danger of becoming window dressing and a rebranding of old oppressions. It encourages a false sense of comfort, having done the good work, finding that preferred path to reconciliation. Relationships with Indigenous people are untouched since settlers do not have to look too deeply at their personal colonizing story or even spaces they control, like classrooms. In this scenario, gentle tropes move settlers to innocence, rescuing them from guilt. Manuel (2017) further reiterates the lack of meaning with reconciliation, he says:

> Everything is reconciliation. When they join a round dance, they call that reconciliation. When their eyes tear up in discussing our poverty, that is reconciliation. At the same time, when they are denying our constitutional rights, they call that reconciliation of Aboriginal title with Crown title. In fact, every new plan to steal from us is called reconciliation. (p. 201)

Willy Ermine (2007), Cree ethicist and researcher, discusses the importance of ethical spaces where reflection and dialogue support genuine sharing as foundational for relationship-building. He argues the spaces between people are not empty, and he invites us to consider their contours and edges, where one's boundary begins and ends. The in-between spaces are in perpetual negotiation; we never run roughshod over others to claim spaces as our own. Relationships are structured around these unclaimed spaces. In parallel, treaties were about working out these relationships and the ethical spaces between people. This intersection of interaction defines the rules of engagement for continued contact and even the potential for friendship. Ermine argued the condition of Canada's Indigenous people has served as a mirror of Canada's approach. Therefore, what Canada sees reflected in the mirror is the relationship they created. Ermine (2007) states:

> The gaze staring out from the mirror is the mindful look of Indigenous humanity standing as it is with substantial heritage. This heritage acts as the standpoint from which Indigenous people gauge and view the unfolding of the Canadian state. (p. 200)

Strained settler relations with Indigenous people have a complicated history and continue to persist. Canada is a few decades into its reconciliation with its Indigenous people, so why have we not made more progress? In *Canada at a Crossroads,* Denis (2020, 2022), claims group position theory is not based on ignorance, and therein lies the dilemma. For Denis, group positioning is more about defending one's group and sense of belonging. Dominant groups understand their superiority; they are invested in their entitlement threatened by change. Prejudice, therefore, is not some isolated moment of irrational behavior; instead, it is a highly predictable reaction to a belief in group privilege and position. In fact, he claims, elevated episodes of racism are expected as Indigenous communities gain sovereignty – an attempt to rebalance power to those seeking to maintain the status quo. It is not based on facts that can be learned in school; therefore, it cannot be immediately corrected when one has discovered the errors of their way. It is a highly elevated emotional response built on self-interest and fear of losing one's 'proper place.' When treaty negotiations take place, in the example of Alderville, the neighbouring settler communities are threatened by community autonomy and by those having the audacity to 'move on.' It is a method for maintaining control.

Understanding between two groups is assumed to be desirable and beneficial, but finding similar pathways is difficult since the paths are understood differently (Denis, 2020, 2022). Denis argues that while education is essential, it is limited. A radical shift in group positioning is necessary for meaningful change. In other words, society needs change, such as exploring sovereignty, questioning one's entitlement, and ultimately sharing power. Our best hope, Denis states, is with younger generations less entrenched in their belonging within a group and their entitlement. Current movements towards greater ecological responsibility and caring for the environment are hopeful since they consider future generations.

White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism (DiAngelo, 2018) argues dominant groups are not always amendable to learning about other cultures and react with open resentment. Consequently, learning about history and other groups are deemed time-consuming and divisive – Simply not learning becomes the defense. This exposes a path of wilful ignorance and injustice to maintain the status quo. Mandatory education about Indigenous peoples may not have the power to change as we had hoped. With all the information readily available to help re-educate non-Indigenous people, they display little motivation to engage in their own learning and often seek easier routes of lower engagement. They frequently request Native people do the work for them, to drill it down into easily digestible presentations where they are primarily observers.

Within our Canadian landscape, Native people are often viewed as impediments to progress and authors of their own misfortune, accused of being an enduring, trying presence that has brought the rest of Canada down. However, Native people see Western methods as pernicious and coming at too extravagant a cost. When relationships were promised, they represented waves of coercive domination – not partnerships. Non-Native communities continue to feed into the notion they have nothing to learn. Were we surprised when Beyak, a Canadian senator who was the chairwoman of the Senate Committee on Aboriginal people, declared that "she didn't need any more education on residential schools because she too has 'suffered alongside survivors?'" (Tasker, 2017). Beyak remained surprisingly contrite when her remarks sparked outrage. She closed her insensitivity by gaslighting band expenditure accountability as a more severe issue. Embarrassingly for Canada, she claimed the TRC unfairly misrepresented the work of residential schools, which had made good Christians out of many Native children. Though Beyak displayed the temerity that prevented her from seeing the error in her judgment, others were not so inclined. The opposing party swiftly set to isolating her remarks and removing her from the committee. For a good reason, First Nation communities remain firm on the education issue. They assert that teaching the truth of Canadian history may benefit non-Native communities more.

On October 11th, 2022, the newly sworn-in premier, ultra-conservative right-wing media star Danielle Smith, barely settled into her seat before she announced her support for the anti-vaccination population, claiming they were the "most discriminated against group that I've ever witnessed in my lifetime" (Bennett, 2022). Recently, she introduced the "Sovereignty Act," a strategy that would allow the province to refuse enforcement of any federal act from Canada that would infringe on the interests of Albertans (Narine, 2022) – where this leaves her position on treaties is anyone's guess. First Nation Leaders were united in opposition and took a stand against her proposed act; they asserted "inherent rights and jurisdictions to [their] lands and territories" (CityNews Staff, 2022). Of late, she has tried to soften her rhetoric by claiming Indigenous ancestry; she alleges, "as someone with Indigenous ancestry, I honour the heritage of Canada's Indigenous Peoples as one of our nation's and province's greatest treasures and strengths" (Amato, 2022). This claim, however, remains unfounded.

Similarly, Smith has thrown doubt on the findings of Indigenous bodies at former residential schools, dismissing them as fake news. How this will filter down to educational systems remains to be seen. Still, the tentacles of politics are never far away. Clearly, Smith has a tenuous relationship with the Indigenous people in her province. Her audacious flair for supporting a fringe minority is troubling for First Nation communities trying to build pathways with governing bodies during reconciliation.

The highly viewed TVO short education segment on reconciliation featured reflections from lawyer Pamela Palmater, educator Eddy Robinson, and Cindy Blackstock, the Executive Director of First Nation Child, and Family Caring Society of Canada (TVO Today, 2019). It is a reminder that reconciliation requires deeper engagement from the average Canadian. For these Indigenous thought leaders, surface attempts like hanging Indigenous artwork will never get us to the goals of reconciliation. Canadians must learn their history, which includes Indigenous people, through readily available resources. Then they must learn about current issues of inequality that perpetuate discrimination and be willing to share power. To be sure, reconciliation is a messy, much traveled road with detours and setbacks. Predictably, decades later, we still have an unfinished conversation about Canada's relationship with its Indigenous people. It remains an

unmet dream in what Leanne Simpson (2011) called “decolonized spaces and transformed realities that we have collectively yet to imagine” (p. 35).

2.10.5 Resurgence

Movements of reconciliation and resurgence are different; they focus on divergent priorities and populations. First, we must be clear about the difference between reconciliation and resurgence. In the previous section, reconciliation aims to improve relationships and develop pathways for greater understanding. Conversely, resurgence focuses on community-driven efforts centred around Indigenous priorities. In *As We Have Always Done*, Simpson (2017) is suspicious of the scope of reconciliation and for whom it ultimately benefits. She says: “the word resurgence is now used in all kinds of ways, some of which feed nicely into discourses around reconciliation” (p. 48). Resurgence is more about the new territory of Indigenous action. Where reconciliation is invested in the goals of improved relations with Western society, resurgent movements, conversely, are concerned with privileging Indigenous voices, independent of outside influences, with a commitment towards working with the priorities of Indigenous communities.

Hampton (1995) describes the continuum of Aboriginal education in five stages, which begin with traditional Indian education before contact. The stages flow through successive, assimilative steps from the Indian Industrial school, pre-confederation, to current provincial schools. The final stage, sui generis, is a thing of its own, based on Indigenous history and culture. Bell (2006) defined this as “Nishinaabe education, delivered by Nishinaabe people, that is based on and affirms Nishinaabe pedagogy and Nishinaabe way of life… Cultural survival must be the explicit goal” (p. 63). Moreover, Battiste (2013) refers to the Indigenous renaissance as an “Indigenist agenda” applicable to the present and future (p. 73). Cultural survival is an important discussion within the community, and education is ultimately a partner in the process of revitalization. In Alderville’s case, our community has not reached the final stage. Instead, our education system is generated through the provincial model, with active negotiation for the schools to

adapt. Administrative education staff from the provincial school board and First Nation meet at regular intervals to develop an Education Services Contract that is satisfactory to both parties.[13]

Smith (2012) advocates for community agendas "that connects local, regional and global efforts which are moving towards the ideal of a self-determining and Indigenous world" (p. 120). She describes four major tides of self-determination: survival, recovery, development, and self-determination (p. 121). Furthermore, Smith argued that each Indigenous community's conditions and evolving state do not move sequentially (p. 121). First Nations do not operate on sequentially placed trajectories that are linear paths toward autonomy. They are impacted by priorities, often beyond their control and created by colonial structures. Smith (2012) discusses the idea of "nested identities," which are multiple layers of belonging and identity (p. 129). The heterogeneity of community members challenges the understanding of identity. Nested identities reflect members' experiences, which describes how some are locked in survival mode (more reactive). In contrast, other members might be more inclined to engage in matters of self-determination (requiring more planning). It is a significant challenge for Indigenous communities to consider as communities rebuild.

The chapter on twenty-five Indigenous projects has grown to include twenty more in the more recent 3rd Edition of Smith's book, Decolonizing Methodologies. The newest iteration prefaces "love": caring for one's community deeply and contending that we must love ourselves enough that we do not "recreate the master's house, with Indigenous art on the walls" (Smith, 2012, p. 190).

Kirkness (1998) previously cautioned us from doing a disservice to our communities when we replicate and mirror what has been forced upon us. Our vision of education must "be firmly based on the traditions of our people" (1998, p. 11). It is a critical observation, a cautionary tale, expressed by many Alderville members.

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[13] This Education Services contract currently includes the level of services for eligible Alderville students for Roseneath Public School and Cobourg Collegiate Institute Secondary School. It also includes the parameters of Alderville support staff when providing service support to Alderville First students in their schools.

As We Have Always Done (Simpson, 2017) advises that we should be concerned with rebuilding our own houses on our terms. Resurgence privileges Indigenous voices, independent of outside influences. Simpson (2014) decries settler motivation 'to help' since they originate from positions of power of knowing 'what's best' for Indigenous communities. Our attention must turn to our communities' needs, yet it is a steep uphill battle. She states:

> Many Indigenous parents and families do everything they can do to ensure their children are connected to their homelands, this should be the centre of the next generation's lives, not the periphery. In order to foster expertise within Nishinaabeg intelligence, we need people engaged with land as curriculum and engaged in our languages for decades, not weeks. Shouldn't we, as communities, support and nurture children that choose to only educate themselves within Nishnaabewin? Wouldn't this create a strong generation of Elders? Don't we deserve learning spaces where we do not have to address state learning objectives, curriculum, credentialism and careerism, where our only concern for recognition comes from within? (Simpson, 2014, p. 23)

Leanne Simpson argues for Indigenous Nations based on the belief our communities deserve sovereignty; it is the only way to ensure our communities survive. Our brand of learning cannot be addressed as an "add-on" as though it can be done by over-extended volunteers. We simply cannot depend on Western systems to do the work needed when they are without the necessary motivation. As our communities rebuild, we must build models that are independent and specific to our communities, as Kirkness (1998) argues:

> Our new 'independence' education must begin with us, our people, our communities. It must celebrate our cultures, our history, the true account of the way it was, and the way it is. From there, we can build on how it should be and how it will be. (p. 11)

First Nation's approach needs to be radically different; to ask different questions and seek other answers rather than retrofitting outdated band-run schools to look and operate like provincial ones. Kirkness's (1998) earlier questions around innovative education are relevant in this discussion: Where are we now?

How did we get here? Where do we want to go? How will we get there? And how will we know when we are there? (p. 14). Only our communities can answer these questions.

Simpson (2011, 2017) discusses an Anishinaabemowin word "Biiskaabiiyang," which references Anishinaabeg people returning to themselves within the context of postcolonialism, which is "to pick up the things we were forced to leave behind, …and bring them into existence in the future" (2011, p. 50). Simpson (2011) acknowledges Elder Dougbaa Williams (of the Pike Clan from Curve Lake First Nation and Elder of Trent University), whose understanding of the term was more reflective of "an understanding that encapsulates something more descriptive like 'a new emergence'" (p. 51). Native people were forced to put aside all ways of understanding who they were as people and their cultural methods of expressing themselves. However, they are now returning, changed by the experience. They are not lost; instead, they are returning, altered by the experience.

2.10.6 Recognition politics

Red Skin White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics Recognition (Coulthard, 2014) discusses Canada's preoccupation with the surveillance of its Indigenous population. This surveillance was a means to keep Indigenous people under control, watching their every move, cataloging them, and disqualifying them from land ownership and access to their culture. Coulthard argues that Native people are trapped in recognition politics that were rooted in fear of their disappearance, and further driven by a desire to be valued. The current Reconciliation movement is steeped in the politics of recognition with the promise of civil friendship – only if relationships are brokered successfully with settler groups. However, Indigenous people are often too caught up in doing all the work, bearing much of the load, to be recognized for their unique contribution. Leanne Simpson (2017) states: "we are rewarded with recognition when we assimilate" (p. 88). Belonging comes at a steep price that leads the dispossessed to turn away, as Simpson (2014) argues, "Nishnaabeg must stop looking for legitimacy within the colonizer's education system and return to valuing and recognizing our individual and collective intelligence on its own merits and on our own terms" (p. 22).

Spirited debates about blood quantum are distractions, while the more critical issue of land grabbing threatens First Nations' disappearance in a few generations through high marrying out rates. Indigenous women were singled out for this brand of recognition. As a result, they carry more of the burden of this issue. Alderville has a 94% marrying-out rate, with larger First Nations, like Six Nations, lower at 80.5% (Wayne Beaver, 2017). Marrying non-status partners is disproportionately high and will result in declining numbers of status members. Consequently, Alderville is projected to have its last status member born in 2037 (Beaver, 2017). This statistic was driven by two studies referenced by former Alderville band counsellor, Wayne Beaver, a passionate advocate of the status issue. In recent years, eligibility criteria, from recent court victories on status eligibility, has increased band numbers (Stonefish & Bellegarde, 2016) and will likely push this date favorably in the right direction. However, membership eligibility remains driven by policies from the Indian Act. Though the 2037 projected date will likely be delayed, there will always be an anticipated disappearance date of status members when crown land returns to the state.

Simpson (2008) shared the views of an Elder on the issue of mixed-blood people. Because they naturally straddle two worlds, the Elder stated that 'mixed-blood' people must "choose and commit to only one path, and that choosing a middle road results in the destruction of oneself" (Simpson, 2008, p. 73). It is a sobering thought about choosing one path; it challenges the divergent tensions manufactured by colonial domination. Manulani Meyer's words, while meeting with Trent University graduates in 2019, are helpful for all of us damaged by identity politics: she said, "identity politics only get you to the door; once there, you must make the decision to step inside" (Meyer, 2019). This quote highlights the importance of moving beyond identity politics and stepping into the role of autonomous individuals. Additionally, it references the conscious choice one makes to move beyond colonialist positions that can defeat us before we have begun.

2.10.7 Refusal

The deliberate act of turning away is an act that outright rejects any recognition conferred to Indigenous people by settlers. This refusal opens the door for Indigenous people to turn towards their own

Indigenous systems (Simpson A., 2014; Simpson L, 2017; Coulthard, 2014). Refusing to validate colonial systems removes their power. From the perspective of an Anishinaabe woman, L. Simpson (2017, pp 58-61) shares a natural story about refusal. In the story, the Hoof Nation has grown weary of human beings' thoughtless behaviour and decides to reject human contact. Without notice, they simply leave. It is a belief shared among Indigenous people that our lack of stewardship leads to rejection from the natural world as a natural consequence. Rejection is a profoundly troubling notion among Indigenous people whose interactions are predicated on mutual interdependence. For the natural world to reject us means we have failed to be responsible in our kinships. I understand this metaphor to be a cautionary tale about responsible conduct. It is this way with the current state of our environment. As human beings walking this earth, we have not demonstrated responsible care. In our brisk march towards progress and material consumption, we have taken a path towards our own demise, which impacts non-human life forms. As the environment responds, we feel the contours of its refusal and begin to experience our limits. Respect is foundational to healthy conduct and the basis of Indigenous knowledge systems. Outward rejection of any relationship represents profound failure.

Our methods toward resurgence involve visioning and dreaming. It is how the individual unlocks knowledge gleaned from the spiritual world. Spiritual knowledge finds its way into artistic inspiration and the expressions and knowing which touch us deeply, giving beauty and depth of understanding to our human existence. It is not passing fancy for Indigenous people; we know its truth. Simpson (2011) shares, "the act of visioning for Nishnaabeg people is a powerful act of resurgence, because these visions create Shki-kiin, new world" (p. 146). Dreams are valued because inspiration is revealed through the dreamworld; it guides us to consider a path we have not yet traveled. Shawanda (2020) highlights, "Gzhe Mnidoo ensured if we ever forgot our way that the spirits could always access us through dreams" (p. 39). This belief that we are tethered to the spiritual world aligns us with knowledge production oriented from our systems, something not widely experienced in Western systems.

Additionally, *Land is Pedagogy; Nishinaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation*, L. Simpson (2014) presents an idea that Anishinaabeg intelligence requires integration into transformational spaces – we simply must consider our teachings when we develop learning spaces. In her combined texts, Smith (2012, 2021) provides 45 possible Indigenous projects to explore based on their potential to revitalize communities. In the 2021 3rd Edition, project 18, entitled "Listening to, feeling and learning from the land," is specific to land-driven community resurgence projects; Smith reiterates, "the land and its waters are integral to many Indigenous philosophies and identities" (p. 206). Moreover, Smith (2021) asks an enlightening question: "How does a modern colonial-based society learn to listen to the land and what are the process through which the land can have a constitutional voice in decision making?" (p. 206). It is an important question that requires us to return to our pared-down essence before understanding ourselves in a modern context; our current existence is wrapped up in the trappings of capitalism. The question is about prioritizing the land and treating it with the same reverence and dignity as a person. For Anishinaabeg, we regard the environment and all its living essence as among our relations.

Social Memories; Steps to Sociology of the Past (Zerubavel, 1996) references how land holds memories. He likens the land to mimicking mnemonic devices, which immediately function as reference points for shared social memories. Individuals are collectively positioned in their traditional landscape and knowledge passes from one person to another, from generation to generation in order "to allow future generations mnemonic access to their collective past" (p. 292).

Similarly, *Wisdom Sits in Places,* by Basso (1996) shares understanding of the interwoven nature of place and spirit. He writes, "when places are actively sensed, the physical landscape becomes wedded to the landscape of the mind, to the roving imagination, and where the latter may lead is anyone's guess" (p. 107). The land holds stories and memories that are transmitted from shared storytelling. As many Indigenous people are not living within reach of their communities, association with land is complicated and requires a reimagining of connections. However, as a Native person raised in the fringes of urban spaces, I refuse to accept this as an inevitable outcome. I would rather think that knowledge is still there,

waiting for us, our retuning; the stories are waiting- we just have to open our ears and hearts. It is as Kent Monkman shared in his recent ROM 2022 art installation entitled "The Land*,*" with the following vignette:

> Our stories that carry knowledge-are as old as the land itself. Many come from the time when all beings were as fluid and dazzling as I am still. Our ways of knowing were carved into the rock. They are still there for those who know how to read them. (Royal Ontario Museum, 2022)

Our knowledges are simultaneously old and current; they are here, but over there; they are within us and the landscape; they are not forgotten; they are within reach of our active remembering. (Deloria, 1999) reiterates the idea that Indigenous peoples think generationally: "thus generations, not decades, were the measure of human life" (p. 57). For him, there is a continuity of thinking that flows through people, not an elaborate quantity of disconnected, distilled knowledge applicable to everyone.

Knowledge is highly relational, localized, and experiential. Meaningful access to traditional lands is not just a logistical complication for urbanely located people; it can also unite a problem shared by Indigenous people living in their lands. Driven by economic dependence, reserve lands begin to resemble urban spaces; their protection is an issue within dedicated First Nation lands. Indigenous people connected to the land raise this observation of a disconnection. Simpson (2014) suggests that Indigenous activism and connection to the land are happening in urban spaces. She reminds us to unite for a common purpose and not discount the contribution Indigenous people are making within the urban sprawl:

> We have found ways to connect to the land and our stories and to live our intelligences no matter how urban or how destroyed our homelands have become. While it is critical that we grow and nurture a generation of people that can think within the land and have tremendous knowledge and connection to aki, this doesn't have to take away from the contributions of urban Indigenous communities to our collective resurgence. Cities have become sites of tremendous activism and resistance, and artistic, cultural and linguistic revival and regeneration, and this too comes from the land. (Simpson, 2014, p. 23)

Many urban Indigenous people are traveling and on their learning paths, too. Creative energies and access to communities have led them to different paths. Still, their connection persists, and their journey parallels others within dedicated First Nation spaces.

2.10.8 Language and culture

Our language presciently locates us, yet it is often beyond access because of assimilative structures that have blotted our ability to think within the complex structure of Indigenous languages. Their embedded philosophies, located within language, are unavailable to casual use when we are essentially tourists passing through. Though there have been attempts in the provincial system to include Indigenous language curricula, they are struggling entities at odds with a system that is struggling itself. Provincial schools are challenged by mounting issues of staffing, dense curricula, and responsibilities dumped on the average teacher. Somehow, Indigenous education must fit and carve out some wedge that satisfies the needs of Indigenous peoples. Our language is natural, but the environment in which it is transplanted is not. Much of our culture does not fit neatly into the rigid boundaries of the provincial school model. L. Simpson (2014) highlights this:

> We simply cannot bring about the resurgence of our nations if we have no one that can think within the emergent networks of Nishnaabeg intelligence. We cannot bring about the kind of radical transformation we seek if we are solely reliant upon state sanctioned and state-run education systems. We cannot carry out the kind of decolonization our ancestors set in motion if we don't create a generation of land based, community-based intellectuals and cultural producers who are accountable to our nations and whose life work is concerned with the regeneration of these systems, rather than meeting the overwhelming needs of the western academic industrial complex. (p. 13)

Simpson's position is well taken. The state system is not well equipped to deal with deep decolonizing education, try as it would to say otherwise. The provincial system is inflexible, dense, and driven by different values. For Indigenous perspectives to be included, they must be stripped down, simplified into

easily digestible units, and reduced in their scope of meaning and expression. They must be hacked up and carved into an existing provincial structure, required to fit within it, the proverbial circle peg slammed into a square hole.

Author Audra Simpson (2014), in *Mohawk Interruptus*, rails against colonial oppression, which has interrupted Indigenous individual and collective sense of being. Settler colonialism, she argues, has pitted us against each other within our communities. Those who chose to resist, to accept the struggle, "find themselves in a 'nested' form of sovereignty and in politics of refusal" (p. 12). Factions within communities result from heterogeneous positions. Our sense of belonging within Indigenous communities is influenced by many factors which may define group belonging. Do we identify as on-reserve, or off-reserve? Status or non-status? Visibly Indigenous, or white passing? Educated or not? Christian or traditional? Gender? Sexuality? Level of affluence? A. Simpson (2014) challenges all these divisive colonial categories as ways of separating from each other that work against us. She says: "the ongoing conditions of settler colonialism [that] have forced Kahnawa'kehro:non to take an offensive position not just against the settler nation, but in some ways against themselves" (Simpson, A., 2014, p. 12). Within this context, the very notion of nationhood is challenged. Indigenous peoples are 'members' by assimilative proxy and others not, given to disqualifiers of being too white, too watered down, just not 'Indian enough.' Still, they are someone's auntie, cousin, child, or parent. They are relations, members of our complex communities impacted by colonial policies beyond our control - policies that have resulted in a fracture from within, which was a mandate of the Indian Act. A. Simpson (2014) asks us to consider a deeper philosophical question: "who are we now; who shall we be in the future?" (p. 181). The question assumes that we have not disappeared, though there is an implication we might. As we turn away and look to the future, our work is cut out for us. How do we rebuild from colonial influences that have impacted our communities?

2.10.9 Nuanced approach or the "and" approach

The thrust of the Indian Act, an assimilative arm of the colonial state of Canada, has worked hard to divide Indigenous communities from within. To be born Native is to be born political. There are so many

ways we have become divided, schisms built in every direction: status/non-status, on-reserve/off-reserve, religious/traditional, male/female, educated/not educated in the conventional Western sense, connected to the land/urban, language speakers/non-speakers, employed by the band/unemployed, and then clan and family affiliations. Our divisions make it difficult to imagine a community with purposeful direction. With a view toward community-driven projects, it is essential to reflect on community needs and their investment and commitment to potential projects.

Within Indigenous communities, polemical debates are customary. Resurgence and reconciliation threads appear concurrently within Indigenous communities. The authors of *Resurgence and Reconciliation; Indigenous-Settler Relations and Earth Teachings* agree with this, stating:

> Some practitioners of resurgence refuse and reject reconciliation-based relationships between settler and Indigenous peoples, claiming they are assimilative or colonizing. Others, including many Indigenous people, feel a more nuanced approach is required. They strive to live more holistically and navigate the tensions they experience in creative ways. They are uncomfortable with dramatically turning away from their neighbours. (Ash, Burrows & Tully, 2018, p. 4)

Rejecting our neighbours may seem too radical for some Indigenous people. Some may opt for what the authors call a more nuanced approach, or what my colleague, Dr. Lynne Davis, and I came to call the "and" approach. Not one or the other, reconciliation or resurgence – but both. This approach seeks to do the impossible: to have it both ways. The nuanced approach finds rejection difficult, partly because it is not in our Anishinaabe way to reject; turning away might include turning away from not only our neighbours, but also our families. Some members are highly invested in reconciliation efforts and live among others in a small community interested in resurgence. In small First Nations communities that are built on the ideal of healthy, functioning relationships, creating more tensions in already stretched associations is presumed to be better off avoided. They may not lead us towards goals that will gather momentum that galvanize communities to collective action. Additionally, our colonized experience marks us in ways that the existence of mixed cultures complicates our communities, to which Bell (2006) concurs:

> Presently, my goal is not to return in entirety to Anishinaabe ways. As Anishinaabe people, we have no choice but to move forward in a society of mixed cultures. Our survival as a people depends on our ability to move forward in a Western-European society while maintaining the tenets of our culture. This requires the ability to draw the traditions of the Anishnaabe culture up into the present with a view to the future. (p. 13)

When exploring the significant contribution of relevant readings, it was essential to consider how they could support the overall findings generated from the study. The results from sections four, five, and six span themes of racism and disengagement with formal education. Exploring them through a critical Indigenous /Anishinaabe lens was necessary. It provides context for significant issues of reconciliation and resurgence and how they are practically experienced daily. The following section deals with the study's development process to achieve that result.

Part 3: Learning How to Grow Sweetgrass

Figure 6 - My Struggling Sweetgrass Bed, photos taken from of garden from 2020-2022

My learning about sweetgrass is girded by understanding its importance as an Anishinaabe kwe, coming into her knowing. I am sure I had seen them before when I was younger, but I was so urbanized that I had no context. What I knew about Indigenous culture what limited to what was shown to me by non-Indigenous people, either on television or in education. They were all stereotypes. Indeed, nothing specific or accurate to the people from my mother's First Nation, Kipawa. My grandparents' dream began by pursuing a better life for their children. They packed up their growing family and left Kipawa for good, leaving it behind, along with their Algonquin language and culture. First, there were matters of employment, and then there were those less-than-promising realities about reserve life they hoped to escape. They had a large brood and many mouths to feed. That is our urban story of how we ended up in fringe areas of North Bay.

I had many typical Western urban experiences, but none spoke to me as an Indigenous person. Being white-passing, it was almost as though I wasn't Indigenous. Almost. Somehow, it is curious how some things stick, and others fall away. No matter my Western education, I always felt like a circle that couldn't be shaped into a square. The older I grew, the less willing I was motivated to fit in. Eventually, I knew

something was missing after more Western education, even after becoming a teacher. So, I began my long journey of learning. It wasn't until I started the Master of Education program at Queens University that I truly began to question what I had learned in the educational system. My children were growing up, and I was entering a midlife crisis. I realized that I felt more at ease, more myself, becoming an Anishinaabe kwe, in my home area of Alderville First Nation. I was determined to relearn and challenge what I thought I knew. Around this time, my husband was diagnosed with stage three cancer; the change was inevitable all the way around. I eventually finished the Master's Program and committed to pursuing a new direction. Working towards understanding Indigenous knowledge was more intentional, but I had to find my way. For me, it is about a connection to the land. I began to garden and learned about my Indigeneity in tandem.

The first year that I planted sweetgrass, it was an abysmal failure. My methodology was learning on the go with very little practical knowledge. I was given a plant, dug a spot, and worked the plant into the hole with little preparation. Predictably, there was no success. The next year, I consulted with a few members and found my soil dense and intolerable for sweetgrass. I have clay-like soil, and drainage was thought to be the culprit, so I watered often. But, again, the sweetgrass did not take. I consulted again and guessed I might have planted too late. Each time I moved the plant's location, they failed to return. It was discouraging, and I wondered if I would ever get it right.

The following year, the 2021 pandemic year, I was even more determined. An Anishinaabe kwe from Hiawatha suggested that I add sand to loosen the compact nature of the soil. We met, and she shared many interesting stories about sweetgrass. She concluded that the soil was a problem and suggested I 'babied' it too much with all the frequent watering. "It needs care," she said, "but too much doesn't let it do its own work." She also shared, "be a little rough with the plant, not too much, enough to coax root development... And don't forget to lay your tobacco down, your good intentions. Visit and encourage it. That will work." I did all these things and planted it in a new location. I laid my tobacco down, asked for partnership, limited the watering, and incorporated sand. And I talked to the plant when no one was looking. "My, you're a pretty thing, that spectacular green that you are wearing today!" chuckling to myself.

And what do you know? It thrived. Prolifically. I was delighted, and so was the plant. I did not take any sweetgrass that first successful year because I was told that I should let the plant establish itself.

In the spring of 2022, the plant showed signs of returning. Great! Unfortunately, the story ends on a sad note, and I experienced another setback. Our 50+-year-old well dried up, and our aging septic system had to be dug out simultaneously. The plant was not spared as the crew came in and tore up the yard. The path was chosen: water and waste disposal or the plant. I tried to rescue a small patch, but it did not make it when I wanted to re-integrate it into the garden. I guess I am still on my learning path of growing sweetgrass. However, I have learned enough to taste success and just enough to invigorate me to try again.

This experience has taught me that the journey is as important as the goal. As I tried new methods, I talked with many people and heard about their attempts and what they had learned about sweetgrass. I heard interesting stories and have improved my understanding of other things due to sitting and talking with people willing to share a little about themselves. At the same time, I was developing a relationship with sweetgrass. Each attempt was not a defeat because every try brought me closer to my goal of growing sweetgrass. I have approached my study the same way. As I developed the question for this study, I met many people, some academic and some not. I discovered, as hard as it was to accept, that some ideas would not work, and though I felt like giving up, I didn't. It's hard to get anything right on that first try. I didn't have "beginner's luck" either growing sweetgrass or developing a research question. There was much to learn regarding the methodology: what knowledge could help me and what methods to use. It has been a journey that requires me to start over successively, but it will not be starting from scratch. Instead, I have developed, over time, a good understanding of an appropriate methodology and selected methods. For this study, I know that my relationship with sweetgrass parallels my growing understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing. It requires that I be patient with myself as I unlearn and relearn many years of entrenched education.

3.1 Epistemological framework

As the researcher, the process is front-ended by my attitude, beliefs, and values. As such, I defer to Canadian Cree scholar Shawn Wilson's understanding of ontologies, epistemologies, methodologies, and axiologies shared in his foundational text, *Research is Ceremony*. Ontology, he shares, is derived from how we come to know what is real, based on a set of individual beliefs. Integrating knowledge involves reflexively understanding about how we have come to know; it informs our personal choices about understanding what is real, and it depends "upon how your thinking works and how you know the world around you" (Wilson, 2008, p. 33). Ontology prefaces methodological choices aligned with researcher values and research positioning. Since I am developing research that has value for the Alderville First Nation community, I have intentionally incorporated Anishinaabe ways of understanding.

Indigenous Research; Theories, Practices, and Relationships (McGregor et al., 2018) offers how Indigenous research differs significantly from Western approaches since it "prioritizes the aspirations, needs, and values of Indigenous peoples and knowledges" (p.1). Pathways are many, depending on the people. Indigenous research approaches can be layered, developed in combination, and transformative to suit the community's needs. Indigenous-oriented research projects are not dependent on colonial structures; they reflect cultures that existed long before colonialism. These knowledge systems are often connected to a deep understanding of the land.

Additionally, they acknowledge the wealth of lived experience and provide space for unlearning and relearning apart from colonial interference. Knowledge pursued within Indigenous communities is purposeful, generational, and aligned to the community's goals for sovereignty; it is *about* Indigenous people, done *by* Indigenous people, and *for* Indigenous people.

Indigenous research supports specific Indigenous worldviews, such as the Anishinaabeg's understanding of the "good life" or "Mino Bimaadiziwin" (Bell, 2013; Settee, 2013; McGregor et al, 2018). Consequently, Indigenous research design and practice have undergone seismic shifts. For example, Nicole Bell (2006) conceived a research design for her Ph.D. dissertation using the Medicine Wheel that was

integrated into all parts of the thesis. Others have similarly woven in meaningful Indigenous frameworks and motifs to structure their research. Mine will explore the sweetgrass braid. Though I am not the first to use this culturally significant symbol for developing research,[14] I have selected it carefully, given its importance to me, the researcher. Additionally, the Sweetgrass Braid's significance within Indigenous circles is well understood, and it is used as a theoretical framework for community research.[15] Like the Medicine Wheel, the Sweetgrass Braid is in danger of being misappropriated by people not connected to Indigenous culture. I am deeply interested in their intuitive value in connecting Anishinaabe philosophy visually and concretely.

Selecting the Sweetgrass Braid as a framework was intuitive and natural - I habitually think in iterations of threes. To be sure, it breaks up the tendency to think in terms of binaries. In my gardening experience, the power of threes lives on: for every tree, a permaculturalist intentionally creates an understory of three shrubs varieties and nine plants positioned strategically to form the herbaceous layer. Designers with an eye for aesthetics replicate the 'rule of threes' that offer more appealing lines of 3-dimensional arrangements. Within engineering, the triangle is considered the most robust geometric shape. If positioned carefully, it can reposition weight across stress joints. The tipi is an example of such a construction. The covered tipi also mirrors the skirt of our mothers, for all their strength, beauty, and care. The braid itself is a simultaneously simple, yet complex structure. Used for thousands of years by multiple cultures, the torc of a well-crafted braid produces a synergistic effect stronger than the sum of its parts.

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[14] Others have used the sweetgrass braid metaphor for research since its evocatively illustrates integration and confluences of sections that fit together to create a complete body of work. This is illustrated by, but not limited to, the following researchers: Diane Andrea Hill (2021) *Teach Me About Your Garden*, Master of Education, University of Toronto; Joey-Lynn Wabie (2017) *Sweetgrass Stories*, PhD, Laurentian University; Melanie Manitowabi (2017) Master of Education, Queen's University *Examining the integration of Aboriginal cultural content in elementary school curriculum in a First Nation in mid-northern Ontario* and Karlee Dawn Fellner (2016) *Returning to our Medicines*, PhD University of British Columbia.

[15] The Sweetgrass braid is used as a framework for Indigenous programs such as: 'Finishing the Braid' 2022 Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) "Restoring and Revitalizing Indigenous Knowledge through Finishing the Braid (community resurgence), Ryerson 2022 (U of MTU) Framework for Indigenizing Graduate Studies, York University, Indigenous Frameworks for Time Management U of T (2023), The Sweetgrass Series, and the University of Manitoba (n.d.) Sweetgrass Teaching Bundle, using the framework in the Centre for Advancement of Teaching and Learning.

However, there is a caveat: inconsistent, poorly woven braids can produce stress in certain areas, which makes them vulnerable to breakage.

While the braid is significant, combined with sweetgrass, it has deeper contextual meaning for Anishinaabe communities. Sweetgrass, on its own, has distinctive value. Within the Anishinaabe Creation story, it appears early when Original Man first walked the earth (Benton-Banai, 1988). Being the first plant to grow on Mother Earth, it is revered as her hair and braided lovingly as that of our mother's hair. Sweetgrass strands are representative of seven generations of ancestors, the Seven Grandfather Teachings (our behavioural protocols for daily living), and seven unborn generations to come. Our teachings remind us that what we do in the present has an impact and is linked generationally across time. Combined with sweetgrass in a woven braid form, the synergy of threes is further symbolic of conflated mind, body, and spirit entities, the overlapping of past, present, and future temporalities, and the interconnectedness of human feeling, thinking, and doing of human experiences.

For this study, Alderville members were asked questions that explored their experiences with education, their views on education, and their thoughts about the future of education for Alderville youth. I intentionally selected these three areas to form the braid for this study. In each selection of this dissertation, I found myself extending the iteration of threes and thinking about how selections wove together.

For this research, I have considered the impact of relationality, the power of lived experiences, and how Indigenous culture is threaded across generations. As Indigenous people, our experience with colonialism has been harsh and remains ongoing. Often undoing our colonial experience means decolonizing ourselves, starting at the one site where we can affect change. For me, that has been critical because my colonial thinking ran deep. I was an adult before I knew what residential schools were, and a much older adult when I learned that my grandmother had been a student in one of them. Such things were not discussed in our home. Still, it explained many things, what I thought were strange peccadillos of my grandmother. She never left the house without being fastidious in her appearance and never

unaccompanied. She had what seemed like an irrational fear of people looking at her. Being young, we scoffed at this and wrote it off as granny "being granny." We had yet to fully appreciate the devaluing of our culture and racist tones brushed liberally, especially in educational spaces. We were oblivious until we learned better. We knew we were First Nation people, but others defined us. The education I received was standard provincial fare, nothing that exciting, and certainly nothing that reflected Indigenous perspectives in any meaningful way.

When I moved to Alderville over 35 years ago, I began my education by knowing more about my Indigenous self. Shortly after moving, I applied to transfer my status membership from my mother's First Nation, Kipawa. When my mother came to visit, I noticed that she was immediately comfortable and soon embraced by some older members. Their generosity still moves me. During the past 20 years, while employed as a community educator, I learned about different Anishinaabe perspectives. The process, therefore, of unlearning and relearning, began. My beliefs, at their core, were shattered. The methodology for my learning changed and what I learned was more profound, more personally applicable.

While employed at Alderville First Nation, I began a Master of Education. There, I serendipitously dipped my toe into an Indigenous methodology. The topic 'methodology and method' leaned heavily on Indigenous ways of knowing. I was exploring the experiences of Indigenous Canadian women impacted by the Indian Act, and I was writing in the form of storytelling. Worried that I might not meet the rigor of a Master's program, I framed my methodology from the field of narrative analysis, still very much within Western influence. Though I intuitively gravitated to Indigenous research design, I still lacked the vocabulary and understanding. I clung to safer, more widely accepted terms like "ethnography" and "narrative analysis." If I had paid more attention, I might have acquired deeper insight from Linda Smith's (2012) seminal text *Decolonizing Methodologies*. She discusses the growth of Indigenous research to include "reframing" and "naming." I was within the tradition of Indigenous research; I was getting there and didn't know it. Still, and despite this, my views were very much under construction. I was learning about Indigenous ways of understanding. I discovered that I was changing as I unlearned decades of

Western influence and relearned something that spoke more viscerally to my Indigenous self. I ended the program with the degree in hand and Wilson's (2008) oft-quoted phrase in my head: "if research doesn't change you as a person, then you aren't doing it right" (p. 83).

In 2017, I entered the Indigenous Ph.D. program at Trent University and was immediately influenced by the plethora of Indigenous critical thinkers who further impacted my research approach. They brought with them new approaches and shaped the arc of my understanding differently. Smith (2012) discusses how Indigenous research differs. Some projects, she shares, have arisen from other methodologies and "invite multi-disciplinary research approaches" (p. 143). Further, she adds, "Indigenous methodologies are often a mix of existing methodological approaches and Indigenous practices" (p.144). Smith's approach creates room to explore both simultaneously, by understanding that both are possible. The approach to my study is situated well within Smith's 25 Indigenous projects, which include a mix of Indigenous research and Indigenous storytelling.

It is critical that "the process" of research is respectfully conceptualized, especially in Indigenous communities where healing coincides. Smith (2012) notes that even Indigenous researchers should be self-aware of their potential outsider orientation within their study. It requires that this study is developed alongside community interests. As Smith (2012) advises, an insider must take care to not become the 'official insider voice,' which is another way of silencing or 'othering' multiple voices (p. 140). True to Indigenous research, this study will include members' experiences in the educational system. Their "remembering" gives the reader a glimpse of what it was like to be an Indigenous student in Western education (Smith, p. 147).

3.2 Storytelling

> *All that we are is story. From the moment we are born to the time we continue on our spirit journey, we are involved in the creation of the story of our time here. It is what we arrive with. It is what we leave behind. We are not the things we accumulate. We are not the things we deem important. We are story. All of us. What comes to matter then is the creation of the best possible story we can*

while we're here; you, me, us, together. When we can do that and we take the time to share those stories with each other, we get bigger inside, we see each other, we recognize our kinship- we change the world, one story at a time…(Wagamese, 2014)

This is one of the poetic jewels Richard Wagamese shared freely on his Facebook page. He was a born, prolific storyteller who viscerally understood the power of a good personal story. Richard often shared vignettes of wisdom about the enigmatic capacity of stories to connect disparate people. This quote has tagged along in my educational journey, and here it is again in my Ph.D. dissertation, deepening in scope and understanding each time I reflect on Wagamese's message. His commitment to story informs my thinking; it has been friendly counsel about the value of experiences. It is hopeful. It reminds me of the power of stories to change minds and make the world a little better, "one story at a time."

3.3 Knowledge

Kovach (2009) acknowledges experiences are relevant and can form primary knowledge through deep understanding. Life experiences of the oppressed can revise the colonial narrative since it challenges and turns our focus to the other side, the previously untold part – a telling from a different personal perspective. They are contradictory versions that acknowledge the uncertainty of established narratives long passed into 'truths.' We question previous 'truths' and begin to see a "shifting boundary between what we call history and what we call myth" (Cruikshank, 1990, p. x). Therefore, we need to acknowledge others experiences to offer an alternative version of how we got to where we are.

Establishing a collaborative environment is essential for relationship building and knowledge transfer. *Indigenous Storywork* by Archibald (2008) confirms "the communal principle of storytelling implies that a listener is or becomes a member of the community" (p. 26). Stories fortify us and accompany us on our journey as we discover who we are. Stories can reach divided hearts; Graveline (1998) agrees: "as the story unfolds, a rapport develops between the storyteller and listeners" (p.169).

3.4 Witnessing

Research within Relations of Violence: Witnessing as Methodology (Hunt, 2018) likens sharing personal stories to witnessing. Bearing witness is not something done exclusively with our eyes; it is also

viscerally felt, a knowing that comes from sharing experiences. Narratives can heal; they are as rich and billowy as smudge medicine as it settles over our senses. They provide clarity and understanding from a different context. Knowing should move us towards action. Charnley (1990) equates personal writing to activism because "on paper we can confront the enemy … We can address someone who is simply too powerful to confront in person. (p. 18). As Indigenous people turn their attention to their communities, they are less dissuaded by powerful colonial systems and are receptive to tides of activism. Walters (2008) further elaborates: "When silence eventually moves us to speak, we know the power of silence and our own words. Remember both, we are told" (as cited in Hulan & Eigenbrod, 2008, p. 145). When we are moved to speak, our existence is noted. Narratives about our peoples' journey are good stories for our youth to carry. When we walk with the strength of our community, we walk taller. I imagine Alderville members' experiences within this writing are an effort to "write back" (Hulan & Eigenbrod, 2008, p.141), to reduce the scope of the unknown. The powerful adversary is the system of education, and over the years, Alderville has grown to challenge it.

Blaeser's (2013) *Wild Rice Rights* parallels the return of Anishinaabeg stories to reseeded manomin beds. Like regenerated wild rice, the people are reseeded into the land in their definition (as cited in Doerfler, 2013, p. 241). From this understanding, stories from the oppressed are acts of resistance. The stories are more than collections of experiences on paper; they are also medicine for the peoples' continued struggle. Armed with our experiences, Anishinaabe intelligence, and responsibilities, we prepare to meet the needs of our people.

3.5 Heart knowledge

Life experiences follow an Indigenous qualitative narrative method that privileges oppressed peoples' voices. The Anishinaabemowin word for truth, "Debwewin," acknowledges a connection to the word ode,"heart." Heart and truth knowledge are intertwined both in definition and understanding. Alderville members shared their stories bravely, in trust. Their emotive retelling sparked tears and laughter from the reflections felt years after their experience. This required that I retell and share their stories

appropriately and to be true to their intention. The process demanded methods that ensured truth and honoured their telling of experiences from the heart.

Within Anishinaabe knowledge, a person's felt experience is valued above knowledge found in books; that is why it is called heart knowledge. It establishes a connection between the storyteller and the listener. Elder Shirley Pheasant Williams (2017) shares how Indigenous learning was achieved through two critical methods: hands-on experiential learning and insight gleaned from storytelling, where deep reflection and personal connection are shared. Personal stories are where the heart lies. Meaning is personal. When you learn about others, especially when you are moved, something curious happens; you learn to care.

Empathetic understanding can segue into moments that might be painful for the individual to relive. Bell hooks (1990) stated, "I say remember the Pain. True resistance begins with people confronting Pain, whether it's theirs or someone else's, and wanting to do something about it … Pain is a catalyst for change, for working to change" (p.215). Pain experienced from oppression forms a path toward resistance and opportunities for allies. The stories of Alderville people are good stories of inspiration for our youth in the community. Wesley-Esquimaux (2009) says it beautifully: "we need to reach down deep so that we can reach up higher" (p. 27). When our experiences are shared, they strengthen communities.

3.6 Catalysts of change

Personal stories can function as agents of change. Their purposes are ambitious and persuasive. In a profound sense, our stories have ensured our survival and are here, ready to walk with us. Stories about personal oppression are an appeal for justice in moments of empathy. Stories and experiences of the disenfranchised can heal not only the storytellers but may inspire healing of our country. We are on the precipice of something new by listening to these stories and coming to an understanding. Silenced voices serve a specific agenda; Jeannette Armstrong advises, "these are voices that have been kept silent and hidden, and now is the time for them to be heard again" (as cited in Hulan & Eigenbrod, 2008, p.146).

Including Alderville members' experiences was critical in shaping the reader's understanding of this Anishinaabe community and the impact of education. You might be a non-Native teacher, dedicated to moving your understanding of Indigenous people further, or perhaps an Alderville member interested in holding onto Anishinaabemowin from within the community. Regardless, and despite your context, the reflections and stories shared by members in this study are a call to action within and beyond Alderville.

Jo-Ann Archibald (2008) refers to "squelqwel" stories that describe a person's lived experience, and they are "true stories" that reflect an authentic interpretation of their lives (p. 84). Similarly, Simpson (2011) discusses Anishinaabeg understanding of personal Dibaajimowinan stories as a form of theorical knowledge since " [e]very Nishnaabeg has our own personal stories or narratives that communicate [our] personal truth, learning histories, and insights" (p. 40). Our experiences are a form of knowledge, apart from sacred knowledge found in "aadizookaan" narratives which carry sacred knowledge about creation and legends. It is a decolonizing methodology which privileges our personal learning as valuable knowledge. Graveline (1998) shares the view that Indigenous peoples need to have opportunities to tell their stories. She argues: "our story has been told by the colonizer; it is one version of reality that has been widely accepted as knowledge" (p. 118). Narratives like the ones in this study, challenge accepted Western views. They are powerful because their goals are simple – to tell the other side of the story. Cruikshank (1998) appreciates the value of stories and the storytellers, noted when she says, "an enduring value of informal storytelling is its power to subvert official orthodoxies and to challenge conventional ways of thinking…" (p. xiii).

Narrated lives to add a layer of meaning and context to historical narratives about us but not by us. Within this study, Alderville's storied lives provide meaning and context to educational experiences that are compelling because they change the orientation of the story to reflect the experiences of the people who have lived through the history. Jo-Ann Episkenew (2009) likens the growing body of Indigenous voices as having the "ability to shape history, politics and public policy" (p. 186). The encouraging words of one residential school survivor is hopeful about the relation-building power of personal stories: "When we

make personal what we teach, we touch people in a different and more profound way" (Crow Creator Collective, 2019).

3.7 Multiplicity

Storying Ourselves into Life, by Sinclair (2013), discusses the living nature of stories and their ability to tell simultaneous multiple truths. Moreover, in doing so, Sinclair (2013) highlights, "the story is relative to other truths, always changing and known according to memory and ongoing experience, it is an ongoing story told in moments of subjectivity and context" (as cited in Doerfler, p. 91). It allows, without judgment, multiple realities and perspectives found in one community. As I gathered narratives from members, differing perspectives were evident, and many truths were shared. What this ultimately signifies is that there is no one homogenous way of perceiving Alderville.

3.8 Caution of representing stories

There is a constant dance between talk and text, a proverbial challenge to committing experiences to the page. Shawn Wilson (2008) discusses the dilemma of putting stories to print: "It is like writing bread on the paper and eating the paper instead of having the bread" (p. 103). After all, the Westernized way has elevated the importance of the written word over the spoken one. It is perfectly natural to resist the structures of academia because it houses the very production of ideas, shapes what becomes knowledge, then creates rigid pathways for dissemination.

According to Michele Grossman, narratives about life experiences revise the colonial narrative because it turns our focus to the other side (as cited in Hulan & Eigenbrod, 2008, p. 114). It is a hybrid where speaking and writing converge, form and content conjoin, and history ceases to be an inaccessible artifact. I could have excised myself personally and taken up space as a third-party dispassionate observer. I have not, cannot. Where telling leaves off, duty begins. Member reflections are not superfluous vignettes; they are relevant for us to hear. They seize our emotions and may even enlighten our spirit, as we are edified by the wisdom of a life lived. Storytelling is very much from Indigenous tradition and is appropriate to develop research using it as methodology, method, and meaning-making.

Wesley-Esquimaux (2009) offers that, “instead of telling only the stories about trauma and victimization and pain, let’s talk about our survival and our undeniable strengths.” (p. 30). This is another way of seeing the power of Indigenous stories. All too often, trauma becomes the narrative from which Native people are viewed, rather than their incredible ability to thrive in the face of adversity. This study acknowledges survivance and the legacy of storied lives, which are the ultimate gift from the participants of this community research. Stories about resilience and strength have a great capacity to teach and move readers toward transformative understanding. They are great healing for the people who lived through them, and they are great healing for our community. However, that too, is limited. To be most transformative, they must move into the territory of action.

3.9 Anishinaabe methodology: braiding sweetgrass

Sweetgrass is evocatively present throughout Anishinaabe culture. Called “wiingaash” in Anishinaabemowin, the word also harkens to “wiinsis” meaning hair (Williams, 2017, p. 72; Williams, 1996, p. 241). It is smooth and glossy to the touch and is often described as the hair of Mother Earth, a gift from the creator. Wiingaash is considered one of the four essential medicines represented by the northern quadrant in the Medicine Wheel. It is grown in protected areas, then picked, dried, and assembled into braids for gift-giving. Elders remind us that our medicines should not be abused or used in the market trade.

I have selected the Anishinaabe sweetgrass braid as a theoretical framework for its multiplicity in understanding connecting threads of knowledge. How one tends to sweetgrass metaphorically harkens to methodological choices I have made within this study. The sweetgrass braid is constructed from three equal sections woven together. All three strands are interconnected and interrelated. When assembled, the braid becomes something autonomous and packed with meaning. Creating a sweetgrass braid harkens to the Anishinaabeg harvesting sweetgrass and the preparation required to make beautiful medicine for the people, and the iteration of the braid works with a temporal understanding of time.

Sweetgrass braiding works well as a theoretical framework for my study (weaving, overlapping, strengthening). It references participant experiences and perspectives layered in time: their past experiences are connected to feeling; present perspectives are related to thinking; and visioning for the future integrates the spiritual and dreamed possibilities—past, present, and future. I have been selective from the data, and have focused on exploring themes that were most common, working to combine themes to operate within three strands. Another researcher might have cast their lens differently and gone in another direction.

Sweetgrass teachings beautifully express the unity of mind, body, and spirit and how they overlap with past, present, and future dimensions. In Alderville, known patches that are routinely visited by women of the community still exist. For this sweetgrass study, I am driven by the powerful contribution of Leanne Simpson, a privilege to include in this study. Also, as a member of Alderville First Nation, Leanne Simpson (2017) remains committed to Anishinaabe thought. In *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance,* she discusses the nature of "Nishnaabeg brilliance – theory, methodology, story, ethics, values all enmeshed in Nishnaabeg politics and encircled by the profound influence of the world" (p. 16). Our thinking is wrapped up in what we do; we cannot separate them since Indigenous ways of being is heightened by both thought and feeling. Alderville member Rick Beaver, a dedicated biologist and internationally known artist, discussed the presence of both temporalities of heart and head in his work when he said:

> I began a reconnection**,** I would say, with art as an avocation, which has since become equally prominent in my life as science and biology. It's a response to the compression that I felt from within this Canadian society; there's a certain grace and beauty to all of that, too. (Interview excerpt, summer of 2021)

His journey of self-discovery extended beyond Western sciences to include Indigenous expression. The process is the learning, and 'the how' of grounding oneself in Anishinaabe understanding opens unexplored possibilities. Simpson (2017) adds:

> Centering ourselves in this Nishnaabeg process of living is both the instrument and the song…It became clear to me that *how* we live, *how* we organize, *how* we engage in the world – the process – not only frames the outcome, it is the transformation. The *how* changes us…*How* molds and then gives birth to the present. (p. 19)

Both Rick Beaver and Leanne Simpson share an Indigenous understanding that focuses on developing our potential as human beings. Education must seek to do this. Focusing on the result discounts holistic learning where the journey has value. Fast tracking to the end translates into seeking methods that are applicable to everyone. Indigenous knowledge is not gained through such an approach. Anishinaabe learning includes the here and now of finding meaning in the moment; Simpson (2017) highlights that the "doing produces more knowledge" (p. 20). The journey can be the transformation that leads to deep learning. Experiences can be so significant they change our perceptions of what we thought we knew. In the process of living, we are learning. My study seeks to keep learning open so that what could be discovered would unfold during the process.

3.10 Sweetgrass remembering and caring

Sweetgrass is a kind medicine that helps us understand the interwoven nature of mind, body, and spirit. It is also a kind healing medicine that honours our ability to remember. Within our creation stories, sweetgrass is the first plant to grow. It is cherished for its ability to help us remember. As Kimmerer (2013) recommends, "breathe in its scent and you start to remember things you didn't know you'd forgotten" (p. 5). Smith (2012) acknowledges that memories are powerful, but for Indigenous people, "remembering is painful because it involves remembering not just what colonization was about but what being dehumanized meant" (p. 147).

In this study, it became essential to consider the consequence of a process that has the potential to be painful. The goal was not to create an environment where members would relive painful memories. It was essential to share that members had complete autonomy over what they shared. In practical terms, the questions were shared in advance with a caveat that they did not have to answer all of them. The

questions about experiences were broad enough that members could be selective in what was shared or be as detailed as they wished. My sincere goal was to have them feel proud of the experiences that shaped them into Alderville community members. As Kimmerer (2013) suggests, as Anishinaabe people, we have a duty to pick sweetgrass because it "thrives where it is used and disappears elsewhere" (p. 165). In the same sense, the stories of Alderville First Nation have the potential to thrive when they are 'picked,' for fear they may disappear. The threatened disappearance of sweetgrass, or stories, mirrors the threatened disappearance of the Anishinaabe people.

3.11 Sweetgrass as kind medicine

Once acknowledged as a gift, sweetgrass sets into motion a set of responsibilities and should not be considered "free." Commitment follows with the exchange of gifts. A gift signals the presence of a relationship and an evolving friendship. Through kindness and caring for each other, we step more intentionally on Mother Earth as we honour our Elders and prepare a Good Life for those yet unborn. It is through kindness that we are most strong; it is through our connection that we are most responsible. This, then, is the ember that reminds us of the responsibility that each of us has to one another. We have a duty to keep the smudge burning, the ember lit, and the medicine swirling. Within the context of this study, sweetgrass represents a long-term relationship. Though this study has a determined beginning and end, my relationships that have developed before the study will continue after it. In addition, what is learned from members will have life beyond the study.

In *The Mishomis Book*, Benton-Banai (1988) recounts the journey of original man to the north where he encounters "wiingaashk," the kind medicine. Because it is considered the first plant to grow on Mother Earth, we braid it lovingly as though we are plaiting our mother's hair. Sweetgrass braids relate to healing and compassion. Like our mothers, we turn to their teachings and guidance when feeling defeated and hopeless. No matter the mistakes we've made or the bad things we've done, our mothers embrace us and offer comfort. Like her, we aspire to these heights because "sweetgrass is a teacher of healing, a symbol of kindness and compassion" (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 336).

Sweetgrass gently settles on our senses as it gracefully blows in the wind. Within the context of sweetgrass teachings, education is explored using compassion and memory. Learning should protect the student because being a learner makes one vulnerable. The teaching of humility is a gift that reminds teachers of their power. Our students begin their learning journey with a humble heart, placing faith in our ability to guide them. The teaching of humility is especially relevant to teachers since we must remember a student's vulnerability and their long journey ahead, with unknown obstacles. One contributing Alderville member, Artbaa Beaver, highlighted:

> Non-Native teachers need to be able to show empathy towards Native students because if they don't have that ability, then, they're not going to come across to instill into the Native student that sense of humility, for them to continue to work." (Interview excerpt, 2021) [16]

For Artbaa, this essential teaching was needed for teachers to develop relationships with their students. It humanizes power dynamics. As an Anishinaabe kwewag, I am aware that education, in the Western interpretation of learning, has not always been a kind medicine. Within the study, I often heard the most effective teachers were the ones who exemplified this teaching. These teachers were compassionate and took the time to notice the interests of Indigenous students and offer sincere words of encouragement. There were inspiring occasions as they shared their unique talents with students. With all the limitations of an irrelevant curriculum, the kind teacher who demonstrated genuine caring seemed most powerful for Indigenous student learning.

3.12 Sweetgrass: connections to the past, responsibility to the future

Mind, Heart, Hand: Thinking, Feeling, and Doing in Indigenous History Methodology (Lomawaima, 2017) explores how history, present realities, and future possibilities overlap with knowing, feeling, and doing during the research process. Lomawaima explores overlapping these contemporaries as she layers them with emotive senses. Through Lomawaima's framework of connecting mind and thinking, I

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[16] Artbaa Beaver, Alderville First Nation member who was involved in this study, was a strong advocate of Indigenous education. Sadly, he passed into the spirit world April 16, 2022

conceptualize Alderville members' educational experiences. When we experience knowing and learning about our past, we understand more fully the ultimate purpose of education and its legacy within Alderville First Nation. In addition, heart overlaps with feeling, which helps us connect a distant history through understanding member experience. Shared experience and 'storying' of history bring knowledge into the present, making shared knowledge accessible. As members share their narratives about educational experiences, the impact of education is felt. However, it is not enough to know about the history or feel the depth of member experiences; learning should propel us towards action. Elders teach us this. Hands overlapped with doing and feeling offer purpose to what is learned and what is felt.

Braiding sweetgrass evocatively overlaps theoretical convergences of past, present, and future. As I have learned, Anishinaabe teachings inform us that history is not linear, marching on an imaginary line of progress; rather, history overlaps, blurring the boundaries from the past to the present so that our ancestors continue to be relevant and influence us. The traditional sweetgrass braid is intentionally woven with precision. Each traditionally conceived sweetgrass braid is constructed with 21 strands: the first seven strands represent seven generations past. The next seven strands harken to our seven sacred teachings and our responsibility to one another (Vatawood, 2019). These strands connect our original instructions to the present, where positive relationships are needed for communities to function well. The last seven strands represent seven generations unborn, for whom we consider our intentions. Woven together, our teachings are carried across space and time. Rather than elevating the primary importance of the individual, Anishinaabe teaching encourages us to think in terms of a community bookended by generations.

My study considers the confluences of time within the scope of knowledge gathered. The research scope regarding education was designed to include Alderville's educational past, the experiences of current members, and thoughts about the future for coming Anishinaabeg. Our teachings require us to think beyond existing realities, and are circular, rather than constructed linearly with a birth start and death finish, focused on one individual.

Rifkin (2017) shares his idea of “backgrounding” In *Beyond Settler Time:* Indigenous experiences, he imagines, threads across time, blurring linear conceptions of past, present, and future experiences. Expressed fluidly across time, I understand him to mean we are connected to our ancestors in ways that keep them relevant in our modern experience. Defined relationships across time predispose us to be “the ancestors of future generations” (Justice, 2018, p. 113-156). If we understand this fully, we behave differently because our relationships matter. We are connected to ancestors and descendants, backward and forwards; we have to think about the ancestors we will become.

As we exist in the present, we are linked seven generations behind and seven generations forward. As such, generations continually conflate, braid, and overlap, and time collapses. Leanne Simpson (2017) explores transgenerational relationships further in her understanding of the Anishinaabemowin word “kobade” (p. 8-9). The term provides rich, evocative imagery of an intergenerational-linked chain, enduring and connected. We are a part of the chain, connected across time and space. We are complex, modern Indigenous people broadly connected to the spirit world through those who have passed and those who are yet unborn.

Connecting past, present, and future realities is represented in the sweetgrass braid. Woven too tight, sections of the braid become brittle and are in danger of breaking; braided too loose, the braid is prone to unraveling, unable to hold together. The strength of the braid is best when the tension is perfectly aligned; then, it is stronger than the sum of its strands. Like correctly braided sweetgrass, we are balanced when our minds, bodies, and spirits are in alignment. Likewise, we are stronger when we accept Elders’ guidance, and our decisions can inform future generations.

3.13 Method: In-depth conversational interviews

The method for collecting member experiences and perspectives for my study involved conducting in-depth interviews with Alderville members. There were approximately thirteen months from the research proposal approval to the conclusion of fieldwork. The global pandemic very much impacted the community during this time. Concerns within the community were from following provincial mandates, restricting

one’s movement to the bare necessities, parental issues dealing with online/in-person learning, and critical changes occurring in employment circles. COVID-19 protocols overlayed methods and changed the study in various ways. When interviews were able to be conducted, they were completed in online formats. The sweetgrass framework remained relevant, but other aspects were aligned to respect limited community contact. What followed was a two-year adaptation where my community study was developed during impactful societal shifts.

My interview framework was comprised of eight questions, designed to seek members’ experiences and perspectives regarding education. I assumed there would be a vast array of backgrounds, including on and off-reserve experiences, members’ length within the education system, and the educational system differences in which they participated. I intended to explore the variety of experiences and perspectives of Alderville members regarding education.

Before beginning the process, I asked my community partner, Melody Crowe, if a practice session could be arranged with her. This test run enabled me to interview Melody as a community member and assess the quality of questions and potential timing of the interview. During the test, I found that questions two and three were significantly similar and were combined for efficiency; therefore, seven open-ended questions remained. The test interview provided enough practice to assume the length and exploration of potential topics within the interview, which remained relatively consistent throughout. The interviews were approximately 60-90 minutes each in length. The interviews began in March 2021 and ended in September 2021, roughly within a six-month window.

When I first broached the study informally with some members, there was a lukewarm response at the beginning of the pandemic, with many opting for a deferral to better times ahead. The process was further complicated by unstable internet in our rural area. I changed providers three times, even forgoing wifi for two months when technicians were backlogged in our area due to frequent active storms, complicated by repair schedules and Covid protocols.

Being a community member is an advantage and enabled me to reach some potential participants more directly. My method for reaching out involved contacting members on Facebook through the Messenger feature, where there are a significant number of Alderville First Nation community members. During the pandemic, it has been an effective method for Alderville members to stay in touch, as it connects them to many services. Seventy-two members were contacted through Facebook. Unfortunately, some members were not keen on being interviewed online, even if they were interested in the topic. Others could not commit due to timing, scheduling issues, or conflicting responsibilities. Though more than twenty-five expressed interest in participating, their participation never came to fruition for one reason or another. As a result, I was able to secure twenty-five interviews.

If members were interested in proceeding, they shared their email addresses with a preferred time according to their schedule. Email correspondence was initiated, and a Letter of Information (Appendix B), Consent Form (Appendix C), Research Questions (Appendix A), and a private zoom link were sent through my Trent University email account. Members were asked to scan and return consent forms; alternatively, I could pick them up from private mailboxes or other mutually agreed-upon arrangements. I anticipated that this might be a barrier, and not surprisingly, most forms were not returned in either hard copy format or through email. Members appreciated that verbal consent (Appendix D) was offered as an alternative at the time of the interview.

All but one interview was conducted online via the Zoom platform. The exception was over the telephone since multiple internet users within the home residence compromised wifi bandwidth. As noted, the interviews were 60-90 minutes long, depending on the participant. However, a few went beyond 90 minutes, and a few less than 60 minutes. Surprisingly, most were within a 60-minute time frame. All interviewees agreed to be recorded, and I used the recording feature and transcription services available through Zoom.

During the interview, I practiced active listening with some notetaking. More specifically, I kept track of significant responses and looked for organic conversational flow. The questions were guides for

discussion as members shared: I had a method for circling missed questions when they went out of order, checking off responses when they were completed, and jotting down follow-up questions. These were not complete sentences, or even thoughts; there were plenty of short form bullet points, exclamation and question marks, a rudimentary set of pictographs. However, I endeavored to listen actively, to be present, and to witness uninterrupted, vividly recalled experiences. It required that I be flexible. My brief notes enabled me to follow up with any questions regarding what I heard, either for clarity or detail. After interviews were completed, I fastidiously committed to more detailed notes about reflections and observations from what was shared in the interview. Some participants were natural storytellers – a gift for me as the interviewer on a challenging digital platform like Zoom. Others responded with hesitation, and my voice was more evident in gathering deeper information.

Zoom technology offered something unexpected. With each interview, three files were created: videos, recordings, and rough transcriptions. These files became invaluable for transcription, but there was something else: interesting, it records both the interviewer and interviewee. For individuals, like myself, I was able to critique my role in the interview. On reflection, even though I thought I was fully engaged, I noted how I missed critical cues. Interview questions formed the structure of the conversation, and I observed my commitment to them, at the cost of potentially other insightful ways the conversation could have been broadened.

During these interviews, I thought about Basil Johnson's wise counsel: "Don't talk too much, don't talk too often. Don't talk too long … Don't talk about those matters that you know nothing about" (as cited in Archibald, 2008, p. 19). In other words, learn how to listen and accept the less central role of the all-knowing academic. I tried not to interrupt the flow of conversations, but this was challenging on the Zoom platform, where delayed feedback often stilted conversation with moments of talking over each other. Predictably, we dealt with frozen screens, dropped signals, and flattened voice feedback. Given these challenges, all members responded like professionals, as though we had been doing this for ages. Two interviews had to be rescheduled when the process entirely failed due to technical issues. During the

transcription phase, there were a few interviews where I noted that I was talking too much, especially when responses were short and minimal in detail. To privilege their voices and offer safe space without interference is in keeping with decolonizing research methodologies. Silence is reflective delicate space for introspection. Still, on audio feedback, I cringed, remembering Basil Johnson's wise words and my own intention not to fill the air with my voice.

3.14 Research ethics

Sharing experiences can be painful, and care must be taken to mitigate risk. This study honoured the ethical standards developed by Trent University. Trent University supports this care and, as such, a committee was established consisting of Supervisor Dr. Cathy Bruce (Vice President of Research and Innovation, Trent University), Dr. Nicole Bell (Professor in the School of Education, Trent University), Dr. Paula Sherman (Director of Chanie Wenjack School Indigenous Studies Ph.D. program, Trent University) and Elder Melody Crowe (Alderville First Nation member, First Nation Education Liaison, educator from KPDDSB, and author). This committee acknowledges the meaningful partnerships within academia and First Nation communities, ensuring that it maintains the integrity of Trent University standards and those of Alderville First Nation. This study has met the standards of two University committees (the Research Ethics Board and the Indigenous Ethics Committee) to safeguard ethical processes, especially research within First Nation communities. Moreover, an Alderville community member, Elder Melody Crowe, guided the study in terms of caring for the interests of the Alderville community, according to Anishinaabe values.

The development of the study aligns with ethical Indigenous research protocols from start to finish. Pre-study protocols involved several steps of approval. Ethical processes at Trent University require research projects to follow the 2018 Tri-Council Policy Statement of Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2) and devote significant attention to the Indigenous people of Canada in Chapter Nine. From the community perspective, researchers need to be aware of First Nations' Perspectives on Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP) and its principles for ethical research in Indigenous communities. Some communities, like Alderville, do not have formal research boards (yet). Awareness of

the principle highlights the community's autonomy and questions regarding ownership and control. Before the study began, I contacted the Chief and Council. Because of the nature of the project, it was referred to the Education Department. During the process, I met with education committee members to keep them abreast of the study. In the final Knowledge Mobilization phase, they have offered to support the study with funding for community engagement.

Field notes and all other collected data have been stored in encrypted formats on a password-protected personal laptop. Safe data transfer to university research servers has been handled according to Trent university guidelines. This study mainly used the audio versions of interviews and the Zoom transcriptions needed during the transcribing process. None of the recipients expressed interest in having audio and video versions of the discussions. However, I will keep them for five years, after which said data will be destroyed. It is my hope that there will be interest to archive these interviews for future members.

Since the conclusion of the interviews, one participant has sadly passed away. The interview was reflective of the contribution of this member to education. This will require a different approach, and I will discuss it further with family members.

3.15 Relational accountability

My approach includes an Anishinaabe code of behaviour (the Seven Sacred Teachings: Niizhwaaswi Gagiikwewin) that guides my ethical conduct within my community. Dbaadendiziwin, the teaching of humility, best exemplifies my place within the context of this research and establishes my bias, knowing my role, limitations, and abilities. It also anchors my responsibility to Alderville First Nation as I develop something of value for the community. It was not my goal to search for traumatic events. Still, it must be noted that discussing any personal experience, especially an educational one, can be painful. It was entirely within the participant's purview to continue or discontinue the research study without consequence. In that scenario, members could choose whether to include their portion within the study. However, no members elected to leave the study once they committed to participating. During the interview process,

there were a few occasions when recalling experiences became tearful. Members opted for their traditional means of comfort and openly smudged while we were online.

Relational accountability grounds this work. Cora Weber-Pillwax advises researchers in Indigenous communities to “make sure that the three R’s, Respect, Reciprocity, and Relationality, are guiding the research” (as cited in Wilson 2008, p. 58). This references Bernhardt and Kirkness (1991) earlier foundational *work First Nations and Higher Education; The Four Rs – Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity and Responsibilit*y. All authors agree in developing meaningful research based on healthy respectful relationships with Indigenous communities. Indigenous societies were built on a belief that relationships are essential to the community’s health. We need more than our eyes; we need our “three ears: two on either side of our head and the one that is in our heart” (Archibald, 2008, p. 8). Research requires that we approach our efforts with an open heart, and that we reflect the notion of relational accountability. Having reciprocity and responsibility enter the conversation holds the researcher accountable to the individuals and communities involved (Johnston, McGregor, and Restoule, 2018). The process of a dissertation is long, from developing a proposal to its defense. Interviewees and other community members aware of this dissertation journey would strike up a casual conversation about the progress of my work. This frequently happened at community events. Consequently, this informal relational accountability reminded me of my responsibilities. Approaching this type of community research requires that I accept my responsibility to be accountable to my community for the study’s progress.

3.16 Sampling selection strategy and participant pool

Within Alderville, there are many connecting and evolving circles of identity, such as family division, traditional Anishinaabe ways of being, and member spiritual affiliation. It requires that I respect the divergent views within the community. For this purpose, I am reminded of the Seven Grandfather’s teaching of Sabe: Honesty – Gwekwaadziwin. Honesty is represented by Kitchi-Sabe, the four-legged who walks on two legs. To be like Kitchi-Sabe, we need to stand tall and be proud. He understands who he is and knows how to use his gifts. To demonstrate truthfulness requires that we walk with integrity and accept the

truth. The Creator created us differently and did not make mistakes. This teaching reminds me that we are different, even within our small community, and differences must be respected.

I have lived in the community for 35 years and have been a community teacher for twenty. Being closely associated with the community, I am aware of its dynamics and, ultimately, its differences from within. It was my goal to have a complete representation of the community. That meant I sought to include members across different spectrums of experience, some aligned with traditional Anishinaabe values and others with Christianity. It was vital for me to capture an authentic representation of Alderville since my study pertains to Alderville education broadly and its future, which includes respecting Alderville's diversity. Part of the participant strategy was to elicit meaningful feedback about education and its future for Anishinaabe youth in the community.

The Anishinaabe Medicine Wheel is a helpful paradigm that enables us to understand our journey around the circle. It is foundational to understanding an individual's path through several stages, beginning in the spirit world, and ending when one returns. The Medicine Wheel is divided into four quadrants; each section has its journey. For this study, I reference the Medicine Wheel in terms of the life stages: infant, child, youth, and Elder. With the guidance of community representative Melody Crowe, who graciously supported my work, we developed a list of potential Alderville First Nation members from within the four quadrants of the Medicine Wheel. We sought to include a wide range of experiences and equal distribution of gender. Members represented on/off-reserve lived experiences, traditional/Christian beliefs, different family backgrounds, and varying levels of educational achievement. However, this study does not include members with limited connection to Alderville. We reviewed study participants according to the following criteria: 1) They had to be registered members; and 2) they had to be interested in the educational services offered for Anishinaabe youth in Alderville and the future of Alderville as a vibrant Anishinaabe Nation.

Seventeen participants identified as female, and eight were male. Geographically, eighteen were living within the First Nation at the time of the interview, and seven were dispersed between the Peterborough area, Ottawa, and one in another province. Even though some of the members interviewed

lived off-reserve, they had, at some point, resided in Alderville. Eight of the twenty-five members interviewed held college diplomas and eleven university degrees; two had graduate degrees, while one had attained a high school diploma. All members expressed a deep interest in the scope of education and its future application to the Anishinaabe people and the coming generations. Seven members identified themselves as grandparents, and nine were parents. Interestingly eight members were without either children or grandchildren but were keenly interested in the future of Alderville education. Most participants – twenty-one, specifically – identified with Anishinaabe culture and were not practicing Christians. The remaining four were Christians or practiced alternative beliefs. Children were represented by parents who were deeply invested in their learning. Anishinaabe youth within this study included youth on the cusp of adulthood, hovering up to twenty-five years of age. The largest group of participants were adults between the ages of 31-40. Some participants carried their family members' narratives, connecting one generation to the next. The senior and knowledge holder category were an interesting subsection containing diverse ages and experiences.

3.17 Tobacco protocol and gift giving

Before beginning the research, traditional protocols were observed as much as possible, given COVID-19 protocols in place at the height of the pandemic. Tobacco offering establishes a relationship moving forward. Accepting tobacco is part of the agreement to contribute and share knowledge. It is usually the first step in the process; however, the pandemic complicated it. Still, I did my best to satisfy this traditional element. Some participants noted a desire to follow this protocol, though not all, given their spiritual affiliation. Traditional tobacco was available in seed versions, tobacco ties, and cultivated plants from my garden. The traditional protocol of offering tobacco to members involved in this study varied according to circumstances. Given the situation, it was most often given with a gift basket. There was no monetary compensation for their participation in the study, but members received small gifts and bounties from my thriving garden. This is appropriate and well within the customary practice at the community level.

Practices such as gift-giving and tobacco acknowledgment are woven into relationship-building, strengthening alliances and relationships with one another.

3.18 Accuracy concerns

Within the body of this work, I used a four-part narrative process: I listened to the experiences, recorded them, transcribed the experiences, and conducted member checks for clarity and accuracy. Listening and recording coincided. We are accountable for the relationships we cultivate by continually checking in and ensuring that respect, reciprocity, and responsibility define our work. Throughout the entire scope of this project, these principles serve as a litmus test for relational accountability. Some of the narratives are included in this study and appear italicized to indicate their voices are separate from other dissertation areas. Similar narratives are grouped together thematically. The rest of the dissertation is written in an essay script.

After preparing the transcriptions according to what was shared in the interviews, these were then sent to members via email links for review as part of the member-checking process. Approximately half of the respondents returned transcriptions with revisions or corrections. At this step, I also requested permission to include some passages within the study, thereby establishing the interviewee's preferred anonymity level. Again, there were varying levels of approval and each members' wishes were respected. Members who did not respond with revisions or permission to use selected passages, with or without their names, were given a second opportunity to provide their consent. Without explicit permission, their direct quotes were not used.

This study was a significant learning experience for me about the protection of community members. Discussions about the intention of sharing at the committee level were enlightening. When members shared their initial experiences, it was with a familiar community member – me. They were generous and motivated to help me. We had kitchen table-like conversations limited to two people. However, when members were contacted at a later date to approve specific quotes, their attention to what

was written was heightened because of the purpose of sharing their words more broadly. All twenty-five participants approved their direct quotes, and most edited them.

Though interviews were recorded, participant narratives, in brevity, were summarized from transcriptions. Each interviewee possessed unique speech patterns, and with an eye for reader flow, passages were written with ellipses to avoid speech pattern repetition. Zoom transcripts were rough and required attention to punctuation and sentence construction to capture emotive meaning. Recollections were not written verbatim since I was guided by holistically capturing a deeper understanding of members' experiences by honouring "the oral conversation" (Kovach, 2009, p 14). Kovach further qualifies the importance of individual recollection and sharing in rich heartfelt conversation as having relevance to the community. She says, "the act of sharing through personal narrative, teaching story, and general conversation is a method by which each generation is accountable to the next in transmitting knowledge" (2009, p. 14). Still, I was determined to capture participants' voices and cadence, a significant challenge since the conversation is distilled to paper and pen, or in this instance, keystroke to screen. Kovach (2009) states that it is the "researcher's responsibility to ensure voice and representation" (p. 99) and to do it in a way that respects the participant but also acknowledges the demands of the reader. When members were given an opportunity to approve and revise what was written, most did, to ensure the meaning of what was shared matched their intention. It bears noting that online technology made capturing nonverbal nuances more complicated.

3.19 Practical concerns for organizing data

The number of overall members invited to participate in the study grew significantly to twenty-five from an initially planned twelve to arrive at a closer semblance of divergent perspectives within the community. Since each interview was generally in the range of sixty to ninety minutes, the output of data was massive, with multiple themes emerging. It became necessary to develop a detailed database to organize the data and have it readily accessible without 'getting lost in the weeds.' For this purpose, NVivo qualitative software was used to manage the data. Unfortunately, the software was unfamiliar, and it

became clear it was not easily intuitive after purchasing it, and training was required. Nevertheless, NVivo proved valuable in managing data thematically for practical analysis developed in the next section.

3.20 Study challenges and limitations

The first outbreak of COVID-19 was reported in Wuhan, China on December 29th, 2019 (Asare, et al, 2021; Xu et al., 2020). The global spread of this acute respiratory disease impacted everyone worldwide. Restrictions soon translated into academic research modifications and protection of members, especially in small urban communities like Alderville. The uncertainty of when normalcy would resume added to increased anxiety among the general population. Many measures were put in place to stop the spread of the deadly virus, including wearing masks, social distancing, and later, vaccinations. However, communication meant a problematic transition to online platforms for many people. In rural areas, challenges were compounded by inadequate equipment, unsuitable environments for shared online conversations, and the efficacy of wifi access. The pandemic has led to delays in the ethics stage, where methods were modified to consider personal safety. Alderville First Nation remained in a State of Emergency throughout the research study. This affected access to participants throughout the study.

1. **Sampling Concerns Regarding Education Levels:** As I invited participants to join the study, I was looking for various experiences and levels of education. Though not intentional, no participants were below high school equivalency. All but one had post-secondary experiences. However, many adult learners returned to school much later after being unsuccessful or dropping out. For deeper analysis, it would be helpful to consider the experiences of current members who had not returned and remained disengaged from the educational system.
2. **Number of participants:** The sample size for this study includes twenty-five Alderville members elected for their difference in age, gender, and life experience. It represents less than two percent of the First Nation population. However, in this qualitative interview approach, it is in the value of particular experiences, rather than the general, where this thesis lives and provides insights. Regarding its applicability for the Alderville, findings will be shared in the broader community

context through committees and community meetings to represent the First Nation fully. To be considered for its value beyond the community in a broader context, further research in other communities, particularly in education, is recommended.

3. **Youth Participation Concerns:** The study includes four members considered within the youth category but are on the cusp of adulthood. Younger members were invited to participate but did not engage in the project. This could be attributed to 'Zoom fatigue,' as Zoom was the mode of school delivery during the pandemic. The lack of younger participant members below twenty years was a serious setback. With no access to the community Youth Group, the high school First Nation Room, or After-School Program, this affected inclusion of this significant group of potential participants.
4. **Internet Concerns:** Living in a rural area during the pandemic was challenging for members. There are only a few internet providers. In addition, given many active storms, internet availability was often down, and system repairs were slow. The initial contact of participants occurred through Facebook, and not all members favour the platform, use it, or are even familiar with it.
5. **Traditional Protocols:** Tobacco is traditionally offered before establishing relationships. If not accepted, a partnership is not formed. It was a significant challenge to follow traditional protocol during a pandemic. Traditional tobacco was eventually given in seed, cured for use, or in plant variations. All participants accepted tobacco, albeit after agreeing to participate.

Part 4: Smelling Sweetgrass - The First Strand

The first time I smelt sweetgrass, I was captivated. Since then, I have tried versions of essential oils, soaps, and sprays to replicate the smell throughout my home; its aroma is earthy and sweet. Its English name is derived from 'hierochloe,' a combination of Greek and Latin words meaning holy grass, also known as Vanilla Grass, Seneca Grass, Zebrovka, Managrass, and Buffalo Grass (Sea Grant, New York, n.d.). Coumarin, the origin of its scent, is a naturally occurring aromatic some say is reminiscent of vanilla (United States Department of Agriculture, 2002). As the grass dries, the coumarin scent intensifies. Over time, though, its smell is less pronounced. However, I have been told wetting your sweetgrass braid restores its scent. Sweetgrass is highly valued and is culturally given as a gift, thereby a culturally sacred plant to the Anishinaabe people.

We relate to the ability of olfactory glands to help us connect memories to smells such as musty basements and our grandmother's choice of perfume; these two examples are relevant to me. My grandmother was known for her soft fragrance. She loved the evocative nature of perfumes but was aware of their effect on those around her. She carefully dabbed the beloved oil on her fingers, then applied it stringently to her person, thoughtful in how it reacted with those around her. You could catch a waft of its scent when you sat on her lap. Sadly, I never knew its name, but I'd recognize it today, and it would immediately transport me back to those rare moments when she and I were together. Her black purse was a treasure trove, my favourite find being her Thrill Chicklet chewing gum – a smell, uniquely its own, that sends me back to those moments when a single piece of gum was waiting to be shared.

Studies have indicated that odor exposure activates highly emotive memories, and smell accesses them more viscerally than visual or verbal cues (Glachet et al., 2019). Extending what we know about the correlation between smell and memories, Glachet et al. (2019) share in *Smell Your Memories* how smell is potent in childhood autobiographical memories of Alzheimer's patients. Sweetgrass is well known for its graceful, emotive odor, thought to help us remember. Kimmerer (2013) reminds us that as we handle sweetgrass, we breathe in its scent and begin remembering things we thought we'd forgotten (p. 5). As Alderville members shared their reflections, I metaphorically stroked sweetgrass, something we do to help activate the scent as it begins to work on our senses. This section explores Alderville members' memories of education and how they started their learning journey. Participants in the study thoughtfully shared the significance of their first teachers, often family and community members, who helped in their learning. These experiences are juxtaposed with shared memories about their educational experiences in Western systems.

4.1 The teaching of kindness

Keith Montreuil, one Alderville member interviewed for this study, shared the importance of the teaching of kindness, the teaching of caring, and how it relates to relationship building among Anishinaabe people:

I don't know that I'm living up to it yet, but I'm striving towards having that connection, that relationship, with my students, my peers, my family, and myself- kindness. I think about all those things. When I spoke to an Elder up in Treaty 3, and I was at a summer camp kind of program they put on, many of their young people were committing suicide. The Elders came together with purpose; they said, "we need to do something; we can't let this keep going on." So, they built a camp out on one of the other islands. They took all the youth and the Elders, the ones that could go, and they put them on houseboats, and they went off to this camp and were out there for a week or two. They'd have different people, maybe middle-aged, and I was maybe 24 at the time to help and cook. They showed the kids how to clean a goose and different things; "so this kind of forearm bone on the wing, you can use that to make an eagle whistle." All the kids were learning these different things on the land with their Elders. The Elders were all speaking Ojibwe with each other; it was great. One of the Elders, when I was talking with them about our grandfather's teachings, told me the one that encapsulates all of the teachings is Kizheyaatiziwin, that's kindness. The way that we live, you know, we can be courageous, we can be brave, we can have truth, we can do all these things with kindness.

In our teachings, we have ourselves, we have our family, our clan, our community; and then, we talked about that one above all, more than all of them, that shows our relationships to those ones that have gone on ahead of us and our relationship with ourselves, our family, community, nation, and those ones who are coming. It's important to keep those relationships strong; to me, it is to strengthen them for a successful life. We must be able to look after ourselves before we can look after anyone; we need to do the work we must do. It takes work to put in the effort and set an example. We don't always live up to it. I try, I've been getting better, but I don't put impossible standards on myself either because I have to be kind to myself, too.

All the learning that I've ever done that is really important to me was never in, maybe a little bit, but the majority was outside of those walls of institutions. It was out in the woods. And

> *when we live as Anishinaabe people, we don't tell each other what to do. The rules of Anishinaabe life are you have respect for people's lives, like the path they're on, right? Some people have to learn things on their own, and the only time you really interfere with someone else's life is when they're in a spot where they could mortally hurt themselves, or being dangerous, you know, being really careless. Then you'd step in, but otherwise, we're all here learning, walking our own paths, and that's mutual respect. When I hear the word 'education,' I have all these connotations attached to it, and that's how English works too. In Ojibwe, you just describe things as you see them, and there are no connotations. There are no loaded words when we talk about things. I've had arguments in Ojibwe with people that de-escalated immediately and weren't an argument anymore. But in English, we can hear words and misunderstand them. I can understand this word my way; someone understands it completely differently, and we're arguing over two completely different things, but we're both talking about education. As learning and education go, having an education is important, being recognized in a western world, having credentials, and that sort of thing, but that isn't the same thing as learning. Self-directed learning, that's the thing, and that's how you actually come to know things.*

Keith and many other members confirm the Anishinaabe value of kindness, a Grandfather Teaching, was instrumental to their learning (Benton-Banai, 1988; Kimmerer, 2013). I am reminded of Elder and author Willy Ermine who opened an online education conference during the pandemic with a message that Indigenous learning/education should strive to help students practice the teaching of kindness and develop our unique gifts. Interestingly, many Alderville members touched on these two essential goals. Environments where kindness is practiced are power-free and provide fertile ground for collaborative learning. Many members shared that their first teachers were family members, often mothers or fathers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and even departed ancestors who were interested in their learning and were supportive in ways that encouraged them. The methods these teachers used were kind and instructive; serious, yet playful; and loving, yet firm.

A knowledge carrier had this reflection about his first teachers, his mother, and grandfather:

> *The first teacher I had was my mother, that's just the first one, always your mother. I had my own mind made up about what I wanted to do, and I loved hearing stories. I loved listening to my mah read me stories, but she wouldn't read the stories unless I got in the bathtub. Yes, that was her way to get me to do the things that I had to do, but it was kind of a bonding experience too and as a teacher now, I'm so grateful that she did that and spent time reading with me. Because I can see in the students, you just know right away, if a parent is reading with their child. It really stands out, you can tell, so I'm really grateful to my mah for doing that.*
>
> *My other teacher would be my grandfather because when I was really young, my dad was always working. And so, I'd be with my mother and my grandfather. And it wasn't ever a sit-down and say "listen kid, this is what you need to know" kind of conversation; it was just the way that he acted, the way that he lives as a role model, kind of looking up to him and the gentleness that he had. I've never heard him raise his voice. One time, there was a little bit of gravel in there, I can tell you that, because we were young and kind of picking on my middle brother, and he said "don't be picking on your brother." You could tell he was mad, but he wouldn't yell, though. But,* ***oh****, he's serious, so, okay, we knew, we'd better be good.*

A young father had this reflection about the teaching of kindness, demonstrated by his grandfather:

> *My grandfather is one person who always shows kindness every time he speaks, no matter where he goes, no matter what the situation, even if it's harsh, he brings that kindness and understanding to the situation. For me, that's my first teacher because those are my first memories. And then, knowing that I can go back to him and ask questions. If there's something that I need to know or be told or shared, he will do that. He's always done that, even to this day. It's not about having someone show you things, but having someone to understand you, and how you want to approach your understanding or receive it, even be able to take something on yourself. That's something that he's always done for me. That is my first teacher.*

Even in the practicality of life skills. He's also really invested in my independence to give my own perspective, to think things through, put a plan in place, see what works, and then go from there. It's always been an understanding that if you want something done, you have to do it. He says, "I can show you how I do it, but you might do it differently. If it works for you, there is no wrong way of figuring out your problems."

When you want to know who you are, you can ask your parents, but it's a different perspective. I mean they have expectations of you, but when you ask your uncles or your grandfather, they instantly see your shine, your gift, or whatever. They accept you regardless, and they really do see your potential. I remember, as a kid, I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life, I didn't understand why I needed a career and stuff like that, but my grandpa said, "you need to have a purpose. You need to find your purpose. You need to find your outlet." And he really pushed that because there was a point when he said, "I'm surprised you haven't written a book yet." Him saying that to me. I was wondering "what do you see that I don't see?" I mean, I thought "do I have a story to share? Am I supposed to be sharing his story?" Those little bits of encouragement. People get forced to do other things like a trade, but when you have a person around you like that, you don't really have limits at all; what you have is unconditional encouragement.

Nora Sawyer, one of our current elected officials and former Chief, spoke lovingly of her mother and how a deep connection to her mother eventually helped to heal. She remembers her kind demeanor and how she accepted people readily, without judgment:

My first teacher was my mom. My mom was not traditional in the sense of cultural tradition, but traditional in the sense of her knowledge base of the land and her knowledge of plants. I was a teenager when she was trying to teach us these things. I didn't really take the time to learn, because you're a teenager, you had other things, and you thought it wasn't that important. Now, when I think back, boy, do I ever wish my mom was here so that I could learn all those things from her.

I've had teachers along the way, but learning as a child, she would teach us all the basics and would say things like, "you know, you don't know what people are going through, you won't know; you've not walked in their moccasins." She'd say, "don't talk about people, because you don't know what they've gone through." I remember when I was in college, a young man had a problem with alcohol, and nobody would have a lot to do with him. I sat on the bus and learned about his history and where he'd from and I could share that with my mom. I was able to say, "you know mom, I know what you mean. He has a lot of traumas, which are why he drinks and has a difficult time, and he didn't have a close relationship with his family." Everybody has something to offer, and that's what my mom always said, "everybody has special gifts." They don't think they do sometimes, even those who are having difficulty with alcoholism. I know one young man, and he's a storyteller, and I told him, "You're a storyteller. Do you know that? You've got that skill of storytelling. That's a gift, that's wonderful. I love you for that." He probably looked at me and wondered, "I don't know what you're talking about," but you know, someday down the road, he'll understand.

She was my hero; she was my teacher, my guidance. She was the one who could put you in your place, too. She would always say, "if you thought, as you get older, you're all that there is, don't think you can't ever be replaced." Sometimes as teenagers, we think we know it all. "We're all average," she would say to us kids. It never dawned on me till years later, you know, that's true. If you're in a job, or you're in a position or whatever, and you're gone one day, there's always someone new filling your shoes in a few days. So, I always remember all those little teachings she had, like treating your neighbor with kindness. She didn't say anything about the Seven Grandfathers but practiced them. She was kind and generous and giving and loving. Although my mom, I don't know that she had a lot to do with residential school, but I knew she had the trauma, but we would never have known that. We always had food on the table, and there was always a big

garden. Sometimes when I look back, I don't even know if I remember seeing her eat, but we always ate.

At Christmas time, she gave gifts because she ***loved*** *shopping. She loved Kmart in Peterborough, and I would take her there every Saturday. She would always have little gifts for people, all over, all the kids in the community. So, it wasn't just in our household or our family. Same thing with pickling, jamming, and stuff, once we got water. We didn't always have water, like running water. She had this little bit of a shed put on, like a little pantry type of thing. And she had little shelves, all her jars, and everything arranged on them. She pickled everything from onions to whatever she pickled. People would visit, and she would say, "oh, come on up and bring your basket," and they'd fill up. She did that every* ***every*** *year, so everybody knew, and that's what I like to do. I follow that too.*

And I didn't even know until after my mom passed that she knew how to make birch bark baskets. When we were kids, I knew she'd say, "that birch bark is peeling. Go get some." We'd make little teepees and little canoes and things, but I didn't know how crafty she was until later.

My sisters were at Bingo somewhere back around Tweed, and this lady came up to them and wondered where they came from. They told her they were from Alderville, Gray family, and she said, "well, I have a basket your mom made." Yeah, and my mom used to sell baskets on the Trent River. I didn't know all that. You see, I missed out on those opportunities because, when I was young, I didn't want to learn anymore.

I'll tell you about how I learned about her recipes and things. I quit drinking 41 years ago. I drank, too. I believe I was an alcoholic. I drank because it was a way to forget or whatever when I think about it, but the year I quit drinking, I spent it with my mom. And I quit during the winter, in December. Well in the spring, I went with my mom, and we planted a garden, and then I learned all her recipes, so all my pickles and jams and everything are all my mom's recipes. And so, let's say we

were doing mustard pickles or something, which is not hard to make, but it's finicky, and she'd say, "well, a pinch of this."

And I said, "No, mom. What's a pinch?" She'd go like that [demonstrates] and I actually measured in my teaspoon and find it was a quarter of a teaspoon.

She says, "yeah that's about right." And so that's what I did; I wrote all these recipes out, and I learned. I quit drinking. I didn't spend time with my so-called friends because I knew that if I went there, I might not make it, you know. I might not survive, so I stayed with my mom. My kids were small, and we all ended up learning to garden, pickling, jams, and how to grind my cucumber relish, learning everything. I did that for the whole year. That was the most amazing year of my life. Because it did not also keep me sober, but it kept me with my mom so that I learned some of the basic skills that she knew. My mom didn't have running water at the time. We had to go get water, bring it in, and do our jars and all that stuff. We didn't have air conditioning, so it was hot in there. It wasn't easy, but you know what? We had the best time and the best laughs, the best.

One youth member felt that her mother's strong ability for storytelling stood out since she felt that complimented her learning style. Her mother's teaching style was kind, and required her to be more attentive. The teaching was never coercive:

I learned from my mom, and her modeling. She's a storyteller, so anything she shares, she does it in a way, like a round about sort of way. She goes off topic, and eventually, she gets to the point. You really have to stay with her, and so I think that taught me how to be a good listener.

Rick Beaver, renowned artist, and trained biologist shared the grace with which his mother conducted herself and how this continues to influence his conduct with others. When learning methods are kind, instruction is more accessible for the Indigenous child:

Our early years were spent at home, not in a formal classroom, I guess, what they call junior kindergarten now. I remember quite clearly learning a lot about nature from my mother, and that included things like working in the garden and watching asparagus grow. We lived on a farm with

an extensive garden that had fruit trees and grape vines, and I was surrounded by nature at that time. So that was my early upbringing; I remember that very clearly.

And of course, her kindness, one thing that I remember, her patience and her gentleness. It was easy to learn something from her because of that. And that stuck with me. I look for that now and have in subsequent life experiences. Of course, there's different inflections, on that particular ambience, you know, kindnesses is a way to put people at ease, whether it's intentional or not, but I think, it was just her own character, to be that way. I found that to be a very supportive basis upon which to embark on my career as a human being.

4.2 Learning from the extended family

I feel privileged to have interviewed Art Beaver before his passing in 2022, and he had the following reflection about his first teachers. He was surrounded by the care of extended family members like grandparents and uncles, often living with them. Their connection was strong and guided him as he pursued Western education and eventually became a teacher himself:

I'd have to start with both of my grandmothers. My grandmother was fluent in the language. She was from Curve Lake, and then my other grandmother was from Alderville; she was an Irish woman adopted by the Lake family and raised as an Ojibwe child. Her first language was Ojibwe and then, of course my grandmother, Bigwin, who lived with us during the summers and other times. I remember very vividly; she spoke the language with my grandmother Beaver. I can remember her sitting me on her lap because she would often be our babysitter, and I would stay with her, and she would tell me things in stories. Likewise, my grandmother Bigwin used to tell me stories.

Although we had no teaching of culture or language at the Alderville School, Jack Loukes would do a nature walk, and he would take us on a hike through the woods, near the waters, and we would learn the plants, the frogs and tadpoles, and different things and find salamanders.

I remember my uncle telling me stories. And then one day, during the summer, he called me, and he said, "okay, it's time for you to learn how to fish." And so, we gathered. He had me put

together my own fishing rod, and then we went out fishing in the evening, and he told me, showed me, what I had to do with the tobacco and how to cast and how to reel in the fish, and what I should do. He was the typical uncle, the traditional uncle who taught me many things. My mother and I lived with him and my Aunt May. He was very much like a father. If there was any wrongdoing, if I was doing wrong and I'd come home late, he would be waiting for me and sitting up and saying, "I want to talk to you." So, there was the learning; I would say he was teaching me. When I look back, he was teaching me the ways of those Seven Grandfather Teachings, and I always had those teachings.

My other uncle, uncle Bill Bigwin, was the one who taught me how to respect the waters of Rice Lake, and how to read the waters. When I'd be fishing or in a boat, he taught me how to mark, using the sight lines on the land, so I could get a cross reference and know where the fishing spots were. Those uncles were very much a part of my learning of the traditional ways and, as I said, the Seven Grandfather Teachings that I look upon education as both traditional teachings and then the non-traditional, or the European way of doing things.

And if we understand and in believe in the teachings, the spirit has the ability to interact on this side. The Elders who conduct ceremonies recognize that. I was in ceremony, a few years ago, and the Elder leading the ceremony didn't know, but for a moment, I smelled the perfume that my mother used to wear. He told me after the ceremony; he said, "your mother was here." And I was shocked and said, "yes, I know." He said, "you knew by recognizing something that connected you to her." And so, I believe that the spirits are around us. When I was going into teaching and would be leading a class, I always took a moment to ask for help from the ancestors and from the creator to help me to pass on whatever knowledge I could that I was supposed to pass on.

Melody Crowe, educator, language teacher, and author, shared her reflection, which included the impact of a deceased ancestor:

I had the gift of being raised in our family homestead with my grandparents, who became mum and dad to me, and my mother there too. When I think of this question about those first teachers, I know that was my mum Lucy, my grandmother. I only had her in my life until I was 10, when she passed away. She was an incredible first teacher of so many things and I'm so thankful. I was talking the other night to some folks online about the power of stories, and not just a simple story that we open in a book to read, but those stories that are told to us through family, of our history, of our ways. Mum was that for me. Everything I do today comes from the foundation of what was built from her. We would sit together, me, as that little wee girl, with her. We would sit in this comfy old chair we had, and she so easily opened this window into the past. That's how it always felt to me as she went page-by-page though our family scrapbook, through the stories that she told, how she was able to engage & connect me to those stories, to the Ancestors, and to that strong sense of community.

She was born in Hiawatha and came to Alderville in her teens. She had a Hiawatha mom and an Alderville dad. Her dad, Fred Simpson, was the Olympic marathon runner. He's been a role model all my life, and that's because of mum Lucy. I felt like I knew Grandpa Simpson, yet I wasn't even born during the years he was alive. Mum shared stories of him with so much pride. She showed me newspaper clippings of stories attached to him, attached to our community of Alderville, as well as of Hiawatha and Curve Lake First Nations. She gave me the gift of being able to carry a real strong sense of history and identity and a feeling of such deep rootedness.

She was that first teacher who introduced me to some of our Anishinaabe language as well. I feel blessed that I was the type of child who could intently listen like that, who was easily engaged and didn't lose interest. I had mum for such a short amount of time, 10 years, so I give thanks beyond words for having such a strong and solid foundation that my life was built upon. Getting to speak about her all these years later, always feels so honouring of her and that's important to me.

Dad too was a first teacher to me of course, and that came from time on the land with him. He had been a fishing guide in his real young days, and he knew Rice Lake like the back of his hand. He took me out fishing a lot and we'd go out for a whole day. We would pack a lunch and be out there casting and trolling. He would point out all the islands and have stories about each. One day we almost got swamped by a bunch of House boats that were travelling past, and it felt like quite the adventure as our little aluminum motorboat rode those big waves. I never felt afraid of anything when I was with Dad.

He was also a trapper and a hunter, and I got to go out on the land with him during these times as well. I was so impressed with how he could move through the bush, walk for miles at a pace of a deer is what I used to liken it too. Me a little kid trying to keep up. I remember going through the woods this one day, my feet walking over twigs and the snapping noises as they broke upon my step, leaves rustling underfoot. Dad finally turned to me and said I had to learn how to hunt in a quieter way. He taught me how to walk through the woods from then on without making a noise, and I was so proud of that, still proud to do this day that I can walk over twigs and leaves and not make a sound. I learned how to set a trap, was good at setting a snare, and most of all it was the time spent with Dad that I loved the most, the stories that he would tell me; they all came from those times out on the land. He loved to laugh and enjoyed making others laugh, so I was around a lot of humour when in his company. And then there was the musical side of Dad; he played the saxophone, but he also played the banjo and the harmonica. When I passed from grade three into grade four, he gave me the banjo. And then I was 12, soon to be turning 13, I was gifted with a big drum set, symbols, and all. Dad had his own little orchestra; they often played down at our community hall here on the reserve. He surprised me by asking me to be drummer for the next dance they were scheduled to play at. I was like "WOW!" so very excited by that. And I was very proud up there on stage with Dad out front on his saxophone. Aunts and Uncles would make sure to dance by close to the stage so they could give me a big smile and nod. When I would get a bit

carried away on the drums and be offbeat, Dad would intentionally get his foot tapping as a way to help bring me back down to tempo. It was a wonderful night and a very cherished memory.

Dad had a stroke just days before my 16th birthday, and although he did recover, for a long while, I had to give him his insulin needle each morning. It meant a lot to me to be able to help do something of such importance for him. He passed away when I was 22 years old.

I just BEAM with absolute gratitude for all I had with mum and dad, all that I was gifted from these two incredible first teachers in my life; teachings that truly helped shape and solidify the firm foundation and identity that my life has been built upon.

With Great Grandpa Fred Simpson as a role model as well, I think the motto ***you can do it*** *was one that I attached to my image of him. A very humble Anishinaabe man, a member of Team Canada in 1908, placing 6th in that Olympic 26-mile-long distance marathon. For me, when I have times where I feel I am faltering, I remember the strength of such loved ones and that '****you can do it'*** *motto, and I feel comforted and supported to keep on going.*

Marsha Smoke, Alderville First Nation entrepreneur and an individual who has a long career working with First Nations and Indigenous organizations, felt that her family, including extended family members, provided her with the grounding of an Anishinaabe woman. Her reflections illustrate how traditional teachings survived in an off-reserve context and how her family committed to their Indigenous identity for the next generation:

To my learning as a child, my first teacher would have been my mother, but I can't single out just her because of our family concept. We were in a situation where our mother taught us the activities that were mainly crafting and cooking, land-based grounding activities, that basically, made you feel proud of who you are.

As for my father, he taught us about discipline, and he taught us how to be a role model. He taught us how to work and go out into the world and be the best you can be. We were able to have our aunts and uncles, our relatives come there, and this is where a lot of the teachings were held.

This is where my uncles used to come. We used to joke around about it because our relatives would hitchhike back and forth between Cobourg and Alderville, all the time. And if they were leaving Cobourg, and didn't get a ride, they knew they could at least walk to Baltimore. My mother always made up the back porch; there was a couch there, so in the summer, our relatives could come in and sleep over. Our home was always deemed as an open and welcoming place. If you were to talk to a lot of people, some have passed on now, but people would remember June and Don's place in Baltimore.

That was a real focal point in our learning, because in our area, we were able to learn our traditional ways. We were able to accommodate our relatives who would come from Curve Lake, Brighton, or New Credit or Credit, as they call it now, different places, around the area. Even from down in the Grimsby area, where some of our relatives had basically migrated to Pittsburgh, they would come to our home in Baltimore. It was the focal point where people would come and do those ceremonies and share those teachings. These are things that would go on, that I was learning. We moved there when I was about 10 or so, that is what I recall for the rest of my life living there. That's where my uncles taught my family how to make medicines; they taught us some other ceremonies. That is what I recall about the teachers who had the most influence on my life, and that grounding was the most important part of moving ahead in your life. And so it is without a doubt, my parents, and of course, my grandparents who were my most influential teachers.

Because of the nature of how people live, my grandmother, on my dad's side, always had her little house or little apartment in Cobourg. My grandfather, on my dad's side, they didn't live together, and he would basically move around from his sons' or daughters,' from place to place. We knew when he arrived, he wasn't going anywhere; we never knew how long he'd be staying, but he was always in the area. I would say that my mother, and a couple of my uncles, on her side were very, very good teachers about the culture. On my dad's side, as well, him *and his siblings were very*

strong in the traditional way of life of hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering. So, I would say, the most important, influential persons in my life are my own parents and relatives.

A young parent felt her grandmother was influential in shaping her into becoming a parent:

My grandmother taught me a lot of invaluable life skills as a child, growing up, and I feel that helped shape who I am today. She took care of me a lot, when I was young, so I feel because of her role in my life, she was my first teacher, teaching me skills in the kitchen, practical life skills, gardening, collecting eggs from the chickens, harvesting from the garden and babysitting. She always babysat kids, and I was always helping her with that. She taught me right from wrong. She was my disciplinarian, and I think you need that in a teacher; you respect them.

The relationship members referenced included extended family members, but also ancestors remembered through storytelling. In my interviews, there always seemed to be a fluid connection to our ancestors, expressed as 'kobade,' the metaphorical chain (Simpsons 2017), or similar to Rifkin's (2017) idea of 'backgrounding,' of blurred lines between past, present, and future. Ultimately, these ideas originate from the sweetgrass braid, which metaphorically represents the confluence and overlapping of people across time.

4.3 Sharing gifts, sharing history, sharing community

One of the themes that emerged during my conversations was that young people continue to be guided by the influence of family teachers and were well-anchored in their community. Not surprisingly, specific gifts within children were recognized early and actively fostered. For example, Jordan Mowat, a young father of two children and an exceptional musician, credits the influence of his father, Dave Mowat, current chief of Alderville First Nation:

When I think about it and going way back, my first teacher was probably my dad. As you already may know, I'm pretty musical, and growing up that's all I heard all my life was music. You know. I remember my dad and me driving to the store, and he'd always have a harmonica. He'd be playing it, and then he would put on a cassette or CD, and we'd listen to this and that. We talked about

blues musicians like Howlin Wolf, or Hubert Sumlin, T bone Walker. So, I was learning about music at a very, very, very, very young age. And he was always telling me historical things, you know, especially about the people from our own community, like Fred Simpson you know, my great great grandfather, and telling me about his accomplishments and his life and being on the Canadian Olympic marathon team, and you know, telling me stories about my uncle Glenn or my uncle Larry, and even my Nana. So, he was always telling me about history. So whether it was about music or my home community, I would consider my dad to have been my first teacher.

Similarly, youth member, Kassie McKeown, currently in her role as Technical Advisor for Indigenous Environmental Projects, reflected on the influence of her mother and grandfather, both of whom were tethered to the rhythm of the land. From them, she grew to understand her role within her family to help with younger siblings:

My mom was my first teacher. I've split that title between her and my grandfather, too, because we spent a lot of time at Papas when I was younger. We would go back and forth between Peterborough and Alderville and stay at the log house, where we learned a lot, like random life lessons. But also, mom with things like pine gum. She always used to go out and always knew these little tricks and tips, even when we lived in Peterborough.

I remember going to the cemetery because the cemetery had a bunch of awesome pine trees, and I had really bad poison ivy from running around in it. She went to the cemetery, picked this like pine gum, and mixed it for me. I remember it always seemed like mom was special this way with natural medicines. She randomly knew how to make up this wonderful concoction that took my poison ivy away, but I know that she learned that from my grandfather or her other teachings.

Most of the time, it was on the way to school because we spent a lot of time in the car on the way to school or on the way home, between Peterborough and Alderville. I know, where in the ditches you can find fiddleheads and leeks and wild asparagus because we'd be driving back and forth. Mom would see something she had missed in the spring and remember that for next year. We

would pull over that time next year and literally jump in the ditch, and we'd be picking fiddleheads and wild asparagus. I remember she had us out of school for just that kind of stuff. I just kind of thought at the time it was really weird. Even roadkill! My mom is famous for stopping and picking up roadkill, and I remember one time there was a deer at Indian River, and we pulled over, and it was still hot. She and Maddie. I refused to participate; I was traumatized; I was like "what the heck? No way, you're not putting this in the car!" But she put it into the minivan, and we got it to my papa's House. My Papa, uncle, and mom hung it up in the in the barn down there and taught us how to skin it right then and there.

It took me a long time, until I was older, to understand many things that my mom did, but then, I realized that she was teaching me during those times. And she also taught me how to be a strong independent woman because mom is super knowledgeable about when to speak and when not to speak, when to hold your thoughts, and when to express your thoughts. I guess it is really about how to conduct yourself. Because she definitely taught me a lot about that, besides harvesting and hunting. A lot of the things that I learned from my mom, I feel like I took that role for my younger sisters, too. You know, my mom and dad taught me how to spell my name, my phone number, and how to read and different things like that. I remember laying in bed at night on the top bunk bed, me and Maddie had bunk beds. Maddie would say that I was her first teacher because she always says, "it's because of you that I know how to read." So, I think when I was younger, I took that responsibility of being a teacher and taking the things that mom, dad, and my grandparents taught me. I felt that responsibility to give it to Maddie especially.

Kathy MacLeod Beaver, Aboriginal Navigator for Durham Regional Cancer Centre and Central East Regional Cancer Program, reflected on the examples set by her parents and her grandfather. Their generosity and kindness stood out. Part of our teachings as Indigenous people is the understanding that protecting a child's spirit is paramount. Kathy reflected on how her family was able to support her and protect her spirit when school experiences were difficult:

My mother taught me everything, how to look after myself, how to be kind to myself. And my dad too, both of them are equally important. My dad always taught me that I could do anything I wanted to do. When I experienced something of a negative nature at school, my mother would always reassure me that I was important and not let others get in the way. She said' when others are insecure and don't like themselves, they want to deflect attention from this but what they don't realize is that everyone is looking at them, not you. That is their issue, not yours to carry," she would say. When I talk about my mom being my best teacher, I remember she would always say, "you're a beautiful person, never forget that. Be proud of who you are, a beautiful strong person." She would say about those who were unkind to me "pray for them, pray for them because they need help."

You know my grandfather, he was born and raised in Alderville, but he went away to school and took his young family with him. They had laws against Native people getting a university education. But they always stayed close to Alderville and always came home and stayed connected with the community. When my grandfather went to go to school, he lost his status. At that time, if Native people wanted to get an education, they had to enfranchise, plus he went into the army too. So that resulted in my dad losing his status. When my mother, who had status, married my dad, she lost her status too because dad was without status.

When I was born, it resulted in me not getting my status. I recalled a story my Dad shared about Sandra Loveless challenging those laws. What's crazy about all of that is both of my parents are from Alderville. Both of my grandfathers were chiefs in this community, too. My grandfather was also a Chancellor at Trent university. He worked on a report called "To have what is one's own" for National Indian Brotherhood, now called AFN. I remember him teaching me about our true history because I never learned anything positive about Indigenous people in school. I remember in public school we told we had diseases, and that we were poor. I was very close to my other grandfather as we often spent time together when I was a child and into adulthood. He was kind and generous, and great cook. He made me feel special and loved. My grandmother who lived away

would often come to visit us; her and I remained close right up until she died at 94. She taught me about spirituality and self-care. All of her sisters, my great aunts, are just as amazing. They all made me feel special and loved. They taught me the importance of love. It is this love that inspired me to learn about the great teachings of our Ancestors.

Kathy shared that a strong calling to be a helper in her community was influenced by the roles of her family. She was motivated to explore the Social Services field but was met with significant challenges and was ultimately discouraged because of what post-secondary staff considered her young age and inexperience. The college staff decided she would be better off taking a General Arts and Science stream to allow her to “mature” before entering the Social Services program. Kathy completed her first year of General Arts and Science and was eventually accepted into the Social Service Worker program. In the telling of this experience, she remains deeply moved by the unconditional love of her family and their inspiration:

The first semester of college was a challenge as the school system failed many students. I was told by the college that most students arriving at college only had a grade 7 reading level. There was a very passionate teacher who ran study lab that helped students like me who struggled in that first semester. She noted I was failing in the second semester, and I had to take double the courses to remain in the program. I would have to go to a study lab every morning at 7:00 a.m. just to keep up. At that time, in the early 80s, educational institutions did not have Indigenous supports for students like they do now. Additionally, without status, I did not have access to funds allocated for Alderville students.

I was failing my first year of college, and my parents really couldn’t afford to pay for my education. I thought I would even leave school and not go back. When I went home at Christmas, I told my mom and dad it wasn’t doing very well, and I broke down. I remember my dad saying, “you know Kathy, you’re the smartest person I know. You can do anything. You haven’t failed. We’re so

proud of you. Do you know how proud everybody is that you went to college?" And so anyway, when I talk about them, I was so blessed to have the love of my family that stood behind me.

Kathy further shared what she learned from her supportive family:

> *The importance of family and community. Always staying connected. Learning about our beautiful culture and the importance of the language, and why we didn't speak it growing up. I learned that we all carry special gifts and not to judge others, and to be kind. We are no better than anyone else, and all of us have had struggles that make us stronger.*
>
> *It's those kinds of important lessons that I am shaped by and what has molded me, what I carry today. I really believe sometimes, when we're given those messages, that's what we're supposed to do. So, I've been able to share those teachings with others, especially in my work as a helper. I know, as Indigenous people, we all carry that trauma. We all carry negative messages we have heard. I have known since a very young person we are amazing people with strong gifts. I learned from my family that long ago we were a healthy thriving Nation. I learned the impact colonization had on our Indigenous ways of knowing. I draw my inspiration from the love of my family and community. We are not alone as we walk this journey. This is the force that keeps me going.*

Koren Smoke reflected on her parents but also on community members who were involved with nurturing youth within the First Nation. For her, learning is an ongoing process, and she believes that teachers are available on your path – but you need to be open to their help:

> *I have a few teachers; it just depends on the aspect of my life. I am an artist so when it comes to artwork and practicing and sketching definitely my father pushed for that and had me practice with a sketchbook as early as public school. And I think, a lot of it does come from when I was in my public-school career, definitely Lily, our Ojibwe teacher; she passed away when we were still in public school. I even got a tattoo of lilies to commemorate her. She was our Ojibwe teacher, and she is the one that taught me the values of the Seven Grandfather Teachings. In that tattoo, it says true*

self, so living with your true self and knowing your true self and living and abiding by those teachings is very important for me and my community. My mum obviously has been a huge impact on believing in myself and doing whatever I want, attaining my dreams, my wildest dreams of becoming an entrepreneur. She was very much of an entrepreneurial mindset herself, ever since we were kids. Actually, you too, Cathy and Lisa are teachers, for the youth group and the Student Services. Growing up and having those programs and cultural programs available to us, and being a part of the Alderville community has really made me who I am today. So, I do have lots of teachers, and I don't feel like it ever stops; there's always going to be those teachers with you and you always have to keep an open mind that you're constantly learning, no matter how old you get, or where you are in your life. Those teachers will change throughout your life and they'll always be there.

Like a few other members before her, Koren is culturally aware of the Seven Grandfather Teachings' significance in informing her conduct to live within her community (Benton- Benai, 1988; Vatawood, 2019). These teachings ground us from within and guide our values in community rebuilding. Koren was especially reflective of the Grandfathers Teaching concerning truth and knowing your true self.

Similarly, Nora shared that Elders later in life were profound teachers who could help one understand life, especially when its trajectory was not clear. Western influences, she shared, complicated Indigenous ones:

My mom sent us to church, then Sunday school. It wasn't till I met Fred Wheatley, that I understood that I could do both. There were long discussions and talks and everything. "I'm confused," I said," my mom sent me to Sunday school, and I don't know if that's for me."

He asked, "well, what do you like?"

And I said, "I just like walking out in the woods and talking to whoever."

And he said, "well then, you got the best of both worlds. Take the best of both, combine them, and do what's best for you, what feels good in your heart." So, when he visited, we would walk over to my woods and stuff like that. We talked about the trees; we talked about nature and

everything. He was another one of my teachers; as I got older, I understood what it was about life and how Elders help in understanding it. He never self-proclaimed that he was an Elder. He was learning, he said; he was learning himself. He went out west and taught himself. He knew the language amazingly and said, "I've had to learn this." For me, too, I learned from those kinds of people and from what they taught me because I wasn't a book learner. It was hard for me. I like hands-on learning. I couldn't get to the funeral when Fred passed because I think it was in Wasauksing. That was a big loss for Trent and all of us. But, he's in my heart every day because I still think about him, about some of the things we would do, like the trees I planted and two trees up in the hill where he told me to plant them. One's just amazing, one died, but the other one is doing amazing.

I was the first Bill C-31 chief in Canada, yeah. I wasn't on council first, but I had the drive and knew I was willing to help and do things for the community. I went to see one of our Elders in the Community. He loved to burn cedar in a pot on the stove; he'd have that cedar going, and it smelled so nice there. I went to him, and we were just chat chit-chatting away, and I said to him "you know, I was asked to run for chief in the community, and I don't know whether I should or whether I shouldn't." He sat there, and he pondered, and he looked out his window. The cedar kept boiling, and it smelled so nice in there, and we were having tea, too. He said, "well, you know, I believe if you want to get something said, you get a man, but if you want it done, you get a woman." That's what his wise words were to me.

Anyway, at around the same time, I was at the kitchen table, down where Julie lives now, and I was sitting there. It was a Saturday morning; Julie was up north, Jared was with horses up in Elmira, and I was all by myself. I was at the kitchen table, sitting there thinking and pondering and thinking, "I don't know if I should do this or whatever." [This was after Nora's mother passed into the spirit world] My shoulder was shoved, just like this [Demonstrates shoulder being shoved forward]. It was as if my mom was there saying, "go for it!" That's what it was, so I did. That was

another wonderful experience, an experience of teamwork, an experience of learning a lot of things. There weren't that many women [chiefs] at the time.

One Elders from the Anishinaabek Nation said a few years ago that we don't do enough of is visiting. We don't visit. Our people would get together on a Friday night. We might play you euchre. I remember as a kid, neighbors would come and sit, and they'd sit outside, have tea, or sit on the porch, and us kids would be playing around and doing all kinds of things until after dark. There was that togetherness, and we would get to know each other. We don't do that enough anymore. We get so busy. I have about a handful here that I try and get to visit. I might take them a jar of jam or a rhubarb pie or something when I go. One of them, I know, likes mandarin oranges and just stuff like that. I sit and chat for a few minutes with them.

Everybody makes an impact on us somehow, and sometimes we don't realize until later the impact that they made, sometimes negative. We think, oh gosh, but it still teaches us something, right? Regardless, if it's a negative thing that happens to us, it's a teaching, and so that's what I think now, in my reflection years, as I call them.

Shari Beaver, a young mother of two children, understood at a very young age the importance of modeled learning from her family, the importance of watching and practicing:

My first teacher was probably my grandpa Max. I feel like when I think of a teacher, it's someone that you respect and stop and listen to. So, when I think about my parents when I was little, it was just like a different dynamic. When I think about someone when they talked, I listened, and when they showed me things, I paid attention to how they were doing them, even from a very young age. So, I think it was probably my grandpa Max. The memory I have of him is actually opening butternuts that we would get to crack open and eat. I was only probably three and a half or four years old, but I remember knowing I had to watch how to do this.

Another parent had this to share:

My first teachers were my family. I learned by observing and trying what I learned on my own. I remember watching my dad clean fish and the processing or cooking of it. My mother always had a garden, and we learned about canning preserves. We were a family and helping was expected and is what we did as children. My grandparents also had a garden, and then there was a community garden. Our gardens consisted of cucumbers, squash, berries, beets, carrots, swiss chard, potatoes, and corn, to name a few of our crops. My father, uncles, and grandpa were hunters, fishermen, trappers, and gatherers. I grew up observing and helping with processing the food they brought home. I remember when the drum first came to Alderville and our first powwow; my parents were learning a lot about those things and ceremonies during that time. I also consider my ancestors to be my first teachers. My great-great-grandfather shared a lot of teachings with my dad, some of which has been passed down to my children and me. He was a medicine man and knew some of the ceremonies but kept them hidden since they were forced underground at that time. I find it fascinating to hear some of the stories he carried.

One member who had grim childhood experiences in the childcare system, a Native child of the Sixties Scoop, did not feel supported by the warmth of a stable home environment. They shared:

At a very young age, I went through many different schools. By the time I got out of the Children's Aid Crown Wardship, I had been through 75 different homes. So yeah, there were many schools I went to, and I wasn't very successful because I was being moved from here, there and everywhere back in those days. I don't remember anybody being instrumental in my learning, in that way, for me as a child. I couldn't even read and write when I came out of the system, there are not a lot of good memories. That's a hard one because, as a kid, I was being moved around. But I could say that my grandmother used to get us out here and we'd meet down at the corner of Vimy. There was a cottage there; they've fixed that cottage up now. In the summer, we'd get out of the system and go there for a few weeks, you know, and just run crazy? And as kids, a couple of times, she took me on

> *road trips down to Nova Scotia, so my grandmother was good that way, to get me out of that situation for even a few weeks.*

Most members described home experiences that were supportive and that aligned with Indigenous values. Learning came from the guidance of Elders, the warmth of loving family members, both living and in the spirit world, and instructive Anishinaabe protocols like the Seven Grandfather Teachings, that helped navigate them towards becoming healthy individuals. The response from this member contrasts with others shared during interviews. Though this individual did not have a stable home environment, they never lost connection to their core sense of belonging to Alderville. For other members, supportive home environments mirrored Anishinaabe values and was fundamental for their growth as Indigenous children. For this person, a returning to their Anishinaabe values was filtered through relearning how to be an Indigenous person and returning to their community. This transformation was ultimately achieved through interactions with other First Nations and Indigenous organizations they connected with. Their personal healing ultimately led them back to Alderville.

4.4 School experiences

Through experience-related questions concerning formal education, the following section delves into reflections about teachers, racism, and systemic violence. These responses resulted in conflicting feelings of a diminished sense of self and, in some cases, a loss of identity. Members shared experiences of teachers most frequently as one of the most populated clusters in the NVivo platform. The intensity in the responses came from experiences where cruelty was most pronounced. Such incidents were painfully recalled, where body language and voice cadence were sufficiently altered to indicate the depth of emotions being shared. These responses were highly descriptive passages with vivid imagery and delivered with emotional intensity.

4.5 Negative teacher experiences

One Knowledge Keeper’s first experience with violence happened in her grade three classroom. It was a painful recollection marked by the power of a teacher to exert rage over students. Decades later, the telling was still raw, and much healing was required after such an experience:

I remember going into grade three. I was nervous because all the older kids were telling us about a very scary teacher, and they described her as a witch and not a nice person. And so, I remember my first day going into grade three. I didn't want to go into the school, and she had to come out and coax me in because I was afraid of her. After all, everyone talked about how mean she was. And anyways, yeah, she was mean, she was really mean. I remember her coming out, being really nice, and coaxing me into the school. Then, I remember witnessing her with a big stick, like a yardstick or whatever those rulers were called. I just remember her slamming it down on desks when people wouldn't listen, not mine, of course, because I was so scared. I didn't want to do anything to make her mad. So, that was my first experience, I think my first experience with violence was in grade three, and it was ***every*** *day, not just here and there. There was a lot of young boys in there, and she was always getting angry at the boys. It was physical, like you witnessed her anger. She was short. I can describe her: I know exactly what she looked like and she wasn't nice. My first experience with her violence was traumatic. I got up to get a drink of water when she left the classroom because I was so thirsty, and I knew I couldn't ask her to get a drink of water during class because she wouldn't let me. I knew she wouldn't. She wouldn't let anybody. If somebody had to go the bathroom or wanted something, she wouldn't; she wouldn't let people have that. So anyway, when I got up to get a drink of water, she'd come back into class. I didn't know it; she must have snuck in because I didn't hear her and I was drinking water. All of a sudden, her hands came around my neck, and she choked me.*

She told me to get back to my class (the desk-water fountain was at the back of classroom), and she got after me for leaving my chair, while she was out of the room. So anyway, but this is a happy memory next that I have of that class. It's not a good one, I mean, it shouldn't be a happy one, but for me, it was because I had witnessed so much violence in that class. You know, I want to say that anytime in there, I never told my parents what happened. I never told anything to my

family, because I was afraid to tell on her. I was afraid that if I told…I knew my parents would do something, and then I would be treated worse, so I didn't tell anybody what happened.

But one day, two older boys were arguing in class, and she went over and slammed the ruler down like she always did. Well, they stood up there, had enough, and had enough of her. They were taller boys. They weren't older, we were all the same age, but they were taller than her because she was short. One of them stood up, swore at her, and she hit him, and he hit her back. She slapped him, and he punched her back, and then he took off out of the class because he knew that was probably the worst thing he could have done.

He took off and ran right out of class and out of the school. She went and reported it, and they sent older boys from the older grades to find him. They brought him back, they didn't bring him back that class, but they found him. I think she retired after that, because she was old like, like she had white hair, you know, she was an old teacher. Like a lot of our teachers were old. The teachers weren't that great. Looking back, it just seemed like the teachers weren't that great at teaching, but anyway, that grade three teacher, I won't say her name, but she left after that. The principal became involved, we weren't interviewed or anything, nobody talked to us, but they must have known. That school must have known that she was a horrible teacher. No one interviewed us, or asked about our experiences, but I think that probably some of those children must have told their parents what they witnessed, and they were telling the principal. They must have because she was gone soon after that.

I had another horrible experience in grade five; we had a teacher, who called children names, and I just remember her referring to somebody in our class who was overweight as "blubber guts." She would get mad at him a lot.

So, when I look back, it was grade three and grade five. I won't say this grade five teacher's name, but she was awful when she called people names. She got after me when I was put on the front page of the Cobourg Sentinel, which used to be what it was called at that time. We did this

Native thing in the school. For all of us children, a community Elder had made us outfits, and she sewed on brown fringe and we sang an Indigenous song. I can't remember what it was, but it was kind of like a little performance, we did at the school, and they took a picture. The picture went on the paper's front page, and I was so embarrassed. I was young, and I remember they must have come right up to me, and I put my hands over my mouth because I was so shy and laughing because they were taking my picture. So, I put my hands over my mouth, and I was laughing. That grade five teacher came into the school the next day because they put the picture up in the hallway for everyone to see, like the principal did that, put it on a Bulletin Board, so everybody was like, "look, you're on the front page of the paper." And the grade five teacher, who was really mean to everybody, said to me in front of everybody, "you really look stupid on that front page because you were laughing. You couldn't even act properly." Again, I never told my parents about some of these things that were being said, but I tell you those messages and those experiences really shaped what I was getting out of school and what I wasn't.

Upon reading the transcript of this exchange, this individual felt she returned to a childlike state in her retelling and felt the fresh sting of what had happened decades earlier. It is no surprise that this individual is now dedicated to reconciliation efforts outside of the community. Another member, Melody Crowe, First Nation Education Liaison for Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board, Anishinaabemowin language teacher and author, laments how language became forced out of circulation with the telling of this story:

When my dad told me this story, while holding a childhood school photograph in his hand from when he attended school here in his own community of Alderville; his words went right to my heart. It's a story I've shared many times because of the ripple it had on our language. I was blessed to call my grandfather Dad, as I was raised in the family homestead, with my grandparents, who naturally became Mum and Dad, and I had my own Mother there too. Dad was born in 1905. And I think it was around 1911 or 12 when that school photograph was taken. He pointed out himself, his brother, and his sisters; he talked about the teacher and how that man chased after him and hit him

with a stick for speaking the language. He talked about being so little, and just running around playing outside. The teacher heard him speaking the language and my dad shared how many times he would get hit for doing so. He said after awhile you just stopped speaking it after getting hit so many times… and not because you don't want to speak the language, but, he said, you can imagine as a little boy, having a grown man, a teacher, chase after you and hit you like that. The school he attended was where the band office sits today.

An older community member who had a significant off-reserve educational experience shared the following narrative about a regimented educational approach intended to instill fear:

It was a very regimented experience. We had to line up outside, and we marched into the school to old military songs like Colonel Bogeys March, and you had to be just prim and proper about that. And I remember anybody who was being disciplined for misbehaviour, it happened at the end of the hallway, at the entrance hallway, where the principal's office was. His first name is Jerry; I can't remember his last name, but he would line up all the kids who were being disciplined at the end of the hallway. It was sort of like a criminal assembly line, you know, "left profile, right profile," I guess. I don't know what his background was, I was too young even to care, but I remember thinking you wouldn't want to do anything like that to get in trouble.

One teacher, she was not averse to giving the strap, and I got a strap once for going down to the creek underneath the fence after, I guess, being told that that was not a viable thing to do. So, you know, for an Indian kid, who was all about going out in nature with the family on canoe trips and everything, that seemed quite a very stern boundary that I found difficult to deal with.

And those days, we were still talking about physical discipline in the classroom; the principal, was a British boxing champion, and he didn't hesitate to knock people around. In fact, he used to tiptoe down the halls and sneak up and peek into the classrooms, and boy, if he ever caught you being bad, you were in big trouble. So, there was that. Fortunately, I didn't have to worry about it, though. There was also a teacher who I found was very abusive in the classroom. I know now

> *that he was like that because he thought he needed to do that to maintain some control. And back, by the same token, you know, being belittled by your teachers is not a good thing, especially if you didn't deserve it. So, I had mixed experiences there, but they were not unusual.*

A member currently involved in the education field shared her experience with teachers whom she privately feared:

> *I was taught how to be respectful, to watch, and to learn. Some teachers stood out for different reasons. There were some very stern teachers. I was often fearful of them. This didn't work for me, a young student who was already quiet. It made me withdraw more. It is difficult to find your voice with teachers who instill fear… and it's amazing how long these teachers stick around.*

Education has been credited for the loss of Anishinaabe culture at the community level while simultaneously turning members into students who could be ridiculed. This member felt they were the butt of casual cruelty from their teacher:

> *When I was younger, probably all through my primary years up to grade three, grade four, I never missed a day, even on snow days, my father would drive us. He had this big old Pontiac; he'd drive us through the snow and drop us off, so there'd be like three other students with the one teacher and me all day, and I loved all the different classes. I was really good at math; I was really good at all of them. And then I got to grade six, and I had a teacher who belittled me. I wrote something. I made a mistake; I wasn't thinking, and instead of mice, I wrote mouseses. And in front of the whole class, they belittled me for spelling it wrong, like using the wrong plural ending, instead of changing the word to mice. And from grades 6,7, and 8, I didn't care about school anymore. It just turned me right off, and my grade seven teacher, whom I had previously in grade four, said I was a whole different student, and she asked me, "what happened? You're completely different" It just turned me right off—the power of teachers. The power of them to build you up or to tear you down.*

Such exchanges made it challenging for members to be inspired to learn. When they felt their families or themselves under attack, they took a dim view of education. A young father shared how multiple teachers

in succession held their family in low regard, due in part to absences when they followed traditional patterns of hunting:

> *There were some teachers I didn't get along with and didn't understand why, but I still learned enough to get by. We got pulled out of school a lot, and not because we were bad, because we were not attending, but because for myself and my family we're all very involved in each other. We're all integral to each other, so if someone got sick, it was someone else's dad picking us up. It was one of my uncles, whoever was close by. But also, when we were sick, they were also the ones who took care of us, or we had to stay home with or whatever, but also when things had to be done. Because honestly, my early memories of being pulled out of school in the fall time or mid-winter, or late spring, that was because it was either Turkey season or trapping. I remember being scrutinized by one of the teachers because we weren't attending school. And I remember; specifically, one of the teachers saying, "oh, are you guys taking turns?" And I remember an uncle who had to pick us up. He walked down the hall, and I was scared for the teacher because he didn't care. I was scared, but I was happy but also worried to see what would happen to me after I'd be back in the classroom. I feel like he did it well because nothing happened after. I didn't feel any backlash, but there were still those kids in the classroom who would ask, "why don't you come to school?" And I'd say, "because there's stuff to do." But, again, I think the biggest thing is that we learned outside of the classroom as well as within.*

High school experiences for Alderville students were even more problematic. The transition included attending a larger school with more students and an hour-long ride into Cobourg. This was the case with all students, even the oldest interviewed in this study. Commonly, the transition was difficult, and there were few supports in place. Before the Roseneath Centennial Public School was constructed in 1967, older members remembered making this transition earlier, for grades seven and eight, to Central School in Cobourg. An older member remembered, "I cried every day for the first year. I don't know why. It was very strange. I did feel rather isolated."

Another Elder reflected similarly:

> *So, I then transferred to Cobourg School, which was quite a traumatic experience, of course, because I left a very small community where I was nurtured and taught about myself. I had to go into a very large community, where many of these people didn't respect us; they ridiculed and teased us, partly because we were Indigenous but also because we were just different. Many people were afraid of change and didn't understand others who are different from them, so they reacted in negative ways too often, unfortunately.*

The transition to a foreign school seemed difficult for most. Sometimes this difficulty manifested in not being able to connect with teachers, said one member:

> *I felt lost, and I didn't have those same connections with the teachers as you do, obviously in public school because, in public school, you see them all the time. You always have an interaction, whereas, in high school, you don't know them. You don't know one teacher from the other. You only have them for such a period of time, and you just feel like you're lost in that class, like you don't stand out in any way. I remember many of my teachers, but I wouldn't say that I connected with any of them, to be honest.*

Remembered negative teacher experiences included teachers who were, at their best, dismissive and indifferent; and, at their worst, abusive and violent. Western education was delivered coercively, with threats of violence, foreign to Anishinaabe values (L. Simpson, 2014, p. 14). Members shared how difficult the transition was, a cultural shock formed from experiences outside their home community. The formal education they experienced was developed according to Western trained teachers, blind to their colonial invested values (Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003; Ogbu, 1992; Orlowski, 2008, 2011).

As I think about what I have learned about sweetgrass, I ponder the journey of education as a kind medicine. Even with terrible teacher experiences, members attempted to offer insight and wondered why such teachers were handicapped in their ability to reach students. They were adamant about not sharing

names and preferred to counterbalance negative experiences with good ones. Their goal was to share their learning and not defame or injure others.

All teacher experiences were coded in multiple ways, which included positive and negative attitudinal attributes. Interestingly, given the intensely emotive quality of traumatic teacher experiences, I presumed negative ones would outweigh positive ones, but that was not the case. Members understood that teachers were often ill-equipped to understand their community fully and credited those who made an effort. Though they were relatively even in their response levels, positive teacher experiences slightly outweighed negative ones. As negative experiences were shared, some truly horrible, individuals would often search for positive experiences, some from other teachers, to present a balance. They were able to consider plausible rationales for exploring what happened and looked beyond the fallibilities of one person. The effort to understand and offer grace reflect innately held Anishinaabe values of kindness and respect.

4.6 Positive teacher experiences

Teachers remembered fondly were often compassionate individuals who demonstrated that they cared. Positive experiences were less detailed, but the emotive responses of participants were still affective in their quality. Generally, fondly remembered teachers acknowledged their students as individuals, displayed compassion, or ignited lasting curiosity. They were not remembered for knowing the history of Alderville or possessing an acute awareness of Indigenous culture. A grandmother in the study recounted:

> *You know what? The best teachers I remember were the ones who would take us outside underneath the tree to read. Those teachers that had that connection to say, "okay let's go read a book," and those kids all paid attention, we were all just so glad to be taken outside and sit under a tree like that. We all listened, held on to every word that teacher said because we all got to sit together and do something different. Our attention was focused on that teacher because he or she had said, "Okay, it's too hot and stuffy in here. Let's go outside," and to see a teacher break a rule, while everybody else was still sitting in their classrooms, and we got to go outside!*

This same grandmother reflected on a teacher who acknowledged her Indigenous heritage, and it stood out as a positive school memory. The attempt for a teacher to connect her to her Indigenous heritage in an urban school setting far away from her First Nation made a lasting impression about the good will of some non-Indigenous teachers:

> *I had a wonderful art teacher there. And she really embraced, she knew so much about Native culture that I did not know. She filled me in on very positive aspects of her travel. You know she was well traveled and had pictures and stuff. She brought in a photo album for me to look at of regalia from powwows she'd been to, so now, the American Indian Movement was coming of age in the 70s. She was in full support of the movement. So, she had pictures of rights and stuff, and she just took me under her wing, and I would stay in at recesses and draw pictures, and we would talk. She was great.*

A much younger Alderville member in the study shared how a beloved teacher helped her succeed:

> *I did have that one really good teacher, Mrs... She was really, really good for me. I think we connected well and I just felt very encouraged by her. I felt that I could succeed with her, and that was when I felt like my grades started transpiring into, you know, doing better in school and focusing a little bit better. She was really good. She was a good encouraging teacher who helped me get on a good academic path.*

Yet another youth shared similarly about how their relationship with a teacher helped her succeed:

> *I have a few teachers that stand out, like my grade six teacher; she was pretty awesome. She could really handle our class, I guess, and everybody really liked her. I remember her being one of our favorite teachers. I was kind of like a shy kid, like I'm a smart kid, but I was never the teacher's pet. I never really put myself out there to become attached to a teacher. I'm just kind of do your work, hand it in, get a good grade and go home kind of person. But I remember this teacher; she had a lasting impact and I still hang a Christmas ornament that she gave me. It still goes on our tree every year, so I really liked her. She was accessible; she was just another human being. Like you know,*

when you're a kid, and an adult is scary. She wasn't like that. You could talk to her like a person. She was on the same level as you, and she cared. I think you could tell she genuinely cared about people and the individuals in our classroom. I know that I learned a lot in grade six because of her.

The participant who commented earlier on her traumatic experiences in grades three and five added a different perspective with her grade four teacher:

Then in grade four, I got probably one of the best teachers. He used to bring his guitar to the class, and he would sing with us, and he would teach. He actually taught us to love learning; that's what I remember about him. Then in grade eight, another male teacher. When he came in, everybody just loved him because he was young, and he came in in his army uniform. I remember the first time he came into class to meet everyone. He was the grade six teacher then, and I just found him very nice to everybody. We didn't have a lot of money. So, I remember wearing clothes that were too big for me, because my grandmother would always send us clothes, just out of kindness. Still, they never fit; they would never fit me, but I would wear them anyway because I was so happy to have new clothes. I remember going into class, and I had rolled up these jeans; they were Levi's. I was excited, and I put a belt on them. And I remember that teacher came in that day, saying, "are those new jeans? Do they ever look nice!"

Members reflected on what positive attributes the teacher had to relate well with them as students. These teachers were often described as kind people who acknowledged their students as individuals. Some were inspirational as they shared their talents as human beings, something of tremendous value to Indigenous people and the Seven Grandfather Teachings, specifically truth. Alderville is a community blessed with a diversity of talents for a small community: artists, musicians, educators, trades professionals, traditional apprentices, healthcare professionals, and authors, as examples. One Knowledge Keeper reflected:

I think part of that has to do with being able to capture the attention of your students and yeah, you do that by being passionate about what you're teaching. And if you really love languages, that

shows through your teaching. If you really love music and art, that comes through in the way that you talk about things, and students hear that, and they get excited, and I think that's what it is.

A young adult member involved in various artistic endeavors felt that a teacher's natural enthusiasm was critical because it revealed unexpected new learning for students. In addition, she felt that the relational exchange between teachers and students was vital, especially for students coming from Indigenous communities:

> *I could do artwork all day long; even in high school, I wanted to hang out in the art room with my art teacher. But even looking back, I struggled with math. I was more of an English student. But there were teachers, that there was a different way for them to teach and I got interested in it and engaged, and my marks went up depending on the teacher. So, I feel like that was a huge impact as well. I remember having a math teacher in high school and I really liked that math class, and otherwise I was not a math person, whatsoever. I think being visual again. It comes back to the visual. She showed us the formulas on the chalkboard and did a few different versions and made sure we understood how to break down the solution. And it really made a difference for someone that gets called a different name pretty much every time a teacher tries to learn your name. Those teachers that actually pulled me aside after class and said, "Okay, how do I say your name?" I always remember those teachers, too; they made an effort. Other teachers would just continue to call me whatever they wanted until the end of the semester.*
>
> *So, some teachers definitely stuck out more than others. I also feel with larger class capacities, you won't have the privilege of having the teacher come and make sure you know what you're doing. Having an over-capacity classroom with 30 or more students, you kind of get lost in the mix and maybe not prioritized as much. Whereas, if it was a smaller classroom, it's much more intimate, and you don't feel nervous to talk in front of everyone or feel like you're going to say something stupid, or something like that.*

The art class was a big thing for me. It was very different; it was progressive. The teacher was very, I think, he had more of a graphic designer background because he was showing us architecture and all different kinds of artwork, and he said, "art is all around us, and I was only there for a few days, but I still remember the little that that art teacher did teach me." I do wonder where my art career would have gone, had I stayed there, but I think it was just all meant to be.

Rick Beaver felt the trajectory of his career, as an artist, was guided by influential teachers whom he remembered fondly:

There was Miss ___ was her name, a teacher in grade four, I think, and five at ______where I went to school, and she was really a good teacher. I started off bad, there. I wasn't a very good student coming from the rural route school, and she straightened me right out. And I remember getting the award for the most improved student in her class. And, it was she, actually, who really gave me early indications that I could be good at art; although many, many years would pass before that actually came into practice, but she was a good teacher, excellent teacher. She really helped sharpened up my skills in mathematics and reading and doing book reviews and that kind of stuff She introduced me, quite frankly, to a whole, I guess, different type of compatriot in the classroom, of people who were not so interested in stealing things, but rather reading books and that type of thing. I gather those experiences are not unique to myself but growing up it was like that for me. I felt that I was a good learner when I was taking in things that I wanted to learn. And I even passed calculus with the assistance of a great teacher; he's gone now, unfortunately. He's the only one that ***could*** *help me get through calculus, which amazed me, actually. My favorite subjects, then of course, were biology. I've mentioned people whose ability to teach me was among my favorite teachers; he was one.*

Taynar Simpson, owner of Wampum Records and Leaders in Aboriginal Research, is generous in his reflection about teachers:

I thought that my teachers, for the most part, were really good. Unfortunately, you remember the bad teachers more than you do the good teachers, or at least that's been my experience. There were a few really good teachers that tried to connect and do the best job that they could, in a self-reflective sort of way. I said the quality of education was quite good in high school. I went to the academic high school in London, so it was always challenging. You don't want something that you just breeze through, and you don't have to expend much energy to learn. You always be moving forward to understand what you're doing. I like the challenges of learning.

Additionally, Melody Crowe added her reflection about the power of good teachers to inspire and be leaders within communities and to support Indigenous communities:

When I was a little girl attending Roseneath School one of my teachers that really stood out to me, was my teacher grade 3 and 4 teacher. He had a great love for music and still does to this present day. This teacher was quick to see a musical ability in me and really encouraged and supported that. He brought in a variety of musical instruments to our classroom, and I learned how to play the Autoharp and Mandolin. I knew how to sing Amazing Grace in our Anishinaabe language at this young age, and I used to play my banjo along to that song. I must have told this to this teacher as he invited me to sing it as part of a school-wide concert. In my younger years, I was extremely shy, so that was a really big thing for me. But the kind manner that he had about him and my feelings so encouraged, I went ahead. I sang that song on that stage in front of everyone, singing in my Anishinaabe language. He had one of my non-Indigenous classmates from the Roseneath area sing the English version. It was a real big moment for me, that's for sure.

So, as I think back to those childhood days and especially being such a shy little girl, having had a teacher like Mr. made such a huge difference for me. It's amazing the positive impact that a teacher like that can have in your life by believing in you, modelling that encouragement and support that enabled me to get up on that stage, for example, and find the courage as a little 8-year-old. It was a proud moment singing in my Anishinaabe language in front of the entire school.

What a gift he gave me in helping me to feel safe to do that. I've run into this teacher many times throughout the years, and he always recognized me, just as I recognized him. He always asks me if I'm still playing the banjo. He even came to pay his respects at the funeral home visitation when my mother passed away in 2010. That really stood out to me and was so very kind of him.

Members shared that influential teachers were often kind, noticed them positively, and inspired them with their individual gifts. Teachers were seen as vital in the process, something confirmed by Indigenous communities (AFN, 2010). Having cultural sensitivity would move them to see their Indigenous students in a more positive light and less so as troubled "disadvantaged students,'' they must fix (Marker, 2003; Mykota, 2006).

4.7 Racism

It became clear that the brick-and-mortar environment of schools differed significantly from Alderville members' community experience. Some recalled environments that were overly regimented and inflexible, unrelated to their home experiences, and further compounded by transitional challenges where supports were unavailable. When educational spaces proved hostile, there were few safety supports in place. Experienced racism was a common theme among participants, making learning more difficult. When speaking with members, an overwhelming number of them shared experiences of racism, often from other students, but some also from teachers. Members were aware that racism began before they left the community, actively fostered in early stereotypes widely shared in Canadian culture. Brian Beaver recalled:

When television came along, we were probably the first family in the community to have a television; there were a lot of westerns, for example, where we learned about our people. We were demeaned; we were considered those types of people the cowboys shot at and killed very easily. We learned that, surprisingly, we were quite different, and the general population didn't totally accept us.

Members of varying ages shared experiences of racism, including this youth, who recalled the behaviour of one classroom teacher:

> *She was very prejudiced and very uneducated because she thought we were poor and that my parents were drunks. I gave my teacher a gift. I don't know what it was, and the teacher got emotional and apologized to my mom because she thought, whatever the teacher thought of them, that we were poor, that we were like that. So early on, very early on…back then I didn't understand that, but you know, now I do.*

An older member in the study shared her experiences and the divide that existed between Roseneath's largely farming, non-Native community and Alderville First Nation:

> *The entire time I went to Roseneath School, I never got invited to the birthday parties of my non-Native classmates. I never once got invited. I remember how it felt to see them handing out the little invitations, and I never ever got one. The only birthday parties I ever went to, as a child, were for some of my cousins. I never understood why I was left out of those classmates' parties. Yet as an adult looking back, I, of course, wonder if it's because of being Native.*
>
> *When I went to high school, we were bussed into Cobourg, and I went to the West High School. And the biggest issue I experienced there was being called a squaw. These two sisters would wait until the hallways were filled with students; it was that in between class-time, when you'd go to your locker and get the books or binders you needed for the next class. I would be having a good day, and out of the blue, they would call out to me in loud voices…" hey squaw! How's it going squaw!" I so remember how that made me feel; it just made me shrink and feel small. I hated it. These girls were in the same grade as me; we went all through high school together and we were in many of the same classes. They didn't do it in the classroom, but they would wait until the halls were full of so many people and then taunt me with those squaw slurs. I've never seen those girls again; I've run into many old classmates over the years here and there, but not them. I've often wondered if they knew just how very derogatory that was, and yet it seemed like they purposely wanted to humiliate me. The impact of that never felt good, of course. Aside from that, in high school, I just went through as anybody else would have, I suppose.*

Curiously, younger members today have continued to experience similar relationships among their student body. This youth observed how indifference translated into ignorance:

> *Alderville was only 20 minutes north of Cobourg; in grade 10, I remember a student asking me, "oh, you're from Alderville, right? Do you guys like live in teepees and stuff?" I swear she was serious. This would have been 2008, so that's not that long ago. I've heard many other stories, as well, from other people, just the ignorance from other students who didn't live that far from us, and it's sad, really."*

Another youth had this to share:

> *It definitely happened in the yard. It happened in the yard a lot, but you know, when you're older and look back, you can see it's just a kid just saying what they hear at home. Right? I remember this one individual, on the little kid yard, so I would have been in grade four or three. A fire truck and ambulance went by into Alderville and we were standing on that side of the yard. You can see highway 45 from there, and I remember him saying, "all those damn Indians." And he just started going off; this kid was literally eight or nine years old. So, when I look back now, he didn't even know what he was saying. He had no idea. He was just saying what he heard at home, so I don't believe that's truly racist, but that's where racism starts.*

A mother shared a recent experience with one of her teenage children:

> *The other thing I've noticed is more blatant, and I think a lot of it is on social media too, but my son has been dealing with racism. There were a couple of incidences. There was a student, a volunteer firefighter from the nearby community. He was talking about all the fires here, just down a road. And he was talking about how he had to put out the Indians' fires again. " I wish they'd stop playing with those fires… I had to get up at midnight and blah blah blah…" The local fire department, to their credit, dealt with the racist comments from the student, though. The teacher didn't hear it. I asked him how he handled it, and he did say something back. I forget. It was something like, "you might want to watch your mouth or something if you don't know who it was."*

> *And the kid replied, "Oh well, it was in Alderville, of course, it was the fucking Indians, and blah blah blah, that's all they do," talking about how they're just drunks and blah blah blah.*

It was not uncommon to hear about explicit racism from younger members and their non-Native peers. Koren Smoke, a local artist and entrepreneur, shared the following experience:

> *Yeah, it was the same people from public school into high school, and a lot of it, thinking back, it's definitely the parents, probably the household they came from. You know, living so close to the reserve and being right beside the reserve, there's probably history there. I know it's definitely a cliquey community, even the community surrounding the reserve. Thinking about it, it probably came from the parents. I remember, again, another chick from public school, that had seen me in the high school hallways. She'd come into the hallway and say, "hey, how are ya, hey how are ya" [sing songy racist chant] and yell it down the hallway. I was on the other side of the hall, and it wasn't busy; there weren't many people. But even after she did it, I was thinking one of her guy friends was beside her, super tall, and he was brown. I don't know what ethnicity he was, but like, as if you're yelling that and your friend visibly looks like he's got some ethnicity to him. And yeah, so I have experienced racism, and maybe because I was a little introverted and weird, maybe people didn't know how to act around me. Maybe that just amplified their need to, I don't know, bully, I guess, and be racist. Yeah, but I think it does stem from the household.*

An older member shared an off-reserve experience that involved a school principal:

> *My brother got in trouble, blah blah blah. I don't know if he got sent home for the day or whatever, but my dad was there to pick him up. So anyways the principal said to my brother, "okay go and sit outside" of his door there. There were a couple of little chairs, "I want to talk to your dad here." Okay, so anyways, he went and sat there. The next thing you know, there was a huge kerfuffle, a huge bang. My dad was a very cross, strong man. If he had an opinion, you knew his opinion. He was on this side of carrying protest signs everywhere. So anyways, next thing you know, he snatched my brother, snatched me out of class. I was being dragged out in a horrendous scene, out*

of the school. We got home, and we never knew what had happened. Only years later, we found out what the principal had said to my dad once my brother left the room. The principal said, "I know you want to call him your son, but you never know what you're getting with these kids."

My dad was, "pardon?" This principle assumed that my brother and I were adopted. This was not our first year in this school, and this principal knew my dad. He assumed that we were adopted. My dad flew off the handle because my dad was so against racism or anything like that. Oh my God, to assume that we were adopted, that we couldn't have possibly been his, was like the icing on the cake, and that principal never saw the end of the school year. My dad had his job gone, gone, gone. He [the principal] didn't come in one day. He just did not come in one day, so that was that.

I guess there wasn't that openness, or he just felt that he was in the right to assume that we must have been adopted because we're brown, that all brown kids are adopted, a child of the system, "you don't know what you're getting when you get these kids." But, then again, that's 1970, whatever it was. So, I always remember that as our first fight against the system, I guess, and that was in public school.

That was our dad defending us. Our dad, you know, being strong; he was the only one who could have done that because he was the big white guy. My mom wouldn't dare speak out because she didn't have an educational background. There was nothing positive about Native people back then; for her to even defend anything. So, our dad had to defend us on the simple premise that everyone's equal. That was probably a huge movement inside that school. I was probably only 10 but imagine how that must have rippled through all those teachers. Any thoughts that they had, they probably dummied them up pretty quick, too and were probably careful walking around my dad of anything they said, because he would take action. You know, that was probably the school's first racial awakening because we were the first brown kids there, in that town.

A Knowledge Keeper had this reflection:

I don't know, but for me, I didn't notice it because I just was kind of hanging out with my two buddies. We were never around anyone, but when I got to high school, that was the first time I'd ever heard the word "injin" and I got called it. I didn't know what that was. I just smiled because I'd never heard that word before and didn't understand how brutal this person was being towards me. Getting the high school exposed me to the wider world out there. One of my girlfriends, at the time, was telling me when she was driving with families to babysit the kids, and one of the kids, said something about "wagon burners." So she's telling me this story, you know and I'm "that's crazy for a little kid to say that," and she's like, "well, where do you think that they heard that from? The parents." Ever wild! People are hardcore. I don't know them; why would they say that to me? I don't know understand that with people. To me, I want to make a connection with people, and you know, put the face with that humanity, not the stereotype and some kind of show. We can't just think about the way TV shows us how things are. TV's not real.

Another Knowledge Keeper and grandmother who is committed to reconciliation efforts in all levels of society, added her experience about intense racism from other peer-aged, non-Native students in high school:

That's when I first learned that I was different from everyone else, and I experienced a lot of racism; the very first day, it was my last name, and coming in on a bus from the country. People thought they were better than us because they lived in town. We had that double whammy of coming in from the reserve. We were treated differently; all the town kids thought themselves to be city kids, right, so they treated us like we didn't know anything. We had two high schools, and you didn't get a choice as to which one you attended as it was predetermined by what side of the road you lived on. All my friends, the people I hung out with at home, they all went to the other high school. And then, there were only two other kids, who were also my cousins. Both were in grade 10, at the time, when I started, and they were the only two people I knew from home at that school. That was really hard on me. That was really a big shock when I went from public school at home to high school in

town. I remember I saw a girl there that I hadn't seen for years. She moved in grade seven, and I thought we'd never see each other again, but there she was, at my high school. She was a level six and wasn't in any of my classes. I remember going up to her, being so happy to see her, and she pretended she didn't know me and didn't want to associate with me. I was so hurt by that; I remember that because I was feeling so alone. This was a critical time when you are a young teenager and feeling a sense of belonging with your peers is very important. I was born in the middle of June, so for some reason, I was always the youngest in my classes. Grade nine, my first year in high school, I had nobody, in my class at all, like from home. Nobody I knew. Then added to that, I was discriminated against because I was Native. Back in those days, you would go to this homeroom every morning, and homeroom was where I experienced racism ***every*** *single morning. It wasn't just here and there; it was* ***every*** *morning. People would tease me, so you know, that was my first experience going to high school. It was very scary and devastating for me. When you look at emotional, spiritual, mental, and physical health, it was my emotional and spiritual health that was damaged during that time.*

In grade nine, I started using drugs to cope, just so I could tune people out. Again, I never told anyone, never told my brother, and he was at the same school, but he was in different classes because he was level six. I never told him what was going on, either. But I was starting to talk to my mom and dad about it when I came home, mostly my mother. When I'd come home, I tell my mom because I would be crying and say, "people don't like me because I'm Native." They didn't just make fun of my Nativeness, either. I was this really skinny 13-year-old, so they made fun of my physical appearance. As a young woman, they would even comment on the size of my chest and my clothes; even some of the guys would overhear it. They would comment, too, because, you know, when one person teases, everyone jumps in. It was just horrible, a horrible experience that really contributed to my low self-esteem.

This account demonstrates how damaging school experiences can be for young, unsupported Indigenous students, particularly when they are isolated. Racism experienced to such a degree has led to a fractured sense of identity in who they are as individuals, leading them to shrink away, hide in bathrooms, or escape to do drugs. For education to be relevant, members strongly felt that education should include the development of self and start from a position of strength that helps Indigenous students understand who they are as Anishinaabe people. Another female Elder added:

> *It was really tough; that's when I first found out where people were racist in my first year of high school. I had long hair and um, I didn't braid it, but I had long hair. A boy in high school sat behind me and would stick my hair in ink. When I first went into high school, I was the only Nish girl in the class, and he would play the drums (on his desk) as soon as I came through the door (mocking noise of Indigenous drums). I was devastated. I was* ***SO devastated****. He did that every morning when I came in. So, I went home and told my mom because one good thing about my mom was that I was never afraid to tell her anything. I could be open and say, "you know, here's what's going on in my mind."*
>
> *I remember it was probably after a couple of weeks of going to school with this boy; he was a bully. However, I didn't know what a bully was, and he'd get the rest of the other boys to do it too, not the girls, just the boys, and my mom said to me, "are you proud of who you are?"*
>
> *And I said, "absolutely. I am." She says then, "you show them." So, that was a Friday, and Monday I went to school, and the same thing happened (demonstrating pounding noise). And I could still hear her words, my mom's words, and I danced. After that, I felt empowered. You know what? I felt it doesn't matter what anybody says. My mom always said, "if you feel in your heart that you're doing the right thing and feel good about yourself, that's all that matters. It doesn't matter what anybody else thinks." So, then I continued, and I met some really good friends in high school, and some non-Native girls were my best friends. It was good. Of course, I hung around the Native girls; we hung around together and had lunch and stuff like that.*

A younger member, a male youth, shared his perspective about the level of what he called 'bullying experiences' within his home school of Roseneath. The relationship between non-Native people of Roseneath and Alderville First Nation can be problematic. This youth reflected on the school's strategy for intervention and found it to be lacking:

> *It was pretty tough just because, you know, I experienced a lot of bullying through my public-school career, and whenever I think about being back in school, that's always the first thing that pops into my head. It is those experiences. They were non-Native boys, and that was something that I always thought about. I'm not sure if it was because I was Anishinaabe or because I was always athletic, so I'm not sure if they were jealous of my athletic ability. But then, the other thing that I also have to consider nowadays is I'm not too sure what their home life was like. So, I'm not sure if they would go home, and it wasn't the best. Then, they came upset and mad when they came to school. They looked at me as a weak link and took their anger out on me. So that's something that I consider now and something that I've learned to, open my eyes to, as well. But it made me understand the effects of what bullying can do on a young kid and, not only that, I mean I'm open about it too, that I actually became a bully, myself. And yeah, so it was about seven years of bullying that I went through in public school. The mistake that I made was I never told anybody because I just thought I was going to be able to handle it myself, but I paid the price.*
>
> *I mean, I can remember that we would have these speakers come into the schools. You know, they were talking about bullying awareness and how to deal with it, what to do, to just walk away and just ignore them. It was always the same thing. You know, the thing the' didn't share was that you know, if you ignore those bullies' they're probably still going to be climbing at your back. Next, think, you know' they're going to be making fun of your sister, and they're going to be making fun of your brother, your mom, and your dad. And the', you're gonna explode, you're going to turn around; and next thing, you know, you're gonna have your hands on them. An' that's what*

happened in my case. I'll never forget the looks on their faces, but I was the one feeling bad for how I reacted. However, that bully was nicer to me a little bit after that.

Yeah, I ran into two of them. One of them actually like talked with me, and he asked me what I do now, and I was telling him, and he said he was really proud of me and whatnot. I never really had too much of a problem with him, because I always knew he was more of a follower. I knew that the majority of them, four of them were followers, and one was the instigator. Quite a few years later, I ended up seeing him [the instigator] at the Tall Teepee and just acknowledged him a little, but' didn't really talk to him much.

They were a year older than me. In the classroom, I just had me and my buddies and none of that really happened to me at all with my classmates. It was always during recess, or they would see me in the halls, then they would go right at me, even at baseball practice. It would still happen there. You know, I was wicked at baseball; I put in a lot of time and gave it 164% every baseball game, every baseball practice. I'll never forget; I was going to practice with new baseball pants, and there they were ripping on me about my baseball pants and probably because they were wearing regular shorts, and you know, I was just like whatever. There was one kid; he was friends with them, but he was a really nice guy, and he told them, "Come on guys, leave him alone." I think he was a solid guy, and I always respected him. I'll never forget, either, being at baseball practice and then my late Papa being there watching; we just had little scrimmage game, and I hit a home run because I wanted my Papa to see. I rounded the bases and hit home plate, and then there they were: "that' wasn't a real home run, you know, "and then I just said, 'I don't really care. That was for my Papa." And they didn't say anything.

The same young man described what he noticed as overwhelming ignorance of non-Native students once he reached high school, students who would not have had any previous connection with Alderville. The fellow student's curiosity borders on an appetite for indulging Indigenous stereotypes that other members similarly shared:

I'll never forget this one time, I invited this kid over to my house, and he was like really weird about it; he was just like, "are you sure?"

And I was like, "yeah."'

"You're positive?"

And I was like, "yeah, why?"

And he was like' "don't you live in a teepee?"

So, this was 2009, and I didn't get mad at him. At the same time, I was shocked, but I, you know me being me, I was just, "Yeah, 'but it's like 50 feet tall, and there's a lot of room in there. And I have my own TV but it's really tiny. It's got no color. If you got to use the bathroom, you gotta go outside and choose a bush. But if your clothes get dirty, my mom will bring you down to the river and show you how to scrub them. Forget about getting hungry, me and my dad and you will probably go check the snares and our fishing nets. It's usually bedtime when the sun goes down."

And he stood there, and he stared at me, and said, "really?"

I said, "NO! I have a house, just like you. It might be a little bigger, I have a toilet just like you, it has big flush, small flush and we use three ply toilet paper. We have food in the fridge and in our cupboards. I wear clothes, just like you. We have a nice TV 'nd it's usually light out when we turn the lights off."

*And he was like "I'm **so,** I'm **so** sorry."*

I was like "it's fine dude." He never came over, yeah, and I used that to my advantage because, at the same time, I still kind of threw it in his face, a little bit.

What is clear from these narratives is that school experiences could be complex and powerful enough to change a person's future trajectory. If education is to be effective, it must include, among its processes, decolonizing education not only beneficial for Indigenous students but also non-Indigenous students. When schools felt like threatening places and teachers could not be counted on to be allies and, at times, added to an already toxic environment, this proved to be difficult for Indigenous students to

engage with education. When racism was felt, it was difficult for students to believe that such events were entirely unknown to teachers. As a result, they perceived apathy threaded across their school experiences, making schools an unsafe and unpredictable place. Historically, schools have not proven to be spaces free of violence or abuse. Many living members experienced episodes of racism; it did not require going back generations to find them.

4.8 Sweetgrass smelling discussion

4.8.1 Racism and neighbouring community tensions

The topic of racism often emerged within the reflections of Alderville members. It is relevant to note that there are two very separate communities in this area: Alderville First Nation and the neighbouring rural village of Roseneath. The latter has historically included farming families, who would be reticent to call themselves settlers, their land ownership stretching back generations. To illustrate, at the recent provincial election in June 2022, my husband heard the proud declaration of one such gentleman waiting in line to vote: when asked about his address to verify his ballot, he loudly proclaimed, "my family was given the land by the Crown seven generations ago." Amongst the group of voters, it would be assumed some were from the Alderville community. This casual display of colonial privilege in Roseneath is tied to land ownership, and is, unfortunately, not uncommon.

In recent years, the community has grown to include commuters, often employed in local urban centers of Cobourg, Port Hope, Peterborough, Belleville, Oshawa, and even Toronto. Employment is variable and tied to all sectors of business – the service industry, health, and education, to name a few. However, there continues to be a significant divide between both communities, Alderville and Roseneath, and yet, so much contact between both groups. How do we account for this? How can they be so geographically close and yet so far away from each other? Some might believe that racial harmony exists because there is a mixing between both communities. There are surface level pleasantries, but also subtle, more acceptable forms of racism Deeper levels of persistent racism are best exposed when significant episodes, like road closures, bubble up to the surface tensions. I have witnessed how the loss of access to services and convenience results in overt episodes of racism when roads have been blocked during

Indigenous resistance. Overt racism is always discounted from the dominant community as isolated incidents from a few individuals. For many average non-Indigenous Canadians, racism no longer exists in Canada; it is only practiced by a few 'bad actors.' However, Indigenous people feel entirely different and see that it is still very much an entrenched in the Canadian experience.

Settler: Identity and colonialism in 21st century Canada (Lowman and Barker, 2015) notes that societies rely on a sense of place to make sense of themselves, stating, “Canadian are no different in this regard, and as a people, they often become deeply attached to land, forming strong emotional relationships with particular places” (p. 48). Settlers see these places as their homeland and property. Their ancestors did not come to visit; their mission was to stay, with a different attitude toward the land. Consequently, Indigenous peoples became displaced on their land and were forcibly relocated, as in the case of Alderville First Nation’s case. Settlers have developed narratives to support their actions, have designed legal systems to uphold them, and have actively engaged in the erasure of Indigenous people. Settler narratives involve heroic tales about their long, arduous journey to uninhabited wild lands that were transformed into proper homelands. This reading of *terra nullius*[17] did not include violent invasions which forced Indigenous people onto enclosed reserves and into episodes of starving. Instead, their narratives involved stories about victorious triumphs, hardships marked by toiling, community solidarity, and the ultimate creation of home, community, and Nationhood. Their narratives upheld settlers as rightful proprietors of the land, and laws were developed to enforce these beliefs (Lowman and Barker, 2015; Mackey, 2016). Their entitlement was legitimized by “longstanding, structured, collective privilege (Mackey, 2016, p. 9).

The creation of the town of Roseneath in Ontario is set against an interesting backdrop of colonial history developed by a specific collection of stories. Roseneath takes its name from a town in Scotland. The

[17] The Doctrine of Discovery pertains to European colonizers arriving in the 1400s in claim to North American lands. The doctrine gave them the right because they considered the land empty *terra nullius, owing to the absence of* Christians. Lands were “discovered” with title and therefore, claimed.

Campbell family arrived in the area sometime in the 1820s. However, the town that was settled, later known as Roseneath, became more organized when a township office was constructed in 1861. Roseneath belongs to the municipality of Alnwick (pronounced 'Annick'), surveyed in 1795 with the first concession of 24 lots. By 1816, Alnwick was a part of the Newcastle District (Ontario Genealogy, n.d.) Alnwick is named after Alnwick County, a market town within an agricultural centre in Northumberland, England. Like Ontario, the homeland of England also contains place names of Newcastle, Tweed, Wooler, Newcastle, and Kingston. In 1830, the first settlers from Ireland, Scotland, and England were attracted to large tracts of land. They arrived to "improve" the land by clearing it and building homesteads (Ontario Genealogy, n.d.). In 1835, a regional survey indicated that 3600 acres were set aside for the Alderville "Indian Settlement" (Ontario Genealogy, n.d.). The preoccupation of settlers was to farm the wild area and fashion the landscape into a hybridization of the "old country" (Ontario Genealogy, n.d.).

Historically, fairs from the old country were adapted and recreated as market venues for newly arrived settler farmers. They were transplanted in Canadian colonies with the assistance of agricultural societies, which could count on government grants approved by royal decree from the King of England. In 1856, within Northumberland County, Alnwick was issued its first grant for an agricultural fair. Their mandate was to celebrate rural life, boost production, and share best practices (Scott, n.d.). The fair was an opportunity to introduce divergent breeds of livestock, different farming methods, and a variety of rural life pastimes for all family members. Samuel Curtis from Alnwick first introduced Holstein cattle, for which he is memorialized at Guelph University (Roseneath Ontario Website, n.d.). While many exhibitions eventually folded, the county fair remains an ingrained part of Canadian settler culture, and its enduring presence continues to be widely celebrated in Roseneath. The fair remains a stoic, proud history of local settlers, as shared on Roseneath Fair website:

> We owe so much to these brave pioneers who have long passed on, and have left behind a challenge we should gratefully accept and move ahead. The erection of memorial gates and

> festivities is only a minute token of the high esteem to be held for our forefathers. (Roseneath Ontario Website, n.d.)

Settlers became the new and improved original people of the land whose feet appeared to grow roots, firmly planted, as a final act of their ownership of the land. Their presumed superiority emanated from a hybridized version of transplanted European culture in a North American context on Indigenous lands.

The 'fantasy of entitlement' is based on generations of collective privilege, which translated into "their right," layered with a required level of certainty (Mackey, 2016). Of late, issues of Indigenous sovereignty are particularly threatening for nearby settler communities; they generate uncertainty and settler anxiety (Mackey, 2016). Denis (2022) argues that two things be simultaneously true, even when they contradict each other: The settler agenda includes the erasure of Indigenous people, while ensuring their presence as inferior people. Jeff Denis (2022) argues Indigenous erasure is conflated with a people redefined. In this sense, Indigenous inferiority polarizes the dominant group towards notions steeped in superiority – Indigenous people exist to tell the story of why colonial dominance has been appropriate and necessary. The colonial mandate ensured dominance while rationalizing why it was essential to improve Indigenous peoples. It is an uneasy, contradictory space that Denis calls a double bind: "you must be like us; but you can never be like us" and "you must assimilate, but we won't let you" (Denis, 2022).

Casual, every day "laissez-faire racism" is a by-product that is practiced generationally in Canadian communities (Denis, 2020). For Alderville members, many episodes occurred in transitional spaces intermittently supervised by teachers – spaces like hallways, busses, cafeterias, and bathrooms. Still, members who shared their stories felt it would require active indifference from teachers to remain ignorant of such activities. Furthermore, it resulted in Alderville students feeling school spaces were not always safe and preferred the insular company of each other. One younger member observed: "I feel a lot of the times at Roseneath, all of us from Alderville, we really did like stick together. I do remember there was racism. There was tension, a lot of the times."

While being a bully is not especially character-affirming, being racist is even less so. Episodes of racism are less pronounced and massaged by validated settler perspectives. Denis (2020) addresses the unique sting of casual racism from neighbours and friends from surrounding neighbourhoods of First Nation communities, a form of what he calls "group positioning." Group positioning is derived from the historical context of colonization which is upheld by political, educational, and religious systems. The non-Indigenous town folk maintain a level of superiority over their Indigenous neighbours by using an 'us versus them' qualifier for 'those people.'

Denis (2020) noted that as Indigenous communities practice more resurgence, they are found to be more threatening entities that potentially disrupt power relations. For example, in the case of Alderville, there has been a significant economic boom, and the Indigenous community is purchasing more property. I recall an episode with a classroom teacher whose roots came from the farming community. She and other teachers scornfully referred to the center as "the AlderDome," because of the construction of the Community Centre, which was built with a curved façade, an homage to the importance of a circle to Indigenous meeting spaces. It was a relatively new build in the early 1990s which subsequently became a community hub for functions and housed the daycare. The centre was certainly larger and better appointed than the neighbouring Roseneath one. The community centre invited much speculation from surrounding communities about its need and where the funds might have come from, as though having a nicely fitted community centre was beyond the needs of Alderville. A discussion ensued amongst other teachers in the staff lounge, with an impression that it was an inferior attempt at comeuppance from the First Nation. Another teacher went on to deride the number of Band Office phone numbers listed in the phone book, implying that too many people were employed at the Administration Office for the amount of work they were doing. Overall, the comments circulated within the group with solidarity; for me, they felt demeaning. The underlying message was clear: Alderville was undeserving of a community centre, and the community had a weak, inflated labour force, perpetuating the ongoing view that Indigenous people are 'given

handouts' that are 'being squandered.' These examples of microaggressions to undercut a neighbouring Indigenous community did not feel welcoming to an Indigenous person from that community.

For some, the structure of colonization is not an event we have consciously abandoned; instead, it is an ongoing evolving process (Wolf, 2006). Denis (2020) discusses how group positioning contributes to the continuing process of entitlement of "superior" groups. Group positioning is an interesting concept that describes the historical features of racism and includes an individual's commitment to the status quo predicated on self-interest. Early on, American sociologist Herbert Blumer (1958) identified that racism was developed from four feelings found within the ruling class's feelings of superiority: 1) feelings that the subordinated group is sufficiently inferior and therefore domination is required; 2) feelings that superiority is justified, 3) feelings that justify the social structures proprietary claim to land and resources; and 4) feelings of fear that the subordinated group is threatening.

Lawrence Bobo (1999), a scholar and activist best known for his work regarding racism, identified Blumer's fourth point, feelings of fear, to be a highly emotive factor that greatly reinforces privilege over subjugated groups, especially when the oppressed fail 'to know their place.' Emotions include contradictions of hierarchical levels of belonging, where one can simultaneously belong and be cast as an outsider. The longer there has been historical contact between two groups, "the more fully crystallized sense of relative group position," he argued (Bobo, 1999, p. 461). Perceptions of threat are notably deepened when groups appear to be shifting. He noted that these shifting boundaries occurred when subjugated groups had access to financial resources, enjoyed the political influence of relevant alliances, or when leadership from within such communities was activated. Combined, these threaten dominant groups who can no longer be sure of their continued privilege. The unsettling power dynamic produces highly emotional responses. Dominant groups cognitively defend their privilege while instilling pride and personal interest in maintaining the status quo over their material interests, such as land and resources.

The sense of losing the status of one's group position is powerful and central enough to the individual that protection is justified. In our modern world, outright Jim Crow ideology is unacceptable, but

laissez-faire racism is. This modern form of racism is justified since racialized groups are viewed as the authors of their own misfortune. Group positioning is a socialized form of inequality that upholds white, mainstream privilege and justifies inaction. None of this is possible without the entanglement of the threatened individual. Indigenous nations' economic advances from treaty rights negotiations are not met with enthusiasm from neighbouring white communities who see their social class potentially shifting (Bobo & Tuan, 2006). Such is the case in Alderville and the surrounding community of Roseneath. Alderville's recent 2019 Williams Treaty Settlement has made it possible for Alderville to reimagine its future, not tied to chronically underfunded government structures. Compensation from treaties presents new opportunities. However, it is not without resentment from the surrounding non-Native community who feel it undeserving for the Alderville community, as though they have forgotten their place.

Hierarchical privilege is well established in its social structures of politics, religion, and education, and are impervious to repeated attempts toward change. Dominance is understood, and even natural, in this way of thinking. Consequently, when tensions eventually erupt, they are interpreted differently. An unwillingness to share power is rationalized by the repeated belief that Indigenous people cannot govern themselves effectively anyway. It is the common epithet that Indigenous people have received enough specialized treatment through taxation benefits and funding envelopes like education, with the lament being: "When are we going to be done paying them?" The ideas entrench inaction and create a rationale for striking out at communities seen as draining resources from average, hardworking Canadians.

Group positioning begins at a very young age since schools are effective agents of socializing behaviour. The *Identity and the Language of the Classroom* (Wright and Taylor, 1995) study observed non-Native kindergarten children practicing social division, with non-Native children preferring to establish friendships with children from similar backgrounds. Curiously, Native children from the same study were not so inclined to these behaviours. The study illustrates the existence of school culture, and the social register of the classroom, which is evident even at the earliest level of education.

In the case of Alderville, children from both the Native and non-Native communities have daily contact with one another in classrooms and other social situations. As adults, they may socialize across groups, work in similar environments, and share social spaces, resulting in friendships and marriages. It is a curiosity that racism prevails when intermingling is so widespread. For the Native person, the impact of racist experiences lingers years after they have been experienced, of which Thomas King (2003) says, "it's like a damp, sweltering campaign of discrimination that you could feel on your skin and smell in your hair" (p. 50).

From the respondents in the study, many recalled the racist experiences vividly; conversely, it is just as likely the perpetrators have long forgotten them, writing them off as growing childhood experiences. School staff should be aware of racialized incidents and have strategies to deal with them, not default to claiming their school as the exception. In this sense, the exception is understood as a rare event that is outside of common experiences and therefore, not taken as seriously. Having designated Indigenous staff and dedicated spaces where they work within the school will assist in developing better communication among staff, community, and the students. Relationship building is complex and requires time commitment. Educational spaces are not the only place where it needs to happen, but much burden is placed here as these are the spaces where our descendants spend much of their formational years.

The non-Native groups near Native communities do not easily acknowledge historical racism or their privilege, preferring to view racially charged incidents as isolated, one-off events from individuals with bad intentions, thereby erasing their accountability as racists from racist communities. They uphold casual everyday racism in a variety of ways: subtyping, homophily, and political avoidance (Denis, 2022). The first, subtyping, accounts for including a few good Natives because "some of my best friends are Native." They are isolated exceptions that safely anchor the setter neighbour away from acknowledging racist ideologies and even equip them with "insider knowledge" by their association.

The second example, homophily, belonging to a particular group, is a widely researched phenomenon based on the social science of group identification (McPherson et al., 2001). Patterns of

homophily tend to be strongest as relationships deepen between two individual people. There tends to be a shaping of attitudes from individuals to align with a dominant group. A desire to belong is matched by sharing similar values. Education, occupation levels, and social class are among the most vital indicators of homophily (McPherson et al., 2001). The more assimilated the colonized group, the greater desire towards shared opinions with the dominating group. Interestingly, shared proximity of geographical spaces contributes significantly to the likelihood of homophilous affiliations. Less studied, though applicable to this discussion, is the presence of overlapping, even conflicting, multiple homophilous associations. Belonging to multiple conflicting groups produces tensions from within and contributes to identity issues.

The last tendency, political avoidance, describes an ongoing congenial relationship based on surface-level pleasantries which avoid deeper level engagement surrounding difference and is, by definition, non-disruptive. Instead, it offers a flattering veneer of harmony between the two groups. Deep conversations are avoided in order ‘to keep the peace.’ The presumption of balance is assumed; thus, when tensions erupt, there is genuine confusion since a good relationship is thought to be in place.

Although both groups suggest pathways are needed to broker deeper understanding, they are understood differently. Bridges fail to address core problems because bridges are another way of misunderstanding each other’s boundaries. For non-Indigenous people, reconciliation is a worthwhile bridge. Non-Indigenous people may feel Indigenous people would be better off absorbing into the dominant system. On the other hand, Indigenous people perceive reconciliation pathways to include opportunities for the larger dominant community to learn more about Indigenous culture. Indigenous education is often held up to the great hope of creating pathways, but it, too, is interpreted differently. The dominant system considers educational pathways to include raising Indigenous people up to their standard. In contrast, Indigenous communities view education as an opportunity to open up the system towards inclusivity and sharing culture.

Denis (2022) uses the recent Pope’s apology as an example of divergent pathways. Non- Indigenous communities acknowledge the apology as long overdue, a positive event, a final act of contrition from the

church's involvement that acknowledges atrocities perpetrated against Indigenous people. It is, in part, self-congratulatory for finally doing the right thing. Indigenous people, however, viewed the act as the first step in the resolution process and a pathway toward deeper discussions about the church's responsibility for historical traumas. For them, the next step should include concrete intentions towards reparations of culture and language programs. Non-Indigenous people view past atrocities as stemming from the behaviour of isolated individuals; however, Indigenous people view such ongoing and unchecked crimes as examples of systemic abuses supported by the church. Pathways from both groups are antithetical to one another; one sees it as an end, the other as a beginning. Negotiating pathways are necessary for understanding the boundaries of both groups. When boundaries are tested by racial episodes or resurgent movements, group positions are hardened. Therefore, attempts to challenge surface-level racism will not change long-term behaviours because it requires radically changing one's group position.

John Mohawk, Seneca scholar and author eloquently argued that injustices are not always fixed by democracy; in fact, he argues democratic societies are hugely ineffective since they are in denial about their deficiencies (Mohawk, 2006). They uphold their systems with pride and work towards convincing others of their exceptionalism, even modelling for other nations to follow. Canada has greatly invested in an international image that cultivates a peace-loving nation steeped in generosity and liberal attitudes towards multiculturalism. Attempts to address injustices are often punished. Modern movements are defined by what John Mohawk called nationalist proclivities and progressivism (Barreiro, 2010). Such movements entrench fervent nationalistic pride and protection defensible by aggression and war.

4.8.2 The value of teachers

Narratives from Alderville participants often focussed on teachers. In traditional Anishinaabe societies, the teaching role is held in high esteem. Those who can be teachers have traveled and learned much; it is an honourable role. Teachers in traditional societies were considered "servants of the community" (Bell, 2006, p. 47). Their extraordinary ability was to help "bring balance to the communities and individuals" (Bell, 2006, p. 48). Teachers were important to learning because they represented

validated knowledge gained through experience. In our Creation story, sweetgrass is given to Nanaboozhoo to teach him about kindness and how to carry it on his journey (Benton-Banai, 1988; Kimmerer, 2013). Sweetgrass, one of our oldest teachers, is a loving teacher that reminds us of this kindness. Compassion is needed for those who make mistakes in their learning and for the mistakes we make ourselves. There is great humility in knowing our fallibilities, which includes making mistakes on one's learning path.

It requires good faith to turn over your child to a system that purports to help shape them into individuals. For Alderville people, many teachers have not fulfilled their obligation to serve the community in meaningful ways. As Alderville members shared recollections about their teachers, the teaching of kindness did not reach all of them. Their training did not include such things as the Seven Grandfather Teachings. Worse, some placed themselves above accountability and used their authority to crush the spirits of their young students. Casual cruelty and destructive apathy framed many teacher experiences. Members reflected on how this left them unsupported in a hostile education environment.

Teachers who come from middle class, non-Indigenous backgrounds and who have often been good students themselves, adapt well to the system. They also have, as Cherubini (2008) notes in the *Ontario Ministry of Education Policy and Aboriginal Learners' Epistemologies: A Fundamental Disconnect*, observed 13,000 hours of teacher behaviour to model (p. 21). They will teach what they know, and unfortunately, they know little about First Nation people.

The teacher owns the classroom space that is separated from Native communities and parents. Cherubini (2008) argues that parental disengagement is a product of parental loss of control. Parents are given tasks to assist the teacher and are rarely asked for input. Successes are owned by the school, and failures are the territory of the parents.

Student success and failure: as a matter of fact, or just how they are portrayed? (Gale & Densmore, 2002) argues that Indigenous underperformance might be a matter of opinion. In this article, Gale & Densmore (2002) defend the idea that individual ability in modern capitalistic societies reflects assimilation tendencies:

> The idea that individuals are rewarded on the basis of their innate talent and effort has wide appeal in modern societies and often has been used to explain or justify social inequalities…origins of inequality are thus located at the early stages in one's life" (p. 12).

Inequality is a social construct that plays out in minority students' performance within schools, something upheld by teachers who are unaware of their teaching practices. Battiste (2013) states, "The courts may clarify rights, but the courts cannot build relationships; people do – by working together on the basis of mutual respect and trust" (p. 78). When the classroom door closes, the teacher ultimately chooses what to teach and uses materials they are comfortable using. Though classroom materials can be legislated, relationship building cannot be.

4.8.3 Teachers and relationships with Indigenous communities

Despite poverty and other social problems, teachers often did not connect these social dynamics to pervasive Western culture. Orlowski (2011) studied teacher behaviours and found they clung to narratives that protected the school. They felt the Indigenous communities they failed to reach did not respect education or were not interested because "it's not their forte to pursue an academic life" (Orlowski, 2011, p. 137). Teachers also reasoned that Native communities had "an absence of positive role models" (Orlowski, 2011, p. 136).

Dion (2007) describes how teachers see themselves as "perfect strangers" to Indigenous people. For the most part, they have no relationship and no connection to them, signifying "what they do not know, and what they refuse to know" (Dion, 2007, p. 331). What they do know fits within a stereotypical model. The author claims this becomes a basis for their fear; not knowing translates into avoidance. Dion (2007) facilitates learning by challenging teachers about their own history and settler awareness, to know themselves as a product of their history, then to juxtapose this with what they think they know about Indigenous people. Non-Native teachers are frequently surprised by their unlearning and relearning, but it is a prerequisite to how they build relationships with Indigenous communities. Dion (2007) encourages this

type of self-reflection, noting that “the construction of ethical awareness among teachers is a promising way to progressively transform relationships” (p. 340).

Education policies, philosophies, and implementation rates reflect settler norms. A Higgins et al (2015) study argues that “epistemology, knowledge systems, history, and language, [are] constructed as the universal norm and projected onto other cultures that possess different worldviews and localized knowledges” (p. 259). Within the study, 90% of teachers queried were from white European backgrounds, which is consistent with Canadian teaching demographics (Kanu, 2011). ‘White’ teachers expressed reticence in Indigenous educational reform because they were unfamiliar with it and did not have adequate resources to engage. This position perpetuates eurocentrism with ‘imaginary Indian’ tropes at play. The binaries are familiar and consistent: they claim to be interested, but they were unequipped. With intentions well expressed, they were protected, insulated, and remained a ‘perfect stranger’ that shielded them from responsibility.

4.8.4 Indigenous teachers

A study entitled *A Study of Aboriginal Teachers’ Professional Knowledge and Experience in Canadian Schools* (St. Denis, 2010) was commissioned by the Canadian Teachers’ Federation to collaborate with 59 Indigenous educators about their experiences in the provincial system. There were four areas of interest: teaching philosophy, Indigenous curriculum, racism within education, and the presence of allies. The Indigenous teachers felt an unrelenting presence of racism that undermined student learning, and non-Native educators continually discounted it. Indigenous teachers perceived most non-Native teachers as so entrenched in their thinking that they could not recognize the underlying presence of racism, to the point where it affected their philosophy of education, their personal selection of learning materials, and their attitude toward their students, especially Indigenous students.

Educational spheres have looked deeply at the First Nations child and their community to explore what went wrong when Native children failed to thrive in classrooms, but they rarely take on the hard slog of looking inward. Marom (2019) notes that systemic racism is very much present at the core of the

Canadian teaching profession and located in daily micro-aggressions. Changes within the context of reconciliation are felt to be largely cosmetic. Marom (2019) argues whiteness is the norm; all others are exceptions. Having evolved from a colonial system, education exists to ease the assimilation of Indigenous people. Marom (2019) argues that packed curricula and Western values are present everywhere; when Indigenous content is added, it is variously insufficient and watered down as curriculum decoration (p. 331). One Indigenous teacher noted that to be successful, assimilation was expected, and one must be willing 'to play the game' (Marom, 2019, p. 332). Covert racism works in subtle ways to shape and influence teacher expectations of belonging to the profession.

Indigenous teachers experience microaggressions in casual insults that are intended to put Native people in their place, including subtle reminders that their presence is conditional. The teaching profession is a highly conservative, middle-class environment with hidden protocols of accepted teaching behaviours reflected in dress code, speech patterns, and teaching practices (Marom, 2019, p. 326). Indigenous teaching programs are viewed as substandard, designed for Indigenous candidates not qualified enough for mainstream teaching programs. Within the school environment, Indigenous difference was noted with disapproval, with a look, that "gaze of whiteness," of being less than (Yancy, 2008). These pressures are enough for isolated Indigenous teachers in Westernized school environments to reframe their identity and align more with Western norms. Thinking back on my own experience, I entered the teaching profession under the affirmative action program, and I am familiar with the discounted view this generally had with non-Indigenous peers. Though my final grades were within an acceptable "A" range, university education programs were skimming from the highest-grade average students to fill their programs, as though this has any guarantee of producing the best classroom teachers. Entering the profession through affirmative action programs further entrenched the view that Native people were conditionally present and less than ideal candidates who could not compete widely with all other teacher candidates. I remember sharing this experience with other Indigenous teachers who had also entered through the affirmative action door and faced similar experiences.

4.8.5 Teachers as settlers

In *Decolonization is not a Metapho*r, Tuck & Yang (2012) suggest that innocence is a much easier path than deep knowing. Knowing can be disruptive and challenging. Settler innocence prefers to frame relationships with Indigenous people from a cooperative stance and leave out the violent bits done to Native people in the service of land seizure and resources. Settlers protect themselves from such knowledge. In this act of ignorance, they transform themselves into natural inhabitants who have tamed the land and its wild people. They are not immigrants, as they have created the laws that Indigenous peoples and even immigrants must follow – they are the settler colonial nation-states. Acknowledging their role in the violence done to Indigenous people is painful. It is much easier to feign innocence found safely tucked away in association with some long-distanced "great- great-grandmother Indian princess." This simultaneously establishes a noble edge to their claim. For Tuck & Yang (2012), decolonization requires a discomforting engagement that is not dependent on continuing settler privilege.

Lowman & Barker (2015) explore settler discomfort that moves them from innocence to feelings framed by what the authors call "moves to comfort" (p. 99). Settler complicity in the violence against Indigenous people confronts their fear and guilt, which has now become personal, and, as such, they are motivated to find an answer that restores comfort (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 99). Since settlers have always assumed they have the answers, they are preoccupied with waves of wanting to control the arc of any resolution. They produce scenarios where they are the exception of tenuous surface-level associations with Native people through their personal association with an "Indigenous friend or family member."

The conversation about racism is difficult for teachers who are knee-deep in denial. The discussion requires teachers to be open and willing to unlearn and relearn, to challenge their understanding from a settler colonial consciousness context. Their relearning must include respectful engagement with Indigenous communities in the vein of what Battiste (2013) refers to as "collective conscientization" (p. 69). Protected by law, Indigenous knowledge is affirmed, but implementation is weak. Change requires a divergent approach at multiple levels with multiple people, using innovative strategies.

4.8.6 Resistant Indigenous students

Being outside of privilege, the colonized recognize the deeper purpose of formal education and actively resist complete assimilation. Indigenous people intuitively learn that full participation is coming at a price and that their culture is under attack – In order to be with one, you must be at odds with the other. Indigenous people are often subversively resistant to becoming fully integrated at the cost of understanding who they are as Native people. Ogbu (1978) describes involuntary minorities, their "caste status," and how this differs from voluntary minorities who willingly immigrate, then integrate into mainstream societies (as cited in Cummins, 1986, p. 18). These 'involuntary minorities' begin to see these structures as irrelevant and resist them.

The engine of education is centered around students achieving requisite performance at timely levels. When provincial or state-run tests become routine, it is the disadvantaged student who suffers first. As the minority children struggle, then fail, assessments are put into place to legitimatize the problem; predictably, the locus is found in the child and their community. Moreover, as explained in the article *Editorial; Indian Control of Indian Education – 40 Years Later* (Pidgeon et al, 2013), the authors explain: "in a colonial education system, learners are constantly assessed as a measure of academic achievement, prioritizing intellectual learning objectives and banking-model styles of pedagogy as indicators of success, Indigenous approaches to education are quite different" (p. 31). Western education is centered around objectives teachers can see, log, and evaluate, eventually feeding into progressivist capitalism that requires students advance at regular, predictable, measurable intervals. Indigenous education is different, and it is proving hard to fit within the provincial system. The purpose of education is clearly articulated in the educational vision statements from both communities. The Western educational system's view is:

> First Nation, Metis and Inuit students in Ontario will have the knowledge, skills, and confidence they need to successfully complete their elementary and secondary education in order to pursue postsecondary education or training and/or enter the workforce. They will have the traditional and

> contemporary knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to be socially contributive, politically active, and economically prosperous citizens of the world. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 3)

Conversely, the Assembly of First Nation's (2010) education document reads Indigenous education as:

> a process of First Nation learners in linguistically and culturally appropriate holistic learning environments that meet the individual and collective needs of First Nations and ensures that all First Nations have the opportunity to achieve their personal aspirations within comprehensive lifelong learning system. (p. 10)

The Indigenous perspective is concise and includes lifelong holistic learning that is culturally appropriate, develops a sense of self, and meets the needs of the community.

4.8.7 Education as a colonizing vehicle: teachers as partners

Our acceptance of education as a colonizing vehicle is succinctly illustrated by the findings of an educational research activity conducted at Lakehead University by Sociology Professor Iseke Barnes with preservice teachers. Barnes (2008) makes a convincing claim in her article, *Pedagogies for Decolonizing,* that although Canadians generally have minimal knowledge of First Nations' issues, they possess a uniquely innate understanding of how colonization works in Canadian education. Make no mistake, she argues, Canadians deeply understand the mechanics of colonization (Barnes, 2008). Without attaching a name to societies, Barnes (2008) divided the class into two distinct groups: a progressive group and a cooperative group. Group activities were designed to require the "progressive" group to expand and overtake the more cooperative group. It did not take long for the "progressive" society to exercise its colonizing will and design educational systems to wipe out dissent. After the exercise, strategies were discussed, and Iseke Barnes' asked the group about how they came to know so much about colonization and its stratagems. Not surprisingly, their experience as Canadian citizens taught them how education was used as a forceful agent in assimilation. Colonization was not accidental, they conceded; instead, it was systematic, determined oppression.

4.8.8 Suitability indicators for teachers

In the practical affairs of teaching, I was drawn to why unsuitable teachers become permanent fixtures in the profession. When Alderville members experienced shockingly poor teachers, there was apathy in dealing with them. It has been my experience that principals and their brand of leadership drive the school; however, their responsibilities often serve narrow administrative foci. Haim Shaked (2019) found that protected tenure attracts individuals to the profession through powerful unions. Shaked (2019) discussed the precarious dilemma facing administrators in removing poor teachers: the effort was significant enough for principals to retain them at the cost of students. In addition, principals from the study generally felt they lacked autonomy in hiring teachers according to their particular school culture (Shaked, 2019).

Burnout in Prospective Elementary School Teachers: Is It Related to Reasons for Choosing the Elementary School Teaching Major, Beliefs about the Teaching Career and Satisfaction with the Choice (Dundar, 2014), a Turkish study, evaluated the phenomena of elementary pre-service teachers' burn-out rates using three indicators: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment, including meeting the demands of daily tasks and deadlines. Candidates who considered teaching a fallback career for extrinsic reasons (job security, reliable income, shorter working days, established calendar breaks, and job transferability) were more likely to experience burnout than students intrinsically motivated to enter the profession as a calling (Dundar, 2014). The latter, guided by altruistic reasons, also experienced greater satisfaction in the teaching profession. The study concluded teachers' motivations for entering the profession and their beliefs about teaching impacted their performance and job satisfaction. The individuals who came into the teaching profession as a secondary option more often expressed low energy, feelings of incompetence, and a generally negative attitude toward teaching. The study supports the notion that not everyone is suited to the demands of teaching, and not all reasons for selecting the profession led to satisfaction.

A Quebec study, *Predicting intraindividual changes in teacher burnout: The role of perceived school environment and motivational factors* (Fernet et al., 2012), attributed teacher burn-out rates to overly demanding school environments, frequent overwhelming student behaviours, and an absence of resources and supports. Teachers from school environments weakened by the above burn-out factors experienced feelings of reduced self-efficacy, especially over the course of the school year. As the school year wore on, their confidence to teach gradually depleted into a loss of confidence to perform their duties capably. Teachers described a loss of energy and motivation for teaching and even feelings of isolation from a lack of available support.

Collective Teacher efficacy (Goddard et al., 2000) explores the dynamics of individual and collective efficacy school environments. A sense of 'efficacy' is derived from teachers' skills, knowledge level, and available support. Grounded in social cognitive theory, the study examines how the school environment is normalized. It impacts teacher practice; they state, "collective teacher efficacy is a way of conceptualizing the normative environment of the school" (p. 496). There is a correlation between teacher efficacy and teacher behaviours (480). When individual teachers' practices are incongruent with the group, they are influenced to conform. Therefore, "efficacy is context-specific" (p. 482). The authors confirm the work of Bandura's (1993) two critical findings about student performance: 1) the collective efficacy of a school positively correlates with student achievement; and 2) the functioning collective efficacy of a school is more influential than socioeconomic factors of its students (p. 497). The collective efficacy of schools is unified and more effective than the efficacious efforts of individual teachers. The selection of school administrators becomes critical since they drive the school's goals, vision, and collective efficacy. While having more Indigenous teachers and allies is excellent news, they must be a part of a unified functioning school with similar goals. If education is important to Canadians, the demands of the environment and how they are staffed and administered must be considered to establish a sense of collective teacher efficacy for the benefit of its students.

4.8.9 Conclusion

Western teachers are at odds with Indigenous students who do not conform to expectations. Colonized people have a different, more troubled relationship with the education system, a relationship defined by opposition and resistance to continued colonizing efforts. They have a deep understanding of oppression and believe that discrimination is institutionalized. Collective action is necessary to change the rules and even the playing field. However, Western society prefers to see their education system as reasonably innocuous. It is with an incredible lack of insight that educators dismiss this reality. Teachers must appreciate this reality to understand how to reach the Native student in their classroom.

It is the same with changing educational policies. Teachers have been trained through a Western lens that has been accepted as fact; so much so, they have become resistant to learning anything that challenges their beliefs, making it possible for them to settle into complacency that can last the duration of their careers. Classrooms are well populated with teachers who continue to practice what they have been taught as fact and do it with little self-awareness. It worked for them when they were students, and it will work equally well for their students, seems to be the thinking.

It is not my goal to beat up on good teachers, trying their best. Teachers do take the brunt of education criticisms. Expectations for the average classroom teacher are immense, and there is ample reason to believe they are undervalued, and their energies overextended. However, this adds to the precarious situation for Indigenous students in provincial classrooms. Indigenous people genuinely value the importance of good teachers and acknowledge that it is hard work. I am reminded that most Alderville members in this study practiced the teaching of compassion. They effortlessly balanced negative experiences with memories of teachers who taught them something about themselves. They found ways to appreciate the efforts of some teachers that stood out in personal ways. Manulani Meyer (2004) suggests that we should remember our favourite teachers because they may have taught us some important lessons, may have inspired us somehow, and “they deserve our appreciation.”

Part 5: Sweetgrass Knowing – The Second Strand

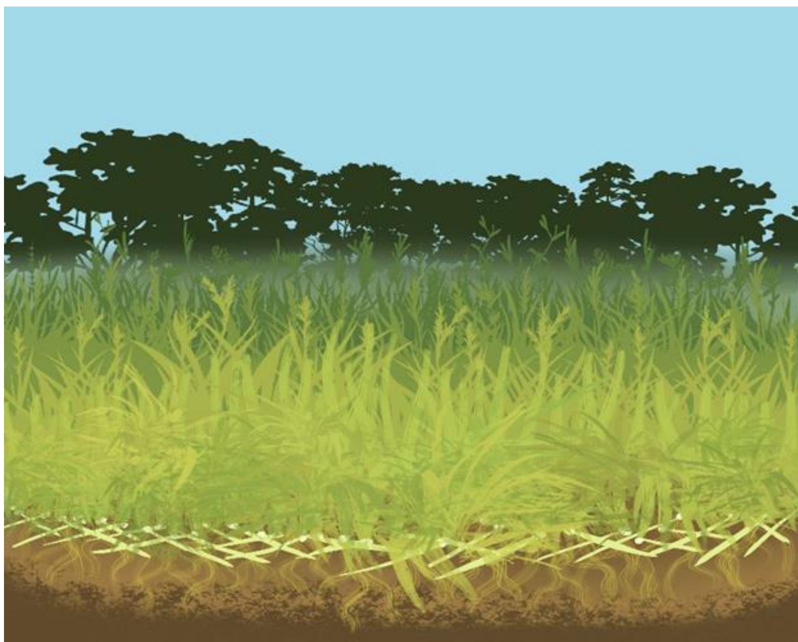

Figure 7 - Sweetgrass Community, artistic rendering by Alderville Artist Koren Smoke

Sweetgrass knowing within this section relates to the foundational understanding of Anishinaabe values that have persevered despite chronic colonial inference. During research interviews, the following two questions were posed: what constitutes a successful life? and what is your understanding of learning and education? These questions provided a window into understanding what a well-lived life looks like for community members. Common themes emerged, but it bears noting that all Alderville members, youngest to oldest, struggled with the term 'successful' and found that it prefaces learned Western values. When the question was reframed to "what constitutes a meaningful life?" participants' answers described a plethora of philosophical content about life, family and community relations, and their overall purpose concerning their responsibilities. Many were cautious of perpetuating capitalistic tendencies found in colloquial terms such as 'success' and preferred the broader context of 'meaningful.' Learning and life were inextricably mixed and interwoven to illustrate learning should be more about one's life journey, signifying that members' perspectives were grounded in Anishinaabe values. In terms of education, most members

interpreted education and learning as separate entities. Where learning is deeply experienced as something personal, education in contrast, was external to the enlightenment of an individual.

5.1 Different worldviews and the influence of capitalism

When members reflected on what constitutes a successful/meaningful life, most articulated a path towards developing one's unique talents and intentionally living a richly experienced life. An older member reflected on the purpose of Western education as a way to reach an optimum number of students and shared that it was the most straightforward, generalized rationale for education. He thought values are sorted out around Western ideals that are firmly entrenched and impervious to change:

> *It can clearly point out the mechanisms of education, if you will, out of necessity, became about the volume of young people, it was trying to impart information that has to be more of a general sort of thing, and isn't this how we move to the structure of a curriculum? We should be learning this and that for the greatest number of people to benefit from. So I think it's a good way, yes. There have been deficiencies in it, for sure, in devising the curriculum. A lot of necessary things, in my opinion, have been left out because the Western colonial mentality has been going in a different direction than we would have advised. And the only reason I think that we persist in doing it this way is because the rest of the world seems to be caught up in this rat race, too. We perceive the consequences of falling behind in things going backward rather than forwards, and our commitment to that competitive structure has gotten us into all kinds of difficulty today. Nobody wants to be first or last. So how do we heal the earth and our climate?*

This member viewed Indigenous methodologies towards education as advancing, while Western notions of progress have a much different orientation. He thought Indigenous perspectives, which foster healthy relationships, were meaningful and should be included in educational models. He added:

> *A lot of good things would be right if we altered our perspectives, made room,* ***made room*** *for the values that Indigenous students carry with them. When we say that there are gaps in the competence of our Indigenous students in certain areas, I'd like to know what those areas are. Of*

what relevance are they to the challenges we face tomorrow? I would like to see space made for Indigenous knowledge to contribute to the solutions of problems, which doesn't necessarily involve those skills that are being judged as deficient. There you go, that's looking at the whole issue from a totally different, from an Indigenous perspective.

An Alderville youth member shared*:*

This Western system wasn't made for people to go and learn what they wanted to learn. It was standardized so that we could grade people based on a standard way of learning. It doesn't even represent their intellect. It's how we basically become molded into this system, to then keep this capitalist train rolling.

A Knowledge Keeper added:

I think it is when you feel good about yourself, that you have positive and rewarding relationships in your life. I'm not gonna sit here and talk about accomplishments "oh I accomplished that and everything else." I'm not going to sit and talk about that. What it is for me, how I got here and who helped me along the way, is what I will talk about. I couldn't have done it by myself. Having experiences, good or bad, taught me a lot about myself and still continues to teach me. My life now is about creating safe pathways for other Indigenous people, so that they don't have to experience some of the barriers I experienced. I draw on my own experiences and experiences of my colleagues too, to do that. I never thought about that, when I was growing up, like what's going to be a successful life? I remember when I went into social work, somebody said that's not a money-making job, and you'll never become rich. It wasn't my focus, to become rich. Even though I grew up not being rich, I'm kind of glad I did, because it made me appreciate what I have. What is poor anyway? What is rich anyway? Was I poor? I don't know. Not having the clothes everybody else was wearing was a sign that I was poor? I probably wouldn't even care about that, if I wasn't teased about the clothes I was wearing.

Younger members, well-educated with requisite university degrees in the Western system, reflected on the shortcomings of their educational experience, and indicated that they were fully conscious of their Western ideological orientation towards capitalistic thinking. They credited their Indigenous learning to include knowledge gained from within the community, which is undervalued in Western thinking. They voiced their views on how Indigenous ideologies regarding the value of the environment were needed to replace consumerism.

One member was particularly philosophical about the significance of learning and how sciences and art should coalesce to produce a complete form of education and learning. In his own experience of combining science with emotive artforms, he found both related, and not compartmentalized:

> *You know, the influence of art in my life and also science, but they're two different things. One is subjective, and one is objective. Where we get the* ***proof of things*** *is the most important thing in science, as how that proof is collected and how it's analyzed, and what you can say about it once you've done the analysis. Whereas art makes statements that don't require proof. They are purely subjective, from a personal point of view, and they may touch periodically on the importance of science, or not. And those two realms are not communicating very well with one another in this world. One is experiential, and the other is a sort of iterative, you know, science follows an iteration of steps as it seeks the answers to things.*
>
> *Now, they're both learning. Learning encompasses so much more than the mechanics of things, the most important being yourself. Learning about yourself and how you work, and how you fit in is an* ***important piece*** *of learning. Your responsibilities to those around you and other living things around you, that's what I've learned. The importance of that came from both directions. You can have telescopes to tell you about the surface of Mars and things far away. Still, if you have an Indigenous drum, you learn something about the organization of your heart and your spirit. They're two different types of instruments, they're both learning, and I think they integrate well together in the proper atmosphere and environment.*

You know, a more wholesome integrated approach would be necessary. We can live with temporal and spatial differences in those types of learning; they can be sequential, or they can be related too, on how one type of learning relates to another, and that's what I would call education. You know, education becomes a broader concept of how to think, and how to relate to different moral structures in the world. It is a good piece of learning.

I think, we cannot call ourselves educated until, at the end of our lives, we can look back and say my experiences, whether self-induced, accidental or by the grace of some great creation, have come into my life and played a significant role in the direction, of how I view the past, how I live from day-to-day, and what I leave for others. I think a proper education is all of those things; it encompasses all those things, and learning is part of the process by which we come to that conclusion.

The following older member highlighted how both value systems were at odds:

They look around them. If they're taught to strive for all of the things that are deemed to be indicators of success and stability, you know, the quality of the home, maybe that their parents live in, the type of car that they drive, all that consumerism, it just ***plays*** *upon people's insecurities in that regard. It's why this country is so far in debt. You know, we've all been warned by economists to reduce our personal debt. It hasn't worked. We still have got people running around thinking they belong to the millionaire's club and what they need to be there. How much is enough?*

Every dollar that has ever been made or spent has come from this earth. All we need to do is stop and realize that there is a responsibility once we come to realize that. Now I'm not a Luddite; I don't begrudge the technologies that we have, the so-called sophisticated structures of how resources flow through the system. We're living beings. It's just that Indigenous people have a different idea of what life should be.

Indigenous people have a great deal of difficulty identifying with success in a Western sense. Western people have a great deal of difficulty understanding the success we feel spiritually

integrating with this world. That is so much about what we're talking about here. You know, religion in the school system is just completely ***made*** *by western civilization. Look what it's done to us. We're not talking about the same kinds of religion; there's a difference between religion and spiritualism. I think that's the crux of the whole issue here. We are integrated with the natural world, so it's not difficult for us to honour it as individuals. We don't need great big churches; all we need is a great healthy forest or a savanna or a clean lake and water to drink, all of the basic, fundamental means that we should be working towards that we have neglected because western science was so busy advising us to make livings, money and support the economy, to be considered successful.* ***We haven't been successful****. We haven't been successful following that method—the world's in trouble. We've failed.* ***Failed****! So, there's a great,* ***great*** *travesty in the way that we've been taught to live. That's all I want to say about that.*

One mother of middle/secondary school-aged children found herself at odds with the values the younger generation were adopting, heavily influenced by materialism pedaled by ever-present influential media sources:

Being happy is knowing who you are, being confident in who you are, and just being fulfilled at the end of the day. I tell my children, "Whatever career path you choose, you're likely going to end up changing it, or you're going to go into a different facet of it. Try not to stress that, as soon as you get to high school, this is not what the rest of your life will look like. It's just a stepping stone." I do tell them that you want to prepare financially for your future. I do have those conversations with my kids. Once they get their first steady paycheck, they have to learn how to take a bit out and save. They have to take a little bit out to save for unexpected expenses coming up. They want cars, well, guess what? Start looking at a budget. But I said, "money isn't everything. Look at a career."

One says, "oh, I want to be a cop, but it only makes this amount of money."

"You know what? Here's the thing. Whether you make 150,000 or whether you make 50,000, you're still going to blow your money on things that are likely not that important to you. As

long as you have a roof over your head. It's safe. It's a nice home that you're proud of. You're saving for your pension, and you have a decent car that gets you to and from work; but, at the end of the day, more than anything, I want you to be happy coming home from work." I tell them about that and try to teach them about stress, and balancing that stress when things get tough. "You don't want a job, where you're at it 24: 7 and then, you're taking time away from your kids."

I stayed home to work in my own community until the kids got older so that I would be home at home at a decent time with them. I'm the one taking them to school, or to hockey. I'm the one putting them to bed at night. I didn't want somebody else doing that for me, even though I could be making 150,000 somewhere else? What good is that? I wouldn't be fulfilled, I wouldn't be happy with myself knowing somebody else is raising my children; that's something that I can do, and that's something I've always wanted to do.

One youth from the study felt any notion of a fulfilled life resulted from valuable relationships and through defining your own success beyond capitalist influences:

I can't say what someone's happiness is. For me, happiness is to have minimal stress, to wake up, knowing that I'm safe, to have people in my life who love me, to have good supports in my life, to be able to live the way that I would like to live. I'm pretty simple, I would say, in that aspect. So, assuming other people might be different, I think at the end of the day, doing whatever makes you happy would make a damn good life. I always try to counteract "being successful." In a capitalist patriarchal society, it is very whitewashed, it's about being rich. That's not what I want. I want to be able to live the life that I want to live which, definitely does involve some finances, but I don't want to be a millionaire by any means. I just want to be able to wake up in the morning, eventually, I'd love to be by some water, the simple things. That's what I want. And for me, that isn't monetary. I think that that's a very westernized way of thinking, to think that success equals money. Having really great connections with people, having a purpose that you feel you fulfil, being a support to others in your life, living an adventurous life, as much as that means to you, is a successful life.

A young father summed it up simply: For him, a meaningful life was defined as "somebody who's not worried, too worried, about materialistic things. If you're comfortable with what you have, then you must feel pretty damn successful."

Capitalism was often named as directly challenging Anishinaabe values. Members connected capitalism to correlate with environmental devastation and noted its impact within Alderville. Indigenous authors have long painted a picture of ecological collapse due to poor land stewardship. As Indigenous people, our teachings remind us of our connection to the land.

5.2 Connection to culture

Members reflected on how to define a meaningful life, and for many, that included being connected to Anishinaabe culture. One member, now an Elder herself, shared the importance of Elder roles and how one helped her when life was full of challenges:

> *One Elder, you might have known, helped us with our full moon ceremonies. I had surgery way back in the day. I wasn't very well, and I was on my couch. My friend brought me an air conditioner and plugged it in. We started talking about how we needed to have a healing ceremony. So, that Elder came, and we did a full moon ceremony in my yard. We did the healing ceremony. We brought food, and we all had a gathering, which helped me through that time.*
>
> *One time, I went to see this Elder because she was always kind of my mentor. She was my Elder; she was my person if I just needed to chat, so I went to see her here at the lake. There was a rough time I was going through, and I said, "you know I'm having a rough time, and I just don't know what to do."*
>
> *She said, "always, always remember that the creator looks after you and* ***remember that the task ahead of you is never as strong as the force behind you****. So, no matter what you're dealing with, there's always the creator or helpers or something behind you that will help you get through that." And that's what I pictured in my mind. I pictured me, there with a shawl on, going forward and all my helpers there with me. They're going to help; that force is there. So, no matter*

*what, I truly believe the creator doesn't give us anything that we can't handle and that when we have these things that come up in our lives; it's to teach us something, as rough as it is sometimes. I truly believe what she said, "***the task ahead of you is never as strong as the force behind you."**

A Knowledge Keeper shared:

Jan Longboat once said that the medicines we need, everything we need to walk this journey, is right outside our front door. We don't have to look too far; that came from her. At the time, I was really young, in my late 20s, and I've always remembered it.

My grandmother also said that to me "just go sit outside, listen to the trees, listen to the wind, listen to the sounds, and that'll help you," because I was having anxiety. I was stressed out over work, a burnt-out period I was going through. That's what she said, so similar to what Jan said, and I'm sure what many other Elders have said. It's a really good teaching. That goes along with those other teachings, that everybody has the ability to heal themselves and that teaching comes from the creator side. Creator gave everything to us to walk this journey. When we were in the spirit world, and when we were born, we draw on that, that is still in us, that spirit. Just like the example of language, we haven't forgotten the language. It's still in our spirit; we haven't forgotten it. So it really resonates to hear those teachings. I love those teachings of how we connect with that, because a lot of people don't have a connection to their spirit, for their spiritual health. And that really concerns me as a helper, in this day and age, when our youth are really struggling, and our children are struggling.

My mother was very spiritual. It was later in life when we had many conversations, when I started going to school, and learning about our Indigenous knowledge; she and I had many conversations. At first, she resisted because she didn't trust it. She came from that place, that place where a lot of us came from, not to trust our own Indigenous teachings. I remember that. I remember many people didn't trust our teachings, you know, "that Elder smokes, that Elder drinks, that old guy was a boozer years ago, so why are we listening to him now?" To me, those are the

best people to listen to, the ones that have been there and have come through, and they ***are*** *our teachers. My mother eventually came around because she started doing her own work and healing when she'd come to ceremonies with me.*

How do you connect with spirit? I really believe that it's just sitting by our fire, sitting by the water, being in ceremony, learning those teachings that's how you connect. Drumming and smudging, those are things that connect you to that place inside of you. A lot of people go to ceremony and say, "oh, I felt like I've come home."

This narrative shares the fundamental belief that Indigenous people must begin to have confidence in the value of their traditional teachings, which is well supported by Indigenous theorists (Meyer, 2004; Kirkness, 1998; Simpson, 2017). This Knowledge Keeper's connection to culture is evident as she talks about its ability to heal members and spiritually realign them when they struggle. For example, one member, whose experiences included being a child of multiple foster and group homes, shared that having a spiritual relationship with the Creator helped her heal:

I think a successful life is not just all your material things, your home, and all that stuff. II think your success is when getting reunited with your creator. You know, to say your prayers. Because if you've got that relationship with your creator, your life will go in a good direction. I believe prayer is a big thing, and your smudging is a big thing. If you can smudge at least once a day and say your prayers, not just for yourself but for your family and friends. It's not just about you; if you have that relationship with your creator, it's about your community. And when you know somebody is having a hard time in the community, maybe pray for them instead of putting them down. I think that's a success if you can do that. Now, 'f you're not taught that as a child, then you have to learn that as an adult, right? Which is what I've learned.

The connection to spiritual wellness is shared by authors who have studied maladies within Indigenous communities (Wesley-Esquimaux, 2009; Antone and Hill, n.d.). The topic of mental health and Indigenous

spiritual alignment is well-covered and supported in Indigenous health circles (Baskin, 2016; Lavallee & Menzies, 2013; Ross, 2014).

Another critical observation from the interviews was the importance of the journey rather than the destination, which is one of our many great teachings about our journey toward becoming self-actualized people. Instead of rushing to the finish line, focussing on the journey of the overall meaning of life allows us time to be reflective and assess the quality of the end goal. One member expressed it this way:

> *I think a lot of people when you're looking back on the journey, a lot of people would probably say they crave "meaning." Although, maybe they wouldn't really admit it because they're so busy being forced to find success and education to meet this or that, when maybe, if they could find meaning, learning, and peace, I think you'd feel better as a person.*

5.3 Equality and kindness

For many members of the study, education can be viewed as a mutually beneficial space for learners and teachers, and on occasion, even egalitarian, where roles could be reversed. I am reminded of Artbaa Beaver's earlier advice on the teaching of humility, where teachers can accept their shortcomings while acknowledging the vulnerabilities of their students. The role of kindness in education continued to emerge in conversations. Education has a role in individuals' learning, though its overall potential is underutilized in current Western practice. One Elder had this to say:

> *I think education's role is very important, one in providing the scope and the awareness that education can do and to open up people's life experiences in a learning way. Learning is about so much more than the mechanics and transmittal of information; it's a great form of sharing, too, as well. I think the mechanism by which that sharing occurs, if they were able to be adequately developed, you know, we've put up a lot of fences in the educational system, separating teachers from their students.*
>
> *I agree with some of them, and some I don't. If you look at the traditional Indigenous way of teaching, it's a gentle way but also very serious. It's about survival, and that's what traditional*

environmental knowledge is about; it's about surviving. You either learn those lessons, or you have a hard time making it through to the next season, the next whatever. But it can be done with humor and grace and gentleness, and just enough discipline involved there, that you learned a lot about yourself and others in the process. So, I much prefer that, actually. If it weren't so damn discontinuous with how the world thinks today, I would have had no argument growing up under traditional Indigenous pedagogy.

Learning is based on sharing communities that include learners and knowledge givers in equitable spaces. Both form a continuous community, to which they belong, based on practical everyday skills understood for a functioning community. Societies that rank members hierarchically and create power dynamics are in danger of being unable to count on one another. When the importance of the individual outranks the community, the community becomes less cohesive and at risk of not functioning. This view is an internalized teaching shared by one young member:

To me, learning and education overlap because it's been my experience that you're learning together, you're working together, and you're teaching together, especially regarding Indigenous education. I was working with Indigenous and non-Indigenous kids at the same time. I would teach them things; they would learn those things. Then they would teach me, and I would learn from them. We would work together, correlating how the Seven Grandfather Teachings work. We would work together, being nice to each other, treating each other with kindness, working hard at being truthful, honest, courageous, and sharing our wisdom and humility. So, education and learning, yeah, they overlap for me because you are kind of doing the same thing, at the same time, in a way. One thing that helps students feel welcome and be part of a classroom is to offer them to co-facilitate the class sometimes.

An Elder offered that living well within our teachings as Anishinaabe people was important to a meaningful life:

> *The idea of success, for me, has changed from the time I first went to high school, changed as a result of different employment experiences. I've recently said, "don't ever give up your dreams, because it took me three changes of employment to find out which one I liked or what I wanted. Success is not a sense of education, only a portion of education. If I would look at it and really define it, success can be measured in how you connect to the Seven Grandfather Teachings, and there you will find your own definition of success. I think success is living a good life as a human being, as the creator has asked us to live, and to accept the responsibilities that the creator has given us. If we can say yes to that, then we've lived a successful life. That would resonate more, to have a deeper understanding of my cultural spirituality and my traditions, rather than success. I kind of associate that term "success" with western thought.*

Connection to the Seven Grandfathers' Teachings flowed throughout conversation when topics evolved around emotive intelligence (Bell, 2006, 2016; Benton-Benai, 1988; Johnston, 1976). Our Seven Grandfather Teachings are foundational in our understanding of how we develop strong connections. The best way to assess a child's development is through these teachings, consisting of "honesty, wisdom, love, respect, bravery, humility, and love" (Bell, 2006, p. 66). Though simple and elegant, it takes a lifetime to live these tenets. Cultivating learning communities this way, in an accessible format, is kinder, yet does not undercut the practical, serious nature of knowledge acquisition. One Elder, who is deeply committed to challenging existing perceptions of Indigenous people on the broader collective, felt this came from within, a teaching of her heart:

> *When I'm doing my work and talking about these kinds of things, my role is getting non-Native students to see and appreciate our First Nation peoples for generations to come. We've all had to carry the challenges of the generation before us as Native peoples. I see it as the teaching of my own heart; my life's work doesn't separate the two, my heart and my work, and what I teach. It's especially so when one's work is a part of making changes in the education system. There's a great*

quote from Murray Sinclair from Truth and Reconciliation; 'education is what got us into this, and its education that will get us out.' Wise words.

I don't know what my older years are going to look like, but it goes back to the heart, that heart center, being your best self. Even when you might be having a hard time in life, as long as we're doing everything from the best place we can, I think that's a successful life.

Being a caring person, being kind; kindness is one of the easiest things to give; you can give kindness to other people; there's nothing easier than being kind, and it doesn't have to be some grand gesture. Caring, sharing, and kindness are wonderful values to share.

This member connected heart teachings to her dedicated work of educating others within the context of reconciliation and shared how this beautifully aligned with Anishinaabe's teaching of her own heart.

5.4 Language

When I spoke with members dedicated to learning Anishinaabemowin, they were keen to discuss how language acts as a foundational structure for learning, and how language patterns are a model for demonstrating Anishinaabe philosophy. Keith Montreuil, a language teacher, better described the complexity of the language:

So, you are describing what you know in learning and teaching. You can show someone how to do something, then they're going to think about that, and then, they're going to test it, make their own assumptions and figure it out. When they are really learning, we say "agikinoomaagewin gikendaasowin." You know maage is in there, that's showing (zhinoomaage), "aki," that's land. It's a physical thing when you are teaching, right? And then Gikendaasowin, that's when it's going into your mind.

In English, we think we have five senses: you know, sight, smell, taste, hearing and touch; then in Ojibwe, touch is two different ones because you can touch the way that something is smooth, rough, sharp, or dull; but then, if you just hold your hand out, you can touch and feel the heat or coldness, that's unseen, that's a different kind of sense. In Ojibwe, we are very precise about

> *the way we're talking about things. Conversing in Anishinaabemowin language later in life offsets dementia in all different ways; it's so important and keeps you sharp too because there's not just one word for anything you know. In Ojibwe, there's always a better way to say it, and that's why everyone's laughing all the time because you can change one little sound and completely change the meaning of what you're saying. And that keeps your mind sharp. I've seen so many Elders that are razor sharp in their cognition and how they think that you just can't get anything by them. Learning is not just for scholastic and educational reasons, but also for our mental health, intellectual health, and physical health.*

The order of traditional language is different from Western languages, and Indigenous ways of knowing are embedded within it. Concepts like physical senses are understood differently and located directly in the language. For me, this was illuminating since I suddenly connected how the very structure of Anishinaabemowin is organized. Unit sounds refer to what is seen and unseen, and the construction of words is arranged from this premise. Before concepts are described, sound utterances signal what is happening for the listener. Alderville members expressed the value of learning in terms of the development of the individual and how that aligns with Anishinaabe teachings. Keith further described his intellectual growth from learning the language:

> *The first time I dreamed in the language, I just came back from immersion. That was 2016; it was a 10-day immersion program, and soon as you start, there's no English the whole time. For two weeks. The first three days of camp, I had the worst headache I've ever had, but by the 10th day, my ears were open, and I could… I could hear all the little utterances people were using in the words, and I just felt like I was ready to start really learning, and then, it ended. But when I went home, I was having dreams about still being there, in the language. I've been to immersion camp twice now and I was going to go this year and last year, but you know, everything got canceled. I try to teach, using as much immersion as I can. When I learned how to name things as a kid in Ojibwe. I could*

say "bineyashiinh', "giigoonh, "makwa;" I could name what things are, but I couldn't say, this is a bird, that's not a bird, that's a snake. You know, I couldn't have a conversation.

I think that it's really good for kids, everyone, to have a different way of thinking about things. In the western public school education system, we're not going to learn those things. So the people who know those things, when they come to the school system, they aren't valued for that, only the things that are already taught [by teachers]. It's different, and they [the teachers] don't even know what to make of it, you know, our oral history, our knowledge, our land, our Indigenous ways of knowing, all these different things.

When I hear the word education, I have all these connotations attached to it, and that's how English works too. In Ojibwe, you just describe things as you see them, and there's no connotations. There are no loaded words when we talk about things. As learning and education go, I guess, having an education is important; the way we talk about education being recognized in a western world, having credentials and that sort of thing, but that isn't the same thing as learning. No. Self-directed learning, that's the thing; that's how you actually come to know things.

5.5 Flexibility and the standardized curriculum

Education needs to be flexible and less prescriptive, less deductive in its orientation. Focused standardized testing often emerged as an obstacle to individualized learning. One youth had this to share:

Have you ever seen that meme? It's a picture of different animals, and they all have to climb this tree, and whoever can't climb this tree fails. The fish and the elephant cannot climb the tree; therefore, they fail, and they're held back because they can't do what everybody else can. But they have their own special purposes. They're not made to climb trees; they're made to swim; and do whatever elephants do. So, it's pretty much like education, this standardized testing. Those two things, education, and standardized testing, kind of go hand-in-hand; whereas, learning can be done in any way. You don't have to have a test; you learn by your own learning.

A parent, grandparent, and former education employee similarly reflected on the demands of provincial testing, which ultimately crowds the curriculum. Grade-to-grade teacher evaluation flowed from attention to testing, followed by school-to-school ranking and student-to-student ranked progress. This means that curriculum is developed to coincide with strident testing preparation, causing the development of individual talents and abilities to be less central. This grandmother shared:

> *I remember well, you and I, Catherine, you know what it looked like when those stats came in once a year. You and I were in the schools with that all coming down, and you know the hurt feelings, you know. Judgey, judgey, judgey, other teachers judging other teachers, it's not good. It's not good to put that on people.*
>
> *So, get rid of that provincial testing. That does nothing for anybody; that puts children under stress, teachers under stress. Good Lord. No. I think they really need to look at where the system it's failing, and revamp. Teachers would be the ones who would know. Like bureaucrats don't know, this new curriculum has to be taught by teachers who are physically in a classroom and know what works and what doesn't.*

A parent and teacher in the study commented on how provincial testing and standardized curriculum posed a dilemma for flexibility in incorporating Indigenous knowledges:

> *I don't know how you would adapt the curriculum because we have EQAO. How do you reconcile something like that, the grade 10 literacy assessment, with an Indigenous way of learning? Government officials and policymakers, I don't know how valid they would consider that style, those pathways to learning and knowledge. For them, it needs to be more measurable and concrete. It still is measurable and concrete, but I don't know if it would be so unfamiliar that they wouldn't have a lot of confidence in it.*

Members shared their concerns about focusing on student evaluation. Some felt the report card became an obstacle between parent and child relationships when they viewed their role more as a nurturer and not the teacher's helper. As parents, they felt committed to celebrating their children's gifts, especially when

the schools were not doing this. One older member, now a grandparent, believed in the capability of his children, their journey, and his role in helping them uncover their talents:

> *When I raised my kids, I watched for their creativity, not tell them "You should do this or that." To me, it seemed you shouldn't impose your ideas on them. I didn't impose on their ideas. It's not my place. So, they went their own way, and their life's mistakes are theirs, not mine. They did have a sense of self worth and that was important. Self worth.*
>
> *Parents should get involved in their kids' education. The point for me is the report card starts at the top and goes down. You don't focus on that as their parents. My kids didn't need that negative feedback from me. Not that they shouldn't get feedback, it's negative feedback I'm talking about. I shouldn't be saying things like "you should have done better than that." You look at the report and say "Okay… that's not good." No, you can't give negative feedback. How was I to know it wasn't going to be perceived as negative? They're my kids. That's important to me.*

One youth shared this reflection:

> *Well, I think education is a Western thing because it's the one valid form of education within our society; that is to go to school, you have to take sets of courses to get good marks. Those good marks translate to school success, and school success translates into the life you're going to have. So, I think that is education to me. But learning, I'm thinking more about the Indigenous side of things; learning would be what interests you, whoever your mentors are, and the people in your life you want to learn from. They don't have to translate into having a 'quote unquote' Western successful life. They could help you grow your own food, go ricing, or to carry ceremony within your family. That's what learning is; it's not standardized, it's not graded, it's not done in one way, which I think we do a lot better in, than the standard system, personally.*

Education can minimize the path of individuals who don't produce Western quantifiable results within set established periods as shared by the following Knowledge Keeper:

We are always learning for as long as we're here breathing and we're in this world, and in our body, we're learning. Not that 'education' is not important, of course education its important. I think there is a difference in what I'm trying to share in terms of that lifelong learning, the value of the learning we do everyday, from our teachings, our ways of thinking and being… The school learning is something that we've all had to do. There are some that really compete for that "A" and I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that, I always think of those kids who will never be those "A" students, ***no matter how hard they try****. They could sit every night and study and prep, and they might get a C grade. I never want any one to judge themselves on that mark/grade. Everyone has* ***strengths and gifts****, and their level of success shouldn't be defined by an A or C…I think we must be mindful of all of that. I want us to SEE the individual, not the grades. I want us to support their strengths and help them find those strengths and feel and be successful and shine. Just like the 'A' student shines, let's support each other from a place of doing it differently.*

A member working within the educational field conceptualized education and learning differently:

I think of a system with standards and policies, instructional methods, assessments, evaluations, and accreditations. You get degrees and diplomas out of a system that grants it. So, my understanding of the word "education" is very technical, and I don't know why, but that's just how I think of it. When I think of education and then learning, I feel like learning is more personal. You have knowledge and skills as a person, and when you're learning, you kind of set goals for yourself: I need to do this. I need to learn how to do that. It's observing and watching things being modeled, connecting, making connections with what you're learning and what you already know, and other things, other knowledge, consolidating information or skills or whatever it is that you're learning, reflecting on it, and building upon what you already know. It's just that constant growth. It's something that you do within an education system, for the most part, but then you also do it in other settings. When I think about it that way, education could probably be a really broad concept;

it's just wherever learning is happening, is where education is; it doesn't necessarily have to be in this system.

A father of middle school-aged children described it this way:

When I think of learning, it's not just knowledge and information, learning is how you know what you know. So, you are not just looking at learning, you're also looking at how you've been taught, what you've been taught, what you know, and why you've been taught in that specific way. I think learning is more of a methodology than just a straight A to B, you know, "here's the information to absorb that information." I think it's experiential. Everyone learns in different ways, so the way one person learns isn't going to be the same as another person. A teacher needs to make the journey of learning tailored to each student, or come up with something that is more easily digested by the students they are teaching. Whereas education is more of a formal laid-out curriculum with outcomes needed, like what is required to be a doctor, for instance. It is almost a prescribed formula that you need to follow to get that education; whereas, learning is how you get to that point. That's why I would see it more as a methodology, and you've got to get that right, but there's different ways of learning, different ways of teaching, to get the result which is your education.

Additionally, during the interview process, the structure and limitations of education spaces were expressed in terms of a lifeless box, leaving members uninspired about the potential for relevant learning. Within the context of learning and education, both were understood differently, even antithetically. Indigenous learning was seen to be individualized; education, on the other hand, was viewed as bland, evenly spread, and applicable to everyone. The analogy of a box emerged more than a few times. An Alderville youth member shared:

I believe that education is provided to you, and learning as what you do with it. Learning is different for everybody. I did not learn everything from Western education, (public school, high school, post-secondary). It's very broad. It's very boxed. It's very much in a box; that's how I feel about it.

A mother had a similar connection:

Education is the box. Education is an institution. Learning is life; learning is about the way we should live our lives according to our teachings. Learning happens on the inside; education is outside. Education is that box. When I think of education, I see a big boring box in my mind.

And another parent added:

I guess when I think of education, I think of more institutionalized learning; that is what I hear when I hear the word 'education.' Learning can be done through many means. It can be done through your experience. It can be taught through stories; it can be passed on through friends and family. I guess they are the same. I mean, definition-wise. I imagine they're pretty close, but when I hear education, I think of curriculums and a formal way, whereas learning can be done by anybody for anybody, in any capacity. It's like a broader, more open way to say education, I guess.

Another parent offered:

I feel education is something that's already set out to be dictated to somebody. Learning is how an individual receives that information from education, but learning can be ongoing in many different ways. Education is something that's already pre- thought, pre-planned, and directed to be taught to somebody; it's pre-packaged.

One mother reflected on the rigid nature of education spaces and how learning, in contrast, is more accessible. She connected to the idea of valuable sharing within a community context once knowledge is gained:

Education, to me, feels Western. When I think of education, I automatically think of a formal setting, kind of hate to say it, but a stagnant setting because you're sitting in a classroom. You're listening to somebody talk, and you're amongst many people. When I'm learning, that's for me, and I'm a hands-on learner. Learning for me is listening to people's experiences, listening to stories, and listening to best practices. Then, applying that and moving forward with that teachable moment and applying it somewhere else. Education is more like "do these tests, write your knowledge down, and have it graded on what you've retained from these books." That's what it is to me.

5.6 Learning from the land

In my conversation with a young man, now a parent, he shared his understanding of Anishinaabe learning through Anishinaabemowin, and how it guides his learning as a man. For him, learning is very much tied to learning from the land. It has guided him back to the language:

> *"Akinomaagewin, akinomaage" that's how we say school or education, "akinomaage, that root word being "aki" the land, the earth, "mang" to nang, the stars and really, that word can translate to learning from the land and the star world, the sky world. And that's how we learned. A long time ago, we would take our kids out in a tikanaagan, for instance, you know, that cradle that we carried our babies in. The mothers would lean that tikanaagan against the tree, and those babies would just be observing their mother, whatever their mother was doing, or their father. Akinomaage, so that's how they would learn, learning off the land.*
>
> *There's one thing that I can suggest for anybody who wants to learn the language, you have to go and sit with the Elders. You just sit and listen for a little bit. Then, there's a word that you hear that you can pick up on. You repeat it to yourself and then ask them later, what does that word mean? And then next thing you know, you'll be hearing them having a conversation and you'll hear that word and know they're talking about this stuff now. That's where I'm kind at, in my own learning journey anyway.*

A Knowledge Keeper shared a similar understanding:

> *I kind of feel like education is all the things that we're told we're supposed to learn. Maybe that's my connotation of English because we say, "where did you get your education?" But all the learning that I've ever done, you know, that was really important to me, was never in, maybe a little bit, but most of it, the majority it, was out of those walls of institutions, and out in the woods.*

Another member added their reflection:

> *Learning can happen outside of the classroom, away from an educational environment. You're constantly learning whether you're outside enjoying the weather and being in nature or being*

around your grandparents or your parents, or being around your kids. Learning can happen anywhere, any time. Just in very basic terms, education, when I think about the word, I think about schooling, workshops, seminars. In very basic terms, that's the difference in my head.

Many members connected with Anishinaabe values of land relationality and felt the influence of modern capitalism was especially problematic as Anishinaabeg. Their responses were reflective of Indigenous peoples' connection to the land, something that Western education systems do not value (Cajete,1994, 1999, 2000, 2020; Mohawk in Barreiro, 2020, Kimmerer, 2013; Settee, 2013; Geniusz, 2009; Simpson 2004, 2011, 2014, 2017).

5.7 Self and purpose

When learning moves beyond the simple recall of facts, its potential includes an exploration of possible techniques which can ignite deep reflective learning, thereby inviting the artists, the thinkers, and those gifted in the arts to challenge our understanding. Exploring our talents and modes of expression leads us back to our community. In knowing ourselves, we come to understand what we can offer our communities. The late Artbaa Beaver shared this insight:

Learning for me, is it is the way I learn. Am I hands-on person? Am I a visual person? So, there is a connection to the senses, to our senses, because our first method of learning, our people's very first lesson of learning happened when the child was placed in the tikanaagan. The tikanaagan would be hung in a tree, so that they could see all the community and watch what was happening. So, that's our traditional sense of learning, when we hear, and then, when we know how to say things, and then we go on to learn. I think, with the heart, with our spirit, we are able to open up our minds to how we are going to learn.

What about our teachers? We need to respect our teachers, and our teachers have to show humility, first of all, so that they can allow themselves to learn too. We can't go into a classroom saying that we know everything like I used to with my mother. I didn't think she knew anything,

because I didn't have that humility back then, but then, as she grew older, and I did too. She had wisdom, of course, she gained as a senior and an Elder.

So, we all know individuals who have chosen not to be educated, and what happens is we apply our value of success on them and in doing that, we are connected to European or Western thought. I can think of one author, Richard Wagamese. He was not really educated; he did take different courses. He learned to read, and then he wrote. Even though he's passed on, he is still inspiring me as a teacher because I'm using his methods. Every morning I meditate, and then, I'm inspired to write for 15 minutes regardless of the spelling and punctuation. I write whatever comes to mind. The teacher and the gathering of knowledge are not connected to this world only; they can come to us from the other world, through a spiritual connection that we all have.

In communication with knowing ourselves, we tap into our gifts from the Creator, a wholly spiritual understanding of our purpose. Like Artbaa, I, too, am reminded of Richard Wagamese when he speaks about the distance between the head and the heart. He writes, "think of it this way: the head has no answers and the heart has no questions" (Wagamese, 2013). Elders tell us that this is the greatest journey we will travel – aligning the head and the heart – and that it can take a lifetime. It is a spiritual quest and deserves the time and attention necessary. To fulfill this goal, we must know who we are; we do this by having autonomy over the questions we ask and the answers we seek. A Knowledge Keeper who works with students expressed the idea of self-directed learning:

Learning is self-directed. When I teach, I ask, "what do you want to learn?" And, if students want to learn something like cleaning porcupine quills, I will say. "I'll show you how to dye them, and hey, don't get mad at me when you're poking yourself; you guys wanted to do this." But if I went in there and said, "this is what we're doing," all the time, they would just shut off and not want to learn. I could be doing my best to educate them, but they would not be learning.

And it's how we live as Anishinaabe people. We don't tell each other what to do. The rules of Anishinaabe life are that you have respect for people's lives, like the path that they're on, right?

Some people have to learn things on their own. The only time you really interfere with someone else's life is when they're in a spot where they could maybe mortally hurt themselves, being dangerous, you know, being really careless. Then you'd step in, but otherwise, we're all here learning, walking our own path, and that's mutual respect.

Another Knowledge Keeper added:

*I think learning is what **you** do; it is **your** action. That's what I think learning is; what you do to contribute? Education is what's out there to draw on, to learn about. It's what's you take from it, for you own understanding.*

Education is what's in front of you, what's in your environment; that's education. It could be experiences, that could be a thing for people, places can be, too. Education doesn't have to be an institution where you go to get a degree. It can be anything else, like whatever opportunities that are out there for you.

A mother of young children who also possesses extensive Western education added:

I think they intersect. Learning and education; they are tied together in certain ways. When I think of education, it's so formal, so Westernized and so colonized. It gets recognized as an achievement that you have to be somebody, I guess. It's got this stigma attached to it. Education means success; that's what it means. But to me, learning, that's more personal; that's more like building you as a human being, as a community member, and as a good person. So, to me, when you're thinking about what core things you carry with you as a human being, you're going to learn those, but you are not "educated." I feel like those are very different things. There is overlap, but I just feel 'education' is a lot more institutional than learning.

From my discussions with multiple members, it was clear that the concept of learning was a serious exploration of ideas centered on how an individual finds purpose within their community. Indigenous authors and theorists discuss the value of individuals knowing themselves, thought of as a process of becoming enlightened (Battiste, 2013; Bell, 2016, Meyer, 2004). A persons' understanding of who they are

is the first step in serving their community. An Elder further highlighted that tapping into individual skills is required for the community to function*:*

> *I wasn't an A student, I was a B plus student, and that was working really hard to be B, B plus. I was probably a B and often a C, but that's okay. I made it through. So, I think, to look at which skills you have, like as a manager, I learned over the years, that everybody has different skills. Not everybody's going to be a nurse, not everybody's going to be a doctor, not everybody's going to be a counselor, not everybody's going to do those things, but what is the potential that they have? What can they really excel at? I think that's a good thing about a manager. You say, "Okay, Susie, I know you're really good at organizing, so we'll put you in there." I think that it's important.*
>
> *I don't have a lot of traditional skills, I know the basics, and that's okay, too, because we have other people that know more. And those are the ones you pull in to help you with those things. You don't have to do it all. I think that's the thing that I learned is, you don't have to do it all.*

During many conversations, the idea of understanding self emerged often. Generally, members felt that a meaningful life evolved from coming to know themselves through experiences and mentorship. Members believed that all individuals are gifted with particular talents unique to them. Knowing our gifts and finding ways to contribute them to our community is critical. One mother explained it this way:

> *Having a meaningful life is loving what you do. It means being excited by life. To get there, you set meaningful goals. When you have a purpose in life, it comes from being passionate about something that you believe in. Everyone wants to be healthy and happy, but it's not about money. Of course, we don't want to starve; we want security to live. Being successful is being an active member of your community, sharing your skills, having some kind of legacy that impacts coming generations. That means being able to be proud of the legacy we left behind, always remembering that teaching that considers the impacts upon the future seven generations when making any decision.*

The quest for knowledge is considered serious, but the journey towards coming into knowledge must take a kind path. It must be considerate of others while exploring how one can be the best version of themselves. This was descriptively shared by the following father of middle-school-aged children:

> *I think you should always have a thirst for knowledge; you should be kind as much as you possibly can. If you have children, you should teach them what you know, your skills, and how you do things in a good way. I think if you have good children, that is a successful life. I think never letting yourself down, you know; you should always be trying to be the best you can be, at all times. I know that's impossible, but if you're always willing and striving to be the best you can be, I think that's important. If you've got a special gift or talent without using it, you should look into that. You should try to identify and recognize your talents and then use them. Everyone's got their gifts, and I think we should be using those gifts; the more you use them, no matter what they are, I think that leads to a successful life.*

Being your best self was a topic well-explored by participants. As you walk through your experiences in life, the goal should be adaptable and change accordingly. This thought was shared by the following Knowledge Keeper.

> *I mean, we always want to have a nice home and all those good things, but really at the end of the day, it comes down to how we put ourselves forward as we walk our journey, as we're making our way up and down those Four Hills of Life.*
>
> *I think the definition of a successful life is being your best self and doing your best. When I say that- it's important to note that what I might have thought was me being my best self say two years ago as an example, I could probably look back and think, oh, I could have done this or that differently; I could have done that better, but in that moment - that was my best self. And that's all we can ask of ourselves.*

A successful life, especially, is knowing who you are, to the best you can and to know where you come from, what you want to do. All of that helps no matter where you go, no matter what you choose to do, because you are a part of something bigger than yourself.

Another Knowledge Keeper added:

Being happy. I think if you're happy that shows you've got engaging work. It shows you're enjoying the challenges of novelty and moving ahead in the world. It shows that you enjoy the challenge of being financially secure, if there is such a thing in today's world. It shows that you've recognized your talents and you are pursuing them. So, to me, happiness enfolds all of the other options that are discussed in that query of "what's my definition of a meaningful life?"

A thoughtful young mother said it this way:

I say that a meaningful life is an ongoing developing sense of self-knowing; knowing who you are, I think, is really important. And that just comes from my own experience, my own personal development that I felt was something that didn't really happen for me until I was an adult. So, for me, success is learning more about myself.

Success is a problematic word because does it mean having a big house, a nice job, and a fancy car? Well, no, it's feeling secure. I have food; I have a house; I have somewhere to live. I can look after my family. I can get to where I need to go, just a feeling of having a sense of security, material security. The definition of a meaningful life is more in the sense of feeling, a feeling of gratitude for what you do have, being satisfied with what you have, and not always wanting more.

It is also when there is a really nice fit between who you are, as a person, and where you are in your life, for example, what type of work you are doing, your family, your relationships. It's a feeling that you see yourself reflected in everything that you've got going on; that is also a marker of success, a feeling of confidence and being sure of where you are, where you're going, and achieving the goals that you've set for yourself.

A young father spoke about his once stressful life, and commented on how finding purpose within the community led to a meaningful life for him:

> *There's a difference. When you talk about success and meaningfulness, and purpose, I feel very successful in what I'm doing. It is what fills me up and makes me feel complete at the end of the day. I get to be myself; I don't feel exhausted. I love what I do, and it doesn't feel like a job. I think that's what success is, doing something that fuels your passion, more than anything, that doesn't cause stress. And also harnessing my own identity. That's what makes me feel more successful because no matter where I go, I feel like I'm complete.*
>
> *Prior to this, I felt good as a security guard because I knew I was ensuring safety. Then, going on, it was a hobby that turned into a job I was grateful to be a part of, a youth archivist for Alderville. I started bringing in old stories and having people share and talk amongst themselves and really push for more understanding of where we are as Indigenous people from Alderville, knowing that there's other people who want to share those stories from their families. What is our story? My successes are just knowing that people are talking to each other and knowing that those things are happening. That is success to know there's always something to share, being in that space talking about culture has always been really fulfilling.*

An Elder felt knowing one's talents was part of the process of becoming., and that part of the responsibility of grandmothers was to recognize talents early and help move individuals toward realizing them:

> *Historically, our grandmothers would be sitting out as the kids were running around, and they would say: "Johnny, over there, he's going to be the hunter; Ryan, over there, he's going to be the protector, maybe Johnny was helping other little kids and he was patient with the younger ones." The grandmothers would look at all the little ones, and they'd know who was going to be the leader of the community. I think we need to get back to that. It's like what I said about sitting back and picking out all the specialties of each person. That's what the grandmothers did, back in the day.*

I'm not a nurse; I'll never be a nurse. I'm not a frontline person; I couldn't be a frontline person because I'm too hardcore, and I might not be as nice as a frontline person. But, that frontline person has patience, so that's their strength. I might tell you, "Come on, how many times do you have to go to treatment?" I mean, I might be like that; I don't think I would, but I might. So, I'm not a frontline person, but I know what my strengths are. Our grandmothers were able to pick out strengths in children. And maybe there are kids in those classrooms who don't know what they want; they don't know where they're at; they don't know what their strengths are. The teachers don't have enough time to pick those strengths out.

I was going to be a bookkeeper, and I never turned out to be a good bookkeeper whatsoever. I mean, if it wasn't for online banking and stuff like that, I wouldn't have a clue, but that's okay. I think, it's important to have a goal, that goal might change 10 times over your life, and you might be where you say, "well, I don't know what I want to be when I grow up, ***still****." There's a lot of people like that, and it's okay, too. But now, if you have some idea of what you want to do, and if you dig into those skills deeper, then you've got something. Everybody has something to offer, and that's what my mom always said, "everybody has special gifts." They don't think they do sometimes, even those who are having difficulty with alcoholism. I know one young man, and he's a storyteller, and I told him, "You're a storyteller. You've got that skill of storytelling. That's a wonderful gift. I love you for that." He probably looked at me and wondered, "I don't know what you're talking about," but you know, someday down the road, he'll understand, so that's what I think success is.*

The pursuit of individual talents always circled back to the community. Members drew the connection easily and cited this as a significant challenge for standard, Westernized one-size-fits-all education that struggles to incorporate community and diversity.

5.8 Restorying identity

Early reflections about Indigenous representation within education displayed stereotypical assumptions about Native people, bordering on racist tropes. When efforts were made to include Indigenous people, they were often fraught with disinformation and weak teaching. As a result, people I spoke with were interested in having educational spaces that included better portrayals of Native people. Taynor Simpson, founder of Wampum Records, with more than 25 years of experience working with the Federal government on Indigenous issues, shared an early school experience:

> *I just remember we were portrayed very poorly. There was a lot of misinformation. We were seen as people to be scared of. We did horrible torture things to the missionaries and other people. I learned that, even though I was proud of who we were, I knew that there was something missing in the curriculum, that they weren't showing us in the right light.*
>
> *I remember one kid in elementary school who did a speech on 'Indian' people. I think speeches started around grade five or something; that happened in grade five. It was just the most horrific, awful thing I'd ever heard. He was portraying us like savages, that we were just out for blood lust and murder and stuff like that. Wow, I thought, so this is how the education system is portraying us? It was very poor. I just remember thinking what's response was going to be to such an awful thing. And then, he, the teacher, felt that it was a great speech and said, "oh, thanks so much." It was received positively. Well, I tried setting them straight, and I remember everyone was making fun of me, "you're not an Indian; you don't live in a longhouse," and they started doing that "woo woo woo" thing around me.*
>
> *It was quite a negative reaction from the other kids, but I said, "I don't care if you don't believe it; it's who I am so you can say whatever you want." I pretty much had to write off the whole experience, the kids, and the teachers. I knew they weren't teaching a proper curriculum. They never mentioned residential schools; no one was taught residential schools in history or Canadian Studies or anything like that. The whole system was obviously well into the denial phase of colonial*

> *teaching; they were just sweeping it all under the carpet. They were basically trying to justify what they did by dehumanizing us and turning us into these "bloodthirsty savages" people who shouldn't have had rights to land and people who shouldn't have sovereignty because everything they did was so wrong and look, we came in, and we saved them from themselves. Look how great we are. I'd say it's only been recently that there's been a shift away from that but, overall, I think that's still the underlying basis of the education system.*

A parent whose early educational experiences are perhaps a few decades old shared a similar sentiment, she says:

> *We still weren't acknowledging it much within the curriculum. When teachers were working with us students, I think they wouldn't have even known. I don't think there was even cultural competency back then; even if they were crappy and said something terrible, I don't even know if there were repercussions at that point.*

Brian Beaver, author of *Alderville First Nation…a History,* felt teachers told the victorious settler story filtered through their perceptions and made little effort to understand Indigenous people. It was an experience that galvanized his interest in telling the other side, the Indigenous experience; he says:

> *We grew up learning about our history, for example, from the lens of others, usually non-Indigenous people who didn't necessarily understand us. They didn't know us; they didn't try. They took the easy way out, usually. Partly it's because the English in Canada were the victors, so they did most of the writing. The Indigenous people weren't writers, the French were as much writers, but it's the English who wrote the history, and it was always from their perspective.*

Members were aware that early attempts might have been problematic and appreciated sincere attempts to spread awareness, said one older member:

> *We had a school principal when I was in elementary school that did A LOT to bring awareness into our school community about our First Nation Indigenous culture. In that time now, when we look back, would it all have been appropriate? I don't know. But for the time-period of the late 60's and*

into the 70's, that's when I went through kindergarten to grade 8. He was our principal for all those years; he really did bring in a lot of good exposure to First Nation Peoples, culture, and artifacts. So, in that regard, I personally feel he was definitely being a changemaker. I know he valued the importance of establishing a good positive relationship with Alderville. If we were to look back today from the perspective and lens we now have, some of those activities and initiatives may be classed as stereotypical in some of its content, but again, his intentions were good, and he most definitely created awareness. I think having a non-Indigenous school principal in those years committed to bringing all that into our school, to me, that was pretty amazing and pretty huge!

A mother who has teenage children reflected on her shame as an Indigenous person, especially when her class attended a long-anticipated trip to a re-enacted historical village:

I remember grade eight, in particular, grade seventh, grade eight, where we took a trip to Ville St Marie among the Hurons. That's when I first started hearing, learning a little bit more about Indigenous culture and traditions, that sort of thing. I remember being from Alderville, thinking, and I wish now obviously that I had spoken up but didn't. I remember thinking we're an Indigenous community right beside Roseneath; why aren't we learning about my community? Why aren't we taking a trip to my community and talking to the community members about it because I remember thinking there are things that I would like to learn about, like my history. I still didn't know much about my history at that time. That's when I started noticing that.

I remember being there and being horrified; that's terrible, that's so awful. I was raised, as well, with a religious background. I was like, holy, why would they do that to them? I still wasn't really understanding the full picture until obviously now. Now, I have a very different view of it. I remember being more aware of the slang and racial comments related to our people, like the scalping. I remember thinking that's probably where those terms are coming from. Now that I look back, that was where the shame started. I should have been there being proud of my culture, and I wasn't.

A grandmother reflected on how Indigenous people were perceived:

> *Yes, yes, people didn't know who Native people were or anything because they* ***weren't*** *really taught. Nobody really knew what a Native person was except to go (demonstrates the derogative slapping over mouth "0ooo ooo oo"'). They were the ones who tried to kill cowboys, burnt up cowboys' wagons, and that. We were savages, and the settlers came here to try and help us learn to be civilized. So, we had the great, white nation to thank for helping us to be civilized people. That was our education; that's what one history book back in 1970. Of course, no internet, no nothing, like we only knew what we were taught. And so, even I was kind of embarrassed because I thought, thank God, I can read. I'm not a dumb Indian, you know.*

The two last passages cover feelings of shame cultivated in them as young children from the school curriculum. Some members shared that post-secondary experiences were not always illuminating either. One participant, now a parent of two, felt some professors and instructors were emboldened by attitudes that went unchallenged. Being enlightened and demonstrating understanding was not limited to teaching professionals for the youngest students; rather, misinformation was rife throughout all levels and well into adulthood:

> *I did have an interaction in university that was really troubling, and if I could talk about that. I was thinking about it, and it was an English class. The professor was talking about storytelling, and it was a general class in a huge auditorium of students. I remember the Professor said something about Native people's stories weren't traditional because they didn't have a beginning, a climax, and an end. Her words. I remember looking around the auditorium, and I saw* ***everybody*** *write that down. That was something that stuck with me, and I thought that's why everyone doesn't understand us. She said that, and you guys all wrote that down. You think now that's gospel. I wasn't brave enough to talk to her after and tell her, "You don't understand storytelling at all. We're basically an oral society; we* ***are the storytellers****."*

Unchecked, supposed knowledge of Indigenous people segued into appropriation. A few members shared how non-Indigenous people within streams of anthropology reimagined themselves to be Indian Jones-like prototypes, authors of Indigenous Knowledge they had been gifted from Indigenous people. Embarrassingly, a few passed their "interpretation" onto students speaking in place of Indigenous people which evidently went unchallenged by the universities they represented:

> *I'm not going to name any names. There was this one professor who was white; he had a British accent, and he was calling himself a Shaman. He said he was raised in this shamanic tradition. He tried to talk and sound like he was Indigenous, talking as though he was an Indigenous person. I just thought, who is this guy? Why was he being given a forum to do this? And it was totally acceptable because he had tenure and everything. I just couldn't get over how he was a thing, and how he wore' wolf howling at the moon' shirts all the time. I just couldn't believe I was in an institution that let someone like this get away with that. I don't want to get into too much gossip stuff, but he was just an awful teacher, I would say. I didn't directly call him out, but in one of my papers, in his class, I talked about how people culturally appropriate Indigenous cultures and use it to their advantage. He gave me an A plus on that.*
>
> *Generally, you know, a lot of anthropologists, they accept that they don't know a lot and that they're learning and that they're just observers. They don't try to speak for the culture, or say they are the culture. They just say what they learned and try to share it. I think there's a difference when you do that, as opposed to when you actually pretend you are that, so there was a fair amount of that going on in Anthropology.*

Interesting, one member recalled the lack of information among university students. While non-Native students were generally curious about Indigenous people, what they were exposed to was a romanticized version, not based on fact:

> *They all wore hacky sack hats, so you know, you could tell they had been to Brazil or somewhere where they knitted those hats, all the different colors. They had dreadlocks, so they were very*

different. I want to say they had a romanticized version of Native people because there was lots of love. They were curious, but I think what they thought was going on reserves was very romanticized, that it was all singing and drumming. No one was talking about residential school systems then.

Members shared how education, at all levels, could be troubling. Conversations about experiences in formal education included misinformation, stereotypes, a lack of knowledge, and appropriation that resulted in members questioning the integrity of education. It involved both the student body and the teaching faculty. Smith's (2012) 'reframing' calls out for a restorying of old narratives of Indigenous people, " where Indigenous people resist being boxed and labeled according to categories which do not fit" (p. 154).

5.9 Ideologies in conflict

Alderville members in post-secondary studies were often drawn into disciplines that focused on Indigenous peoples in an attempt for greater understanding and services that purported to help Indigenous communities. However, Alderville members felt these programs did not align with their Indigenous beliefs and values. One older member shared:

When I was going to Trent, I thought I really wanted to be an archaeologist. I thought that was what I would like to do. A funny story. We went on a field trip to the Rom. I learned about shamanism and spirituality and the different religions. I loved learning that. That was so interesting to me, about the different religions but realizing that we all have the same creator. We just all call it different things, and so I was going to take Native Studies with a major in Archaeology. I was in my first year of Archaeology and we went on this trip to the Rom. There was a gentleman there that showed us all the stuff. There were all these kids there, and I was older. I sat in the back because, you know, they needed that experience. Well, they opened the shaman's basket, and I totally backed away; I just backed right away from the whole crowd. There was an overwhelming feeling of oh OMG, I should not be seeing this. This is not meant for me because it was very, very important to

some person, this basket with their own personal spiritual items. I knew it wasn't for me. I knew that I was not supposed to be digging for those things. Now, I do understand that it's important for historical reference and all that, but it wasn't for me. So, I dropped the major at that point.

Another member, who had a lifelong ambition to work in social services, was met with obstacles beginning with the first step of entering the program. She eventually entered the field, with much persistence, but she was discouraged by her first attempt. Here is her story:

Well, first of all, I went for my interview at college, because you had to be interviewed back then, whether you would be a good candidate. When I went in, I remember being very intimidated; there were like eight people sitting around this table. Again, I was so young, maybe only 17 or 18. When I went for my interview, it was in June to be interviewed for the fall courses, so I was only 17, when I went in for my interview. I remember telling them that I wanted to be a helper, like a social worker; I wanted to help my own Indigenous people. And they said, "why?" I said because "we have so many problems. There's a lot of drugs and alcohol, and I want to help people get better. I want to be there, and I think it has to be Native people helping Native people for that work." I knew that, even at 17, from my own experience, so there are good things that come out of my experience. I learned that they needed help from their own people.

I remember them saying, "give us an example of something, somebody in your family that has a problem." At that time, a loving family member was incarcerated. I remember talking about it, and I got emotional, because just talking about it was making me sad. When I was talking about this, I said, "I go in to see this person because I want to lift their spirits." I started crying because when I went there to see him, he would lift my spirits. He would make me laugh. I was talking about his resiliency; I didn't have a word for it at that time, but what I was trying to say was I can't believe the things that we go through, but how resilient, how strong we are. So, what they took away from that was different. They had a meeting, and they told me that they weren't going to accept me into the Social Services Program because I was too young and immature. They really weren't sure,

according to the interview, what I really wanted to do. They said that because I'd become emotional, that maybe, I should rethink about becoming a helper because I'm tied too closely with what I was doing. They would accept me into the General Arts Program for a year, and that program offered courses in sociology, psychology, and justice courses I would eventually need in Social Service if I applied again.

An interesting takeaway is the persistence required of Indigenous people to work within some programs, even when the supposed goal is to help Native students enter them. Program entry is managed through a Western methodology where deep community and family connections are considered inappropriate. In the social services field, an objective, disconnected professional approach was favoured.

5.10 Resistance from within

When the schools spent little effort to address what was happening and how Indigenous students experienced education, Indigenous opposition and resistance followed. Well-known statistics paint a picture of high drop-out rates. However, these statistics can be framed from another perspective, such as high rejection and refusal rates. Indigenous students are at risk of becoming disengaged and resistant to an educational system not meant to include them. Koren Smoke, a quiet student, recalls a moment where her complicity in honouring the Canadian flag became a pivotal moment of her resistance:

I think it was Stephen Harper, at the time, who had cut billions from the preservation of First Nations languages, teachings, and culture. So, that's what really set it off for me, and that's when I started sitting. I sat for the anthem for the remainder of my high school career. It was emotional. Some class members, my classmates, were yelling at me during the anthem "why aren't you standing up for your country?" and I just didn't have the means to tell them why. But I remember covering it in my civics class. I did a whole project on the blood quantum theory, and I got to explain myself through a project later on.

There was just way too much that hasn't been taught or isn't being taught. So, for me to sit during the anthem and have people yelling at me, I just couldn't begin to tell them what or why I

was doing it, in a few minutes because there's just so much. Then I started to cry when I sat, and there was one student who yelled at me. And then there was another student who asked "are you okay? Are you feeling okay, this morning?" It even got to the point where teachers were contemplating sending me outside in the hallway for the anthem. But then there's Jehovah Witness students, for example, who could sit during the anthem. No one bats an eye, but as soon as someone makes a stand, it just gets everyone all up in arms. They don't care about why you're doing it; they're just yelling at you, and saying "why don't you care about your country?" Whereas why would I care about a country that doesn't care about my people? Why doesn't my country care about my people, so why should I care about my country? And that was my early political angst. I had a lot of political angst when I was in high school, and I wasn't able to describe what I was feeling at that age.

I think all of it. Eventually, it just became oh, that's the girl that sits for the anthem. I liked challenging the teachers. I forget what class it was, but one where we debate. There was a debate, and a few of my classmates had been my classmates while I was at Roseneath Public School. Now we're in high school, and the topics for debate were written on the chalkboard, and students were able to make suggestions. Two girls that were from my public school said, "Native issues," and the teacher wrote "Native issues" as a debate suggestion, in debate class. Of course, I took the bait because I'm the only Native one in that class, at the time. I had a white peer with me, who is an ally, still an ally today, take on this debate with me. I did not do well in the debate, didn't do the research, and of course, these chicks were armed and ready for firing. The teacher just made jokes the whole time, like, "oh, miss congeniality, ha-ha, look out." We were butchered, and I sat down, and my ally turned to me, and he said, "that was the most racist thing I've ever seen in my life." Looking back, I should have stood up, walked out, and gone to the principal's office, but I just wasn't that person, yet. I wasn't ready, didn't know how to handle it, and to this day, I don't know. I'm not a very grudgey person, but if I ever see those chicks ever again…

Later, after that, when I came into my own, I started wearing makeup, dying my hair, and getting tattoos, and I'm becoming more presentable as a person. I would see those girls, and they'd say, "Oh, you look so cute; you should come to hang out sometime." I thought 'as if you're talking to me,' just totally oblivious, they were. Oh, my God, as if, I'd answer "yeah for sure" because I would never ever ***ever.*** *They probably forgot about it now. I think about them today, still just wondering with all of these issues now coming to the surface and there being more awareness, I can't help but think of those girls and think about it. They probably don't ever think about what they said or what they did, but it still makes me wonder.*

Though she had limited words to define her choice for not standing, Koren had all the raw emotion. What is interesting about this reflection is how threatening Indigenous residence is for schools: there appeared to be an appetite to accept religious freedom but not for Indigenous resistance. Instead, the thought of Indigenous resistance of one teenage girl sparked a negative reaction from teachers who were generally represented by European backgrounds (Kanu, 2011) that reflect settler norms. Indigenous resistance is troubling for settlers because it destabilizes power, and there is no guarantee of the outcome. The presumption of risk is elevated, and settler people are threatened (Mackey, 2016; Lowman & Barker, 2015). Perhaps teachers were worried about a mob turning up from Alderville? or maybe they were concerned about the tensions escalating among non-Native students from settler backgrounds (Denis, 2020, 2022).

With the "re-storying" of identity, Indigenous students learned what Western education systems thought about them, their families, and their community; consequently, they were motivated to share their reflections and to counter existing narratives. They were fed stories about who they were as people, as defined by Western educators well entrenched within Western systems of knowledge. Since their community was considered less than and limited to fatuous misrepresentations, Indigenous students were out of sync, yet expected to sit silently and accept their fate as individuals. Small wonder, then, why they were disengaged. Even more troubling, though, is the imprint negative school experiences can have on

shaping identity, as shared by some Alderville members. What is hidden is genuinely always in view if you are looking.

5.11 Lifelong learning

Members shared the importance of ongoing lifelong learning. Our Anishinaabe conception of learning reflects our life journey, from our first breath to our last, often called cradle-to-grave teachings. It was not uncommon to hear members reflect on lifelong learning and how life would lose its extraordinary dimensions without it. One Elder explained it this way:

> *From my perspective, learning is something I will continue my whole life. If I didn't continue to learn, it would be sad and unfortunate. At the same time, learning inspires me, and I want to be inspired. That's* ***very*** *important to my existence, whether it be books or movies. Whatever, I want to be inspired, and learning is along those lines. Education I guess there's a formal process of education, from kindergarten to university. Learning educates you, so they complement each other.*

A grandmother was reflective in her understanding of the differing goals of education and learning and how they may not coexist easily within education institutions**:**

> *Learning is lifelong. I see that separate from education, I see education as something where you get your letters, you know, something formal; and learning, it is just life. It is, you know, day to day; you're always learning, but education is separate. Education is something where you have a focus on what it is you want to achieve, to become a teacher, to become whatever. You need that education to get there.*
>
> *I see that as separate. I don't see learning as something that you can put a mark on or give a grade. If you think about it, there's people who don't have an education that are very successful in teaching the medicines of the culture. If you're sick, what will this do for this? What do you need to take for that? Yet, they don't have any formal education. So, it's learning; it's living with an Elder and being taught those things and not expecting to get a Ph.D. So, I think those are separate.*

I still see it as separate. I mean and in teaching our kids that. I don't see how you can put a… I don't know why; I can't see that as an education. It's life skills, and it's just as important to have that in schools for sure, but how do you put a grade on any of that?

Another grandmother similarly offered:

I think they're similar in some ways, but if we're talking formal education, I mean I'm glad that I got my formal education. My mom made sure that we went to public school, and we went to high school, and we got that formal education. I think lifelong learning goal is different, in the sense that all the things that you learn from people, all the things that you learn through trial and error, all the things that you have gone through in your life, ***that is learning*****.**

Learning is as natural as breathing and happens despite ourselves, as shared by one young member:

Learning is something that you do every day, an ongoing practice. Education, for me, is something you choose to engage in or not; however, learning, you can't help but learn. It's just something that you do. Sometimes you are not even conscious that you're doing it.

5.12 Inclusivity

Learning is for everyone, when understood, it is all-inclusive, and everyone is involved. Like education, not everyone makes it through. Indigenous learning, however, involves everyone and celebrates their diversity. One grandmother described it clearly:

Education, I feel is a very broad word, that, to me, is curriculum. The word education and curriculum mean the same thing. Learning to me is very broad term; learning is everything, learning is all encompassing. We can learn anything, we have learned behaviors, learned curriculum, learned education. We can learn anything because we are humans, and we want to absorb. When you say education, I feel like that's a word that is very singlizing, that's education. I feel that puts us into a very small box, that word education. I feel learning, if you ask somebody about their education, they will say, "Oh, I went to high school." But, if you ask somebody, "what have you learned?" Oh God, they could talk for hours. "I learned this, and I learned that" and you know, we learn every day,

whether we have education, or not. I feel education, the word, puts everybody on different levels. I feel that's a word, you know, like what's your highest level of education?

I feel people who are educated use that word ***on*** *other people, you know, to be better. "Well, what's your highest level of education? Oh, what education do you have in that?" "I don't know." "You're Native, oh what education do you have to speak on that?" "Oh, I don't know… life" "do you need education to back that up?" You know my mom has a grade 10 education and she knows more than anybody. She has made herself learn more, on her own. So, I feel it's marginalizing, but I feel learning is very positive, because everybody is learning.*

Where, if you ask someone what's your highest level of learning? That could be a totally different trip. Oh my God, I learned yoga this year, and I went to a group, where we talked about this, and I learned that. There's so much more out there in this world; there are so many people. Learning and education, I feel, are two very different things.

I think we have to embrace more real- life into education because we have so much more knowledge out in the world and of the world. It's not just books that tell us how to learn anymore, right? We have so many other facets of learning now. Instead of offering one thing out of a book, we need to learn how to expand that. We could draw on everyone's fire, to want to learn in different ways.

You have a student who doesn't think they're learning to read, but you know what? You can make them feel positive, because they are learning how to make cookies with their grandma on weekends. To me, learning is a very positive word. Education, I feel, is a very one-way word. It's hard to tie them together. When there are 32 kids in a classroom, and only 7 students who caught what the teacher was teaching and the other 25 are done. You know, that to me says education, is only for some, not all.

I think in the right circumstances, you could have 50 people sitting in front of one person talking, associating, and have 48 of those people understand, and those other two, you find out why they didn't get it, and help them understand in a way that works for them. That to me, is learning.

Communities should consist of diversity where all members are valued, no matter their various abilities, as all lives have a purpose. It is more than that, though – cooperative communities function better with diversity. 'Valued' knowledge that only reaches a few creates tensions and disengagement, as well as increases the likelihood of power dynamics and imbalance.

5.13 Relationality and community

According to one member, community relationship building offers unique opportunities for Indigenous learning. As people gather, this grandmother remarked on the prescient opportunity for young people to practice verbal recall in remembering and ordering details for oral sharing in conversation. This fascinating observation was explained:

Native families do a lot of talking. I know that we talk about more things than other families. I think kids can always associate, and that's what helps the learning process. They can associate through so much because we include everybody, a huge family dynamic. I could be talking "oh, GG did this last night, and GG said that" So we're always talking about other people too. Then, the children get an even wider scope, because now they've got that language to add that association (story) that comes from me; they can say, "oh, my grandma said that GG said there were two owls there last night." You know, building on associations and stories. Native people are such speaking people with a speaking way of learning.

It doesn't matter; you get home, everybody's talking over each other, talking, I know, and our kids amongst each other do a crazy amount of talking. We went to a funeral last year; we had what they call 'friend sharing.' So, everyone was on the front lawn trying to be socially distanced and whatnot, while everyone just laughed because, of course, I roll in there with my grandchildren. They don't know anybody; they maybe know a handful of people, and they are just running a muck,

telling the craziest stories. "Oh, that little girl, she came right over and told us that her Daddy was out, you know doing this and that" Other people just kind of stood there and were not engaging with the Alderville group. My granddaughter bridged that, talking to them, so that I'd have to go over and say "hi, this is my granddaughter, social boundaries, she doesn't know them yet." That would get them talking to me, "where are you guys from?" I just find that would not happen in Cobourg for people to come together, that much movement of people talking amongst total strangers, where we do. We have that comfort; once you land in Alderville, you're open game. We will come and talk to you, and you will have to answer our questions. I feel like our kids can be very social. I don't want to say to a fault, but it can be overwhelming because they do have big personalities.

This account had me reflecting on how storytellers are made. Storytellers are a unique amalgam of highly refined listeners and speakers who are well-tuned to their audiences. Watching and listening to gifted storytellers, you understand that the skill has been developed, but how? It would follow that producing storytellers requires opportunities to develop listening and speaking skills within a community context. Relationality within a community context is highly valued, and not limited to Alderville. One parent shared how relationship building prepares the individual for a variety of social skills needed to work effectively with others and it is an underrated skill in the modern technological world:

It's those soft skills too; those are all part of that learning because they are all things transferable, and they're also useful when you're interacting with people. It doesn't matter what your education is; if you don't have soft skills, you have a barrier.

Within communities where relationships are foundational, these skills preface others. For Indigenous communities, teachers must demonstrate proficiency in this area, not just valued Western specialized skills. Critical to any promise of learning is its value to the community.

I have heard Elders talk about how community responsibilities have been sectioned off and parcelled out to systems that do not always end up doing their intended work. Systems such as education

and health do not always match Indigenous priorities. They are out of sync with Indigenous ways of being, illustrated by the following reflections of an older member with experience working in both systems:

> *Going back in time, the learning part, for us, has always been taught by our parents and our Elders and aunts and uncles. So, the learning part is by participation. It's not being in a classroom, sitting in desks, in a row. So, for the learning part, there's no formal method to it, like classrooms. It's the ability to be able to allow people to tell their stories and not sensationalize the stories. We don't sensationalize what we learn because that's not who we are. What you are, is who you are. On the learning side, it's really important to let the questions be asked to the knowledge keepers and wait for the answer. That's learning and then, being in an environment where there's no fear of what you're going to be, or of being able to ask a question. The learning happens in circles, and in that circle, there might only be two people. Learning is in our own circles, and it's land-based. It's not in a formal environment, so that's the learning side.*
>
> *When it comes to the education side, again, the example that's used is the differences between white society and First Nation society. In a classroom, when it comes to biology, we had to go through and dissect things too. Yuck. I didn't like it, still don't like it. I learned that was something that was a choice, that I didn't have to go down that path in life. In the white world, you have those classrooms with those frogs that are brought in, and they're all dissected, and that's it, then they're tossed away. In our education system, we have that animal cut up and dissected, but every part is used, and there's a teaching behind every part. The white world calls their biology, or something like that, and we call ours harvesting. To link learning with education, we have to find the way to coexist, and that would be in the hopes that one day, Indigenous people share their way of education, where we use the entire animal and explain that some parts of that animal will go into ceremony.*

One knowledge holder and Elder beautifully shared the emotive quality of learning and how it must excite and inspire:

> *There's nothing wrong with book learning, you know, when I say book learning, there's nothing wrong with that, but **learning** is all those things that I just shared about my life, like learning from sitting in that chair as a child with my grandmother listening to the stories and learning from her, to shape my whole life, going out to learn how to walk through the woods with dad, how to do those things. To me, that's also important learning. Life learning, that's **our** life learning.*

One mother concluded: "I feel learning, it's always tying you back to your roots." Many Alderville members felt that successful, meaningful lives evolved from healthy relationships within the community. Relationality, understood by our Seven Grandfather Teachings, were expressed often in terms of caring for one another. On Elder had this to say about caring for one another:

> *My definition of a successful life is being a helper. I think that's the thing is, is being that person that people know that if someone's passing and or if they're having a rough time, that they can give you a call, or you'll bring them over a plate of sandwiches, or you'll be there. You might not say anything, just drop it off, and they'll know you're there. I think that's success, knowing that you're giving of yourself and you might not have money, and that doesn't matter, but you have tangible things, like a voice, and a kind word, "I love you" um, "you mean a lot to me," and not be afraid to tell people you know that "I really like what you're doing," "I really appreciate it," and to tell you that "you have a beautiful garden," because you [meaning me] do have a beautiful garden when I go by. You need to tell people things; you need to express it because sometimes we hold things in, and we should express that.*

Young members also expressed how strong relational ties formed meaningful lives. They articulated having responsibility towards their community, evidenced by the following reflection by a youth:

> *I feel like when you have choices; you can do whatever you want. And the only way to have those choices, is to set yourself up for success. And when you have choices, you can be happy, by choosing to do what you want to do. You're not forced to do something; you don't have to get up and go sit in an office; or get up and go pump gas in the heat all day. But also, for me, what I would define as*

a successful life is to take these things that I've learned and that I am learning and to bring that back to my community, to try to make an impact or make one change, or just make one good change and contribute, to contribute and to give back to where I came from. I would define that as a successful life, finding purpose and bringing it back to the community to make it better, and to add on to what's already there.

Individuals having a responsibility towards strengthening their community was a frequent topic. Similarly, there appeared to be an ebb and flow with shared responsibility. Though we must find our own path, we are never expected to walk it alone (Steigelbauer, 1992). We are responsible to our community, but our community is responsible to us. An older member reflected on the responsibility of caring for family members as a means to fulfill a successful life. It requires that we be attuned to the experiences of others:

Having that success is being able to look at your surroundings, your family, your parents, your relatives that are close to you and make sure that everyone is accommodated. If someone's having a hard time, then you know when not to stick your nose into your sister's, your brother's, or your kids' business, but it's to recognize when they may need some help and to find a way to accomplish that with a helping hand. I find that if people are making assumptions and being negative, I'm the first one to say, "well look you don't know why the person is saying that." I'm quick to try to impress upon people that you don't know their truth, so it's not up to you to assume anything.

One grandmother reflected on the recent impact of the pandemic and how it focused members on caring for others. It became routine to redefine priorities and expend energies collectively:

I think I even reached out to more people. I felt that with more people, this was their opportunity to do stuff like that, because all of a sudden, I saw people posting on Facebook, saying, "I'm running to Sharps, does anybody need anything?" Somebody random, someone they wouldn't even talk to normally, would say, "oh my God, could you please get me some bread?" "Absolutely" So, I felt that it drove community and family together more, whereas, in other parts of the world, people were separated. "Oh no, I can't see my mother." So again, this is where I believe our culture is different.

You know, I just don't know if I could say, "I'm not going to see my mom for a year and a half." I couldn't say that, so I can honestly say there would be no way… Now our stay-at-home order, we did the stay-at-home thing, you know. I left Alderville maybe once or twice in a two-week period to go and get groceries. I had no desire to be out anywhere, except at home, here in the woods. I just found family; I have to say, the family was most important. I mean, during a pandemic, even that's been pushed to the limits, which I have found horrendous for a lot of people. A lot of people felt that they couldn't include their families, and I felt terrible about that! When the pandemic hit, I moved my two boys and two grandchildren home. I made my circle very big in a hurry. If we're going to die, we're going to die together.

One Knowledge Keeper reflected on the requirement of caring community relationships in times of healing and added the importance of kindness in relationship building:

I don't know that I'm living up to it, yet, but I'm striving towards having that connection, that relationship, with my students, with my peers, with my family with myself- through kindness. I think of all those things.

You know, I spoke to an Elder when I was up in treaty 3 at a summer camp kind of program because a lot of their young people were committing suicide. The Elders came together and said," we need to do something; we can't let this keep going on." They built a camp on one of the islands. They took all the youth and the Elders, and the ones that would go, and they put them on houseboats. They were there for a week or two. They had different people there, some middle-aged, and I was maybe 24 at the time, to help out and do the cooking. They were showing the kids how to clean a goose, saying different things like, "this kind of forearm bone on the wing, you can use that to make an eagle whistle, if it's not an eagle, on a Canada goose." The youth were learning all these different things, on the land with their Elders. The Elders were all speaking Ojibwe with each other, and they all laughed; it was so great.

I was talking to the Elders about our Grandfathers' Teachings, and they said the one that encapsulates all of them is Kizheyaatiziwin; that's kindness. That's the way we live. We can be courageous; we can be brave; we can have truth; we can do all these things- with kindness. Because in our teachings, we have ourselves, our family, our clan, our community; and those ones who have gone ahead, and those ones who are coming. We have that relationship with ourselves, our family, our community, and our nation. It's important to keep those relationships strong. For me, a successful life is to strengthen all those relationships. It takes work to put out the effort and set the example. We don't always live up to it. We have to be able to look after ourselves before we can look after anyone else; I try, I've been getting better, but you know, I don't put impossible standards on myself either because I have to be kind to myself, too.

Another Elder talked about responsibilities, I would also add, when we talk about our successful life. Maybe not all of us know our clans, but we have responsibilities, and if we know our clans, even better. Then, we have ***more*** *responsibilities, that we can be in service to our family, to our communities, and to our grandparents who have walked on and to our great-great-grandchildren who aren't here yet. And so, the things that we do, in the way that we do them, we do them because we're responsible for that, and we do them in a kind way.*

The loop of generational connections exists as this member articulates – an ongoing relationship with ancestors who have walked onto the spirit world and those who have not yet arrived. The intergenerational link is expressed in the sweetgrass braid, by Simpson's (2017) generational chain 'kobade, and by Rifkin's (2017) idea of fluid 'backgrounding,' where temporal boundaries blur.

For some members, the family connection was absent when family relationships broke down in the most devastating ways. Being in crisis coloured an individual's understanding of learning and, thereby, themselves. It also meant being in a constant state of survival, which ultimately meant that finding one's purpose was put on hold until adulthood. For one member, deeper learning came as an adult, immersed in their culture, evidenced by the following reflection:

Right off the bat, my learning was about people, who's good and bad, because you get that gut instinct inside of you. I learned there's a feeling that you get when you come across somebody who is a bad person. When I was a child, my gut instinct told me that sometimes there are bad people that will try to harm you, and they ***are*** *bad people. So, if you got that feeling in your stomach, it was like a feeling they call the sixth sense. It's a feeling I get sometimes, even nowadays, and I know there's something wrong with this person. So, you're learning those things as a child; you're learning how to function. Education is what opens your eyes up to how things are.*

But education really, for me, wow, did it ever open up my world. Instead of just doing manual labor, I could help other people once I was educated, which I did. I think there's a difference between learning and education. Learning that's not classist, because you're learning about life and education is the key to make life successful. With education, I learned a lot more about why I am the way I am and what happened to families and people like me.

I remember going to Rama; they had brought in dancers and talked about traditions. We had these little groups that we all went into, and we were learning our traditions in a different way than what I did at university. This was a different kind of learning. So, at university I learned ***why*** *things are the way they are with our people. I learned that* ***education-wise****, but then I learned about us as Native people because they taught us about our traditions.*

For this person, post-secondary educational experiences as an adult connected her to her culture. Exploring what she learned culturally returned her to her community. Indigenous traditions can aid the healing of members wounded by life experiences. A successful life means helping make the world a better place. Many highlighted that relationship building should include developing understanding and empathy towards others. One younger member felt compassion should extend beyond us and towards others since the Indigenous struggle is relatable:

A successful life is full of love and family experiences, getting to know other people, no matter who they are. Being successful has a lot to do with networking and supporting people, not so much "this

is about me, and I want to make money, and I want to buy this car and buy the new state of the art" whatever it is. That's all fine and great, but having a successful life is being happy and making people around you happy, or helping them, inspiring people in their passions, no matter who they are. And if I was to be successful in my life, I would want to make a huge impact by creating allies who are non-Indigenous, changing the narrative, creating more allies, and having people be more comfortable with each other.

It's always been a dream of mine, ever since public school, I was very political. And it comes from my favorite band, System of a Down. They're from Romania, and they've got their own wars and political issues going on, so I could relate to that. Their lyrics really resonated with me and my culture, and my beliefs in my country. Even as a kid, I wanted to change the world for the better. Now that I'm older, I feel the way to do that and the way to attain my wildest dreams. To be successful is to change the world; to do that is to mold young minds. I'm thinking back to how I was molded, more of a sponge then, taking in the media and socials around me. That's the age group that I would like to help change the world, by answering their questions and sharing our teachings and our history. So, I feel like it starts with the youth because that's the future, that will be the future, and that will be the way we can change the world. There are small steps being taken, but there is a long way to go, and I want to be a part of that. To me, to be successful, I want to be a part of that change, an Indigenous influencer, if you will, and help create awareness and educate for the better.

A Knowledge Keeper shared how Anishinaabe youth need to feel anchored to their community: to know who they are is of urgent value and needs to be a part of any education Alderville students receive:

I don't ever want us to get to the place where, our young people say over the generations to come, "oh you know I'm a descendant of Alderville First Nation; my relatives are all Anishinaabe, but I don't know anything about being Ojibwe. That's where I'm from, who I am connected to, but I don't know anything about our culture, our language, I don't know any of our traditions…" ***I don't ever***

> ***want it to be that way. This is so important to me*** *[said with emphasis], We already have some members who this is their story, their reality, to no fault of their own. We must keep finding ways of providing opportunities for that cultural learning, AND to remember those who live off Reserve, offer more online workshops & talks from knowledge keepers in OUR community so that they're learning from their own home community. We have the most beautiful teachings you could ever* ***ever*** *have in your life, now is the time to preserve the knowledge, to ensure it's there so our young people can thrive as Anishinaabe. We want to ensure that kind of learning is there alongside any other education they receive.*

5.14 Sweetgrass knowing discussion

5.14.1 Understanding our paths

This second braid strand explores Alderville members' perspectives about learning and what constitutes a meaningful life. In Indigenous philosophy, learning differs dramatically from that of Western education philosophies. The sweetgrass braid metaphorically includes the integration of mind, body, and spirit. Indigenous learning is a lifelong quest, and each stage of The Medicine Wheel has unique challenges. A child must learn all in balance: emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual (Bell, 2006, p. 67). When we think of Elders being harbingers of knowledge, we acknowledge how experience shapes a person's coming to know and understand. One member shared how traditional learning methodologies involved matching young students with their most senior members or highly skilled technicians. It provided learning opportunities from the best, with all the benefits of experience. This participant saw it as a great failing of the system to place our impressionable youth, our future, into the hands of young, inexperienced, overworked teachers when it should be the opposite.

5.14.2 Experience

Experience is the foundation for learning, and exploration is its bedrock. Each individual has something to offer based on who they are and their accumulated experience. Learning "is a process that goes through the stages of seeing, relating, and figuring it out with the integration of heart and mind and bringing that learning into action" (Bell, 2006; Stiegelbauer, 1992). From a group of eight Algonquian

Elders, Stiegelbauer (1992) listened to their wisdom as they shared their thoughts about how traditional practices were "non-threatening" and facilitated space for young people to practice independence and develop confidence (1992, pp. 48-9). Methodologies included learning from stories that were subjectively understood to shape behaviour.

When we are young, we learn about our parent's paths, but we are never expected to replicate their steps. All children must seek their own path. Our wandering years, teenage and young adult years, are about exploring and finding our paths because we seek knowledge specific to us. Experience is neither good nor bad; it is a learning method. Learning is considered a "personal journey towards wholeness" (Bell, 2006; Beck & Walters, 1977).

I find it relevant that we consider the Anishinaabemowin word for people, which I learned as "bimadizijig," written as "e-abimaadizid-jig" (Helen Roy, personal communication, July 18-22, 2022).[18] My understanding from this is that Anishinaabe people, ('e-abimaadizid-jig'), are the people who learn by doing and then come together as one for the essence of deep sharing. The word describes our need as Anishinaabe people to learn and return, to find our place and share.

5.14.3 Finding our path

Elders provide wise counsel, and our behaviour protocols assist in helping us develop healthy social interactions with one another. Losing our path is part of the process. Elders likened our lives' journey to a feather's complex structure: sections of barbs group together to form a vein, and a series of veins create what we know as the feather. It is up to us to figure out our paths, which are expected to change and develop from our experiences. Our duty as community members is to honor individuals' deep truths on their journey of self-discovery. It is the great teaching of honesty (Gwekwaadiziwin) represented by upright bipedal Sabe, one of our Seven Grandfather Teachings. Interestingly, when the work in broken down in

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[18] This understanding was shared by Helen Roy and means that are talking about "*the ones (g), group of people, that continue on (j) doing (d) as one comes together (m) (b) in the 'maa,' (aa) the essence/totality of (m) everything coming together."*

Anishinaabemowin, its meaning refers to straight and correct way of living.[19] Selecting a true, honest path is in keeping with one's correct path, what is true for them. We must find our own truth, our own path, and walk it with honesty, "it is really up to us, but we need courage" (Meyer, 2004, p. 7); Courage to walk it and courage to carry it.

As we approach adulthood, we demonstrate our learning with families and the community as we take on adult responsibilities. However, our family responsibilities lessen as we enter our senior years, and we may enter the teacher or grandparent phase. Wisdom from accumulated life experiences is valued. Stiegelbauer (1992) is reflective of what Elders shared in her study: they drew on their experiences to understand the meaning of life and what it means to be a human being, to be an Indigenous person. The Elders talked about finding one's path:

> Our personal paths are not straight. They take turns and sometimes we stay on these turns and twists until something we gain from experiences tell us to walk the 'path 'again…Experience in itself is an important teacher, and a person should not be judged by the good or bad of that experience, but gently guided and reminded of what makes 'the good life,' what their responsibilities are. (Stiegelbauer, 1992, pp. 6-7).

Hence, there is no judgment. Nevertheless, it is a critical lesson to develop oneself. The Medicine Wheel expresses this as we understand it is in constant motion, a spiral emanating from the centre outwards that visually emphasizes the interdependence of people (Graveline, 1998; Bell, 2006). The inner circle refers to our earliest personal experiences connected to our mothers; the second circle moves outward to include our ability to vision. Visioning consists of a type of knowledge drawn from dreaming, vision quests,

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[19] I have used the spelling "gwekwaadiziwin" from Odawa Elder and language teacher Shirley Williams (2017) *Nishinaabe Naadiziwin Gindaaswinan*. "Gwayakwaadizi" spelling from the Ojibwe online source conjugates the word from the root stem ""gwayoko" to include "straight" or "correct." https://ojibwe.lib.umn.edu/main-entry/gwayakwaadizi-vai

ceremony, and traveling, of which Original Man is a great example (Benton-Benai, 2010). Like Original Man, as our guide, we are meant to travel to what Cajete (2000) calls "a journey of discovery" (p. 42).

Experiences of vision include time. As youth approach their wandering years, they turn away from their parents in favour of seeking their own way, to explore who they are meant to be. Elders play a critical mentorship role during this phase. Connections outside the parent-child relationship involve other key family members such as aunties, uncles, and even non-family adult mentors. The older generation has a vital function within families and communities. Parents are in their active phase of working, providing, and caring for their families. Youth are in their fast stage. Elders model a slowing down phase for reflection.

I have witnessed this with my children. In our family, teenagers naturally gravitate to their grandparents, who love them unconditionally, without judgment or expectation. They seek their wise counsel knowing these older people have experience and carry good intentions for their welfare. Sadly, in contemporary times, older people have little value after having lived out their usefulness as wage earners in a capitalistic society. What we have to remember is that we are interconnected: "the old and the young need each other; one to provide the understanding through experience and the other to 'frame' knowledge through 'current and changing needs'" (Stiegelbauer, 1990, 1992; Bell, 2006, p. 49).

Not all elderly people have reached their potential as Elders who are in the position to mentor others. Understanding the Anishinaabe Four Hills of Life and each sequences unique challenges has helped me conceptualize this further. Not all people make it over the hills of traumas, which results in some people being "stuck." We must learn from other people's experiences, which fosters compassion and our ability to understand the paths of others.

Accumulating experiences produces understanding and knowledge in the individual (Stiegelbauer, 1992, p. 6-8). Further, Stiegelbauer (1992) adds, Elders share that it is important to start with vision:

> If you don't start with vision, it is difficult to reclaim it. The dominant society starts in the knowledge part of the circle by focusing on the institutions of learning. Starting at vision enables you to see the whole picture, to know your direction and develop it appropriately 'through the

> natural process' of how vision unfolds into reality and creative 'doing.' We need to think 'as if' we are just out of the birth canal or on a vision fast. We see clearly and with fresh vision what is ahead of us and we have a visioned direction to hold us up and guide us to where we are going. Vision is the 'spirit' behind everything; it is at the core of everything. It underlies all. (pp. 9-10)

Relationship building is important for visioning since it prefaces all our connections, and, in order to access valuable knowledge, we need to anchor them in cooperative reciprocal relationships.

As our propensity for rich vision occurs, we are in a cycle of experience over time. True knowledge and understanding are the outcomes achieved through aligning the heart and the mind, with the heart leading (Stiegelbauer, 1992; Wagamese, 2013). The heart is led by inspiration and touched by the spirit. Our knowledge is personal; therefore, knowledge is constructed from within. Vision originates from the spiritual realm. Our teachings inform us that the very young and old are closest to spirit; infants have just left the spirit world and the very old are preparing for their return.

The final phase of acquiring knowledge requires sharing. According to the Elders, Stiegelbauer (1992) offered, "By gaining experience, sharing it with others, understanding how the dreams relate to everyday life, we are able to act upon them. Thus, the dream becomes reality" (p. 10). By knowing ourselves fully, our responsibilities become clearer. Retracing the spiral within the Medicine Wheel, from its core to the outer circle, reveals a unique, free individual with specific gifts to share. We have value as an individual and responsibility to our community. Still, ultimately, you walk your path knowing your decisions will affect others. Our Anishinaabe culture teaches us to be mindful of our actions because they affect us directly and others around us; they can potentially impact people yet unborn. In decision-making, we consider the wisdom of Elders and ancestors to help us arrive at responsible decisions. This protocol of community connections minimizes selfish, destructive behaviour.

A whole person is strong in mind, body, and spirit and is practicing healthy relationships with others, including the natural world. Basil Johnston (1976), renowned Anishinaabe scholar and storyteller of *Ojibway Heritage*, shares a view that healthy communities are needed for the dynamic infinite possibilities

of self: “the more resourceful [the individual], the more whole, the better [their] community” (p. 70). An ebb and flow of people and community form bonds of interconnection; strong individuals create strong communities, and strong communities create strong individuals. For knowledge to develop, it requires “strong individuals in order to create strong communities” (Bell, 2006, p. 40).

Elders tell us there are two basic intentions for living a good life: the first is to grow in our own life and spirit, and the second is to share life with others, to be “helpers to everyone and everything” (Stiegelbauer, 1992, p.6). Here, I am brought back to one of my interviews with an Alderville Elder’s and their definition of a ‘successful life’: “My definition of a successful life is being a helper. I think that’s the thing: being that person, a helper.”

Community includes a continuity from the past, and connections through sharing culture, knowledge, and language. What grounds people is their belonging over time in a system where time is less of a construct, and when connections to lived ancestors and descendants yet unborn are fluid and included in the present. Our conception of time is not linear; instead, it is cyclical, and we are viscerally connected across time. Elders in this study shared how the community is well expressed by the circle metaphor, particularly the Medicine Wheel. It is the expression of a fully realized person in motion. Our learning is always in movement, and that includes how we understand ourselves.

5.14.4 Changing knowledge and knowledges preserved

Epistemology is an understanding of the philosophy of our knowledge, our Anishinaabe intelligence. The foundation of the Anishinaabeg worldview includes methods for acquiring knowledge, and then arranging it within the context of Anishinaabemowin, cultural understanding, and relationship protocols. All too often, information passes for knowledge. Deeper knowledge must have the capacity to transmit generationally. It must engage, have purpose, and be meaningful. In other words, we might ask the question: what is valuable knowledge to pass down to future generations? It is where the intersection of old meets new, or, as Manulani Meyer (2004) states, “the Ancient becomes modern” (p. xiv). Knowledge, for Indigenous people, should be practical and applicable because “Knowledge for knowledge(’s) sake was

a waste of time. Everything, absolutely everything had a function" (Meyer, 2002, p. 57). In today's modern world, this has translated into capitalist economic tendencies, which conflicts with Indigenous views on creative ecological environments that function sustainably.

There is always a delicate balance of what old knowledge is needed to anchor us as modern Indigenous people, and what evolving knowledges could enlighten coming generations. Simpson (2011) discusses the Anishinaabe concept of 'naakgonige' (p. 56). This concept explains the cautious nature of changing for change's sake. Our Elders have carried certain wisdoms for generations, and they held value and purpose. Change requires deep reflection. Indeed, as L. Simpson (2011, 2017) notes, some change is needed to reflect the evolving dynamics developing within the community. Being unable to adapt renders our culture frozen, "under glass" and limited to material representations (Antone, Miller, and Myers, 1986, p 16), or what one Alderville member referred to as being limited to "fluff and feathers." Our knowledge runs deep and does include beautiful artistic expression, but the philosophy of their origins reflects deeper intuitive meaning. Our goal is to have these knowledges breathe purpose into struggling Western systems in danger of imploding.

Simpson (2017) discusses the topic of heteronormativity and its challenges within Anishinaabe protocols. There are discussions taking place within communities about gender roles. It was with great pleasure to witness the spirit of inclusion at our first powwow (July 2022) following the pandemic. During the first round of intertribal dances, the Master of Ceremonies invited dancers to dance their style in the gender they identified. It was the first time I heard this. The implication was clear: Communities must take action to include everyone, and transgender people were welcomed and invited to participate. This new protocol was introduced after it became known transgender people were forbidden to dance at a recent powwow in British Columbia.

Additionally, I recently heard about the origin of the shawl dance as it was shared with a group of community members. It goes something like this:

There was a time when all women danced the traditional women's dance. It is a beautiful dance that exemplifies a woman's connection to the land as her fringes gently catch the occasional breeze, and her feet step intentionally, respectfully honouring life and her role as life-giver. It is a stoic and proud dance. I dance it myself with pride, now in my sixties. But as the story goes, younger women had different ideas about expression. Their spirits were youthful, exuberant, and touched by the novelty of life, colour, and movement. Their hearts were bursting to showcase their appreciation. And so, these young women introduced their version of a woman's dance, a young woman's dance – the shawl dance. It did not go well, and there was general disapproval throughout the gathering. The poor young women, their hearts sank. However, a group of older women stepped in and reminded others of their teachings. Everyone has their own way, and everyone is included, and the dance soon caught on among young women. My daughter dances it and has taken great delight in preparing regalia with her friends. The dance is very much a part of our social gatherings in contemporary times. Visitors to our powwows are delighted with these dances; they are colourful and energetic. Everyone is included, and everyone has value. These are our teachings.

I will share another experience, one that I observed:

At one of the community socials, a women's hand drum group arrived and asked to sing. They did, but I remember the reaction from some male drummers sitting at one of the bigger drums There was nothing dramatic in their reaction, and it in no way ruined the evening. However, if you were paying attention, you noticed their active dismissal: talking over the group, their backs turned to them, and open expressions of disapproval. This was not lost on the hand drum group who was within earshot and expressed their views quietly among each other. It is safe to say the women's group challenged the norm and men's spaces within traditional protocols. It is different now. Space has been made for the hand drum and women. Some men also use the hand drum and at our last powwow there was a hand drum competition which included both male and female hand drum

> *singers. I have even heard male drummers say they like the addition of hand drum groups; it gives them a break.*

Who knows what changes are afoot that will reflect our community in the future; no matter, it will be the people who drive them.

Preservation and adaptation have always been a part of who we are as Anishinaabe, a necessary way to grow and maintain knowledge. As an example, Manulani Meyer (2004) asks, “are we brave enough to do new and old things to bring out what is best about our people?” (p. 10). To answer Meyer’s question: I believe we are brave enough to adapt to bring the best of our culture to our contemporary existence. Culture need not be an inflexible construct impervious to change. Protocols, even ceremonial ones, can reflect modifications according to the experiences of its people. Likewise, learning should not be a frozen accumulation of concepts that will apply to everyone across time and captured for posterity in the teacher’s laminated lesson plans.

5.14.5 Self and community

Manulani Meyer (2004) discusses the complexity of self and their relationship to the community. She asks, “how do we withstand the ravages of one way of thinking amongst the fullness and complexity of what it means to differ, to stand in juxtaposition, to be the Self that unifies *on its own terms*?” (p. 62). She argues that knowledge is expanded within Indigenous societies and grows from a personal experience that is collectively shared. Mind, body, and spirit are not separated. We are accessing all facilities of individual perception to grow knowledge. Within Indigenous communities, we learn knowledge comes from within. Thus, it becomes essential to acknowledge the individual for all their potential and the diversity of individuals within the community.

As Anishinaabe people, we honor diversity, and we see it echoed everywhere in the land. We see it from its vast plethora of animals, insects, and plants, to the energies and powers of wind, water, and fire. We know its truth as we uncover the varied wealth of medicines that dot our landscape. To learn how to behave in this world, we look to the land and its creatures to show us. They become our teachers

represented in The Seven Grandfather Teachings. Simpson (2017) confirms, “[individual] agency was valued, honored, and respected because it produced a diversity of highly self-sufficient individuals, families, and communities” (p. 129). We acknowledge that life, in every form, has a purpose. Anishinaabeg’s ways of being are highly dependent on evolving the understanding of its people. Interfering with the autonomy of others is a form of coercion that ultimately disrespects their independence, as demonstrated by Leanne Simpson’s (2017) following quote: “Nishnaabeg thought directs me to respect and celebrate individual self-determination and diversity” (p. 130). This thinking reflects Alderville members’ narratives about the autonomous nature of an individual’s journey.

5.14.6 Loss of self

The issue of identity crisis has had a devastating impact on Indigenous people since it directly attacks knowledge production. Alderville members’ school experiences covered a debilitating loss of identity. It was common to hear members share they lacked a sense of direction as young people; they did not know themselves well enough to acknowledge their particular gifts, nor how these gifts would fit within their community. Individuals were happiest and most fulfilled when they knew their purpose and could identify their strengths and community contribution. Dr. Frye Jean Graveline (1998), Cree scholar and author of *Circle Works; Transforming Eurocentric Consciousness*, challenged eurocentrism. She shared Indigenous values of interconnectedness that understands the growth of human beings within a communal context:

> All things and all peoples, though we have our own individual gifts and special place, we are dependent on and share in the growth and work of everything and everyone else. We believe we thrive when there is a web of interconnectedness between the individual and the community and between the community and nature. (p.55)

Graveline (1998) adds that communities prosper through an enriching process of individual contribution; she highlights the process of spiritual connection that develops from within:

> A spiritual connection helps not only to integrate ourselves as a whole, but also to integrate the individual into the world as a whole allowing the individual to move towards experiencing connection-to family, community, society and Mother Earth. (p. 55)

Indigenous people are not expected to be homogenized versions of each other, prototypes of their people. No universal example can be packaged to be widely disseminated to all. The effect of the identity crisis for Alderville members seemed most profound during secondary school experiences. As young people, they were meant to explore who they are, define their gifts, develop them further, and then bring back what they had learned.

Experience is neither good nor bad, but a natural result of exploration. Each individual has something unique to offer as a result of who they are and their accumulated experiences. Learning is always shared; it is a cooperative venture, a constellation of experiences which enlighten the community. Connection to community is the result of developing multiple relationships and competition is not favoured since the notion of individualism divides one from the whole. Western education promotes ideologies of competitiveness that serve more selfish individual tendencies. Settee (2013) summarizes this well:

> In many ways this concept of collectivity, which is central to Indigenous Knowledge, runs counter to the individualism that is promoted in formal schooling systems, where children are urged to 'get ahead' and 'be the best', while they want instead to be a part of the whole. (pp. 6-7)

5.14.7 Culture and language

Those comfortable in the language describe a strong sense of their identity, purpose, and anchoring of what it means to be an Indigenous person. During the summer of 2022, I was privileged to attend a language camp in Alderville facilitated by Anishinaabemowin speaker and author, Helen Roy. I had an earlier understanding of the meaning of the Anishinaabemowin word for sweetgrass – Wiingaashk. I had received a loose translation of it, meaning "aromatic grass." However, I was aware the construction of the language lent itself to a more profound meaning, and I was still searching for answers.

Unfortunately, before the camp, there were several deaths, two of which touched me deeply: one a family member, and the other, Dougbaa Williams, Elder of the Trent University Indigenous PhD Program and Elder from his home community of Curve Lake First Nation. His words tumbled around my head over the weeks following his passing. Though I hadn't spent as much time with him or had known him as well as others, he imparted some significant teachings to me. He knew my longing for language as I lamented my colonial thinking and always advised me about two specific teachings relevant to the work I was considering in this study. First, "always carry your tobacco," he reminded me, for which I was notoriously derelict. After his passing, I felt his words more intentionally and recognized their importance. They are ground into every step I make. I was grateful for this teaching when I arrived at the family funeral in North Bay, fully equipped with my bundle, grown from my garden, when natural tobacco was needed. (Miigwech Dougbaa). Next, specific to language, was the teaching about its role with speakers. Though I was proud of my limited vocabulary, Dougbaa Williams, a fluent Anishnaabe speaker, gently encouraged us as beginners to challenge ourselves and move beyond naming and nouns. For him, the language was so rich in action and imagination that learning words in isolation could never achieve. Truthfully, I felt ruefully inadequate and knew I was not there. Nevertheless, I continue to be inspired by his teachings and try to be a language learner who can string together an occasional thought in the language.

On my first day in the language course, I was introduced to seeing sweetgrass differently, as it reflects Anishinaabe philosophy. The construction of the word is very methodical, based on careful observation of the phenomenon of what is being studied. To explain, the class spent time constructing an Anishinaabemowin word for a "computer mouse," based on the characteristics of what it does and the inherent structure of the language. Intermediate students who were more familiar with grammatical rules could precisely create the word. It demonstrated the creative facility that is required for functionally speaking the language. The relationship I have developed with sweetgrass reflects a nuanced learning which encapsulates a growing understanding of the interplay of what is seen and unseen. In the Background section of this paper, I reflected on the well-developed soil communities that exist below the

surface long before entities evolve into plant entities. This view of soil communities beyond human view echoes foundational tenets of an Indigenous worldview in Anishinaabemowin.

I began to appreciate the complexity of the language and knew that English, shaped by Western thought, complicated the understanding of Anishinaabemowin words. Language exists to express abstract ideas; it is the creative device by which we express ourselves. Learning Anishinaabemowin requires unlearning our attachment to specific ideas and how we express them. This realization settled over me, and I fully accepted its transformational value. It became clear how taxing full immersion camps could be because we are not just learning the language: our thinking is also being challenged, and we must 'rethink' to communicate. For example, I explored the word "wiingaashk" (sweetgrass) as I understood it before attending camp. True to form, the sound units echo Anishinaabe understanding and worldview. I will share what I learned during my interaction in class and then with email follow-ups. If there is any error in interpretation, I accept them fully as my own. Sweetgrass in Anishinaabemowin is spelled "awiingashi'aki" (Helen Roy, personal communication, July 18-22, 2022).[20] Simplified, its individual sound units are constructed as follows:

'a' at the beginning, is not vocalized explicitly, but is there, as a "little push" refers to the entity that is being described, fully seen

'w' sound expresses the abstract body is present as an active participant, either acting or being acted upon,

'ii' sound reflects the unseen effort as evident

'n' sound reflects the entity in action; something specific is being spoken about

'g' sound reflects a separating and grouping action is being described, attributable

'a' sound reflects the entity is fully visible, or in the description of what it is

[20] All references are taken from Alderville language camp (July 18-22, 2022) and the following resources: *Understanding Anishinaabemowin: Understanding all the Sounds that are Heard* (2012) and sound cards, followed up with clarification with Helen Roy. Helen provided the footnote: (n) is parts, (g) of the [earth's] body, (w) in effort, (ii) seen (i) and revealed, (s) of its inner state (z). The aki does this action. It produces from within (w) [below/under the earth].

‘sh’ sound reflects the entity to us given, supported by its inners state or the thing being spoken about ‘aki’ sound reflects the physical separating and grouping action of the entity when something is done to it or happens but is seen – The end result of the earlier “g” sound. When combined, ‘aki’ references the earth as understood from within, below the earth.

Viewing the word in its totality means understanding the mirroring effect of what the word is describing. There is fluid interaction between the separating and regrouping nature of living entities and a perpetual dance between what is seen and unseen. In the case of wiingaashk (awiingashi’aki), the language describes the seen and unseen qualities of the plant: the roots (unseen), and the sweetgrass blades (seen). What is unseen is expressed by an inner state, but its action and effect tell us something about the essence of an entity, a closed system. The grouping and separating nature references root development; grouping followed by a period of separating grass when it pushes through the soil. The ‘k’ at the end of the word is important as it signals a grouping together once again, when it is picked. The word, when written, can be visually divided down the middle to describe these associations, presenting a mirror interpretation of the word that reflects what is seen above ground (with the plant) and below ground (with the roots).

It is important to consider Keith’s (language teacher and Alderville member who was a part of this study) earlier observation of the language. Anishinaabemowin acknowledges the important sense of touch, enough to separate it into two separate senses: touch as it is experienced by something seen, and then touch by one unseen. Furthermore, Anishinaabemowin includes observing the effects of unseen entities. For instance, our human bodies demonstrate the presence of unknown entities when we fall ill or when we express our emotions. We know that something has happened as a result of something we cannot see. Observation skills are critical, and the language works hard to describe them.

If I learned anything, I have come to appreciate the complicated precision of the language. It is a challenging language to learn, and the effort was intense, but much of our Anishinaabe philosophy is located within the language itself. It is difficult to imagine fluency from truncated pedestrian engagements

with the language – if fluency is the goal, it needs to be built around a student's day, not as an aside program. In order to be successful, it needs to be intentionally intensive.

In a relatively new podcast called *The Language*, the tenth installment, Ojig, features a guest (Alan Corbiere) who shares his journey toward becoming a fluent Anishinaabe speaker. In the episode, Alan quotes Tom Porter: "everything they tried to take from you is what you should learn." For Alan, our greatest form of personal resistance is to learn our language. There has never been greater pressure to learn the language; it is important because the words carry our history needed in contemporary times. Knowing the language profoundly changes our cognitive understanding of the world. Language is fluid and is carried forward with its changing generations. Alan prefers a logical understanding of language, one that is less granular and centred around morphological arrangements that are highly descriptive and functional. Imperfect language attempts should not discourage speakers; we will make mistakes. He predicts as fluent speakers continue to thin in communities, there will be an increased reliance on adjacent dialects and written sources resulting in converges between dialects. He shares it will become essential to create cross-community opportunities to develop conversational pools of speakers.

Interestingly, Melissa Nelson, ecologist and author, references Elders' observations: "the health of the language indicates the health of the community" (as cited in Doerfler et al, 2013, p. 226). The diversity of thinking is embedded in language; hence, the state of language survival within the community is a litmus test for how well Anishinaabe ways of being have survived (Kirkness, 1998).

5.14.8 Land

Shiva (1998) explains how Western knowledge and technology lack understanding of the diversity displayed by Indigenous, scientific knowledge that is based on generations of observations and adaptation. Indigenous methods do not include harnessing and forcing their will on the land. Instead, Indigenous methods are sympathetic to the rhythm of nature, which results in human adaptation, not the other way around. The confluences of monoculture in both the land and our thinking illustrate the colonial apparatus at play. Monocultural land practices adhere to a violent invasion of the land, where land nutrients are

systematically stripped and require chemical interference to restore an artificial sense of balance. Land monoculturalism parallels the monocultures of the mind—one thought, one practice.

Indigenous relationships include non-human beings who are much a part of our natural environment. Our prayers acknowledge the importance of our connection to the natural world from the ground up to the heavens. Anishinaabe's relationship to the natural environment highlights a distinctive worldview that includes non-human entities. It is why we use the phrase 'all my relations.' All living entities and energies, like plants, stars, winds, and the sky world, are acknowledged for their significant contribution. Johnson (1976) shared the important function animals and plants had towards building our knowledge as human beings:

> All animals possessed a special affinity with Mother Earth and with plants. They lived by The Great Laws and they somehow had a precognition or pre-knowledge of events. Besides this great gift, which all possessed, each species and each individual creature was endowed with unique and singular powers proper to himself and his kind. (p. 46)

Our role as Anishinaabeg is to observe their behaviour and watch for nuances. Our senses are not as well tuned as some animals, so we must pay close attention. They respond to environmental changes faster, and observing their behaviour informs us about subtle environmental changes. Additionally, animals model appropriate conduct when we look at their unique character: "each animal symbolized an ideal to be sought, attained and perpetuated" (Johnston, 1976, p. 53). Therefore, their unique traits are models for our conduct. We honour what they teach us and call them "our Elder brothers" (Johnston, 1976, p. 58).

Plants have a similar role in our coming to know ourselves; they, too, demonstrate how we should conduct ourselves. Johnston (1976) explained what was to be gleaned from the "Tree of Life" (pp. 32-33. Like us, it grows, fends off illnesses, heals, and then dies in its cycle of living. It feeds, provides shelter, can be used to build vessels, and gives prolifically without expectation, until its life cycle eventually ends. As it decays, it provides rich humus for younger generations. Our conduct should mimic the example set by the stately tree.

As a novice gardener, I am still humbled by what the plant world gives from the promise of a humble seed. To know plants is to understand healing. They are prolific life givers: with little care and attention, they sustain us in many ways. Plant beings have two powers: to grow and to heal (Geniusz, 2009, p. 67). It takes specialized people to understand the vast range of plant abilities. Like animals, plants have their own unique characteristics. Makoons Geniusz (2009) states that part of our decolonizing path is to see "Anishinaabe inaadiziwin," the plant world, as the valid form of Anishinaabe knowledge that it is (p. 11).

With the little bit of gardening I've done, I know this to be true. I often listen to podcasts to try to 'read ahead' for plant knowledge, attempting to shave off a bit of time. There is so much to learn and few shortcuts – you must experience the plants in their environment. Sharing knowledge is one way to broaden knowledge quickly. I began gardening a little over five years ago. Each year brings unexpected influences such as innovations, different weather patterns, environmental changes, and evolving pests. No two years are the same, and "gardens are simultaneously a material and spiritual undertaking" (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 123), where knowing your limitations is humbling. They are physical labours of love that awaken spiritual wonder and enliven our senses, a gift shared, born from the toils of caring. Kimmerer (2013) shares:

> Once you develop a relationship with a little patch of earth, it becomes seed itself. Something essential happens in a vegetable garden, it's a place where if you can't say "I love you" out loud, you can say it in seed. And the land will reciprocate, in beans. (p. 127)

Our ability to form a relationship with the land, wherever our feet happen to travel, is rewarded. We need knowledge of the natural world to survive, but it requires nothing from us. We acknowledge this in the order of our prayers and understand the edges of our limitations. No amount of pounding and forcing our will on the natural world will change the fact; we are the students, and the land is the teacher.

Land knowledge helps us understand ourselves as Anishinaabe. As one participant shared, "information knowledge is needed for the here and now of tasks, but Anishinaabe **knowledge** goes deep into your being, finding a home in your bones and blood." Our Anishinaabe knowledge is without limits when we consider the possibility of shifting through time and space, accessing the spiritual in dream

dimension and ceremony. For Anishinaabe, our knowledge is affected by our colonial experience. Biskaabiiyang, “looking back” or “returning to ourselves” considers colonial impact (Geniusz, 2009; Simpson, 2011, 2017). Simpson (2011) explored the concept deeper with a Michi Saagiig Anishinaabe person who described it as a “new emergence” (p. 52). The next strand connects what knowledge is valuable for coming generations impacted by colonialism and anchored in strategic reconciliation and resurgence movements.

Part 6: Dreaming About Sweetgrass

Figure 8 - Dreaming of What Can Be, pictures taken of my garden progression from 2017-2021

This third strand considers members' dreams and hopes regarding education for Alderville Anishinaabe youth. Two questions related to future potential were posed to participants. The first question explored possible gaps: "On reflection, was there anything missing from the education you received? (And if yes, please elaborate)." The second question was exploratory: "What would it look like if you could imagine/ design an education system without limitations of budgets and other challenges?" The questions

explored current issues of absences within the system, followed by exploring possibilities. The responses brought significant themes of reconciliation and resurgence. Within the community context, both exist concurrently and are present in future imaginings.

As the wind touches sweetgrass, it sways softly, bending to the will of the breeze. Its sweet aroma travels with the wind, unseen but there. Wiingaashk. Even as the word slips out of my mouth, the sounds travel and get pushed out into the world, I know I more comfortably utter "zhaaganashimowin, the white man's English" (Noodin, 2014, p. 49). Speaking and thinking in English was and is a path to 'civilization.' Learning to speak our ancestral language is a significant effort; not only have our tongues been colonized, but so too have our minds. I practice what I can to remind myself of the beautiful imagery and intellectual weight of our knowledge. I hope to learn to think in the language, "ezhi-Anishinaabendamo," (Noodin, 2014, p. 199). Such is our dilemma, to which we ask: how do we return to that comfort of knowing without being self-conscious of our longing?

Shawanda (2020) stated, "Baawaajige means to dream" (p. 37). It is relevant to note that in Anishinaabemowin, "baa" is often used at the end of a person's name when they have transitioned from their earth journey to their spiritual one. We understand they are beginning a spiritual journey in another dimension – dreaming explores a similar path. The individual unit sounds within the word 'baawaajige' are describing: 'b' the one at this place; 'aa' the essence of this being; 'w' the body of the entity; 'a' everything about it; 'j' the result of grouping and separating; 'i' the way it is seen of its inner effort; 'g' the grouping and separating; and 'e' as the way it is identified (Helen Roy, personal communication). As a novice language learner, I interpret the dream world being described in terms of an essence separating and regrouping, being unseen, then returning and grouping to how it is identified. The dynamics of the word is a fascinating interplay of the Anishinaabe philosophy of the dream world; what we do when we dream: the mind leaves to wonder, though the person is still present. The effect of dreaming on the human body can be observed, but there is a curious interplay of what can not be seen.

Dreaming provides an avenue for considering possibilities. It allows for deeper connections made outside of waking consciousness, what Hartmann (1996), author and psychotherapist, called dreaming imagery: “cross connecting” guided by emotions (pp. 153- 158). Hence, the dream state functions to provide answers by ’weaving in’ emotions with explanations (Hartman, 1996, p. 153). It is a process of problem-solving and a form of self-knowledge that does the work of connecting possibilities. Conscious states are more rigid. Conversely, when we dream, anything can happen: divergent, isolated, simple units are coalesced in “connectionist nets” (Hartman, 1996, p. 150), and associations are made. We can hypothesize that dreaming can be “hyperconnective” in combining possibilities that relies less on linear thinking. In a dream state, we can wander, exploring associations and possibilities with less encumbrance by the limitations and constraints of the body. Driven by emotions, we are working a net of possibilities, “a smoothing out” of complex experiences of the dreaming individual (Hartman, 1996, p. 163). Dreaming provides safe space and comfort. At a very young age, Anishinaabe children are encouraged to dream. Being their parents, we hang dream catchers from their bedroom windows to encourage good dreams and capture bad ones.

Most memorable dreams originate from the rapid eye movement (REM) stage. In *The Function of Dreaming,* Staunton (2001) argues that newborns typically sleep 18 hours, of which 12 is spent in the REM stage. The REM stage is considered valuable for the development of identity, and the uniqueness of who they will become. As we grow, the REM stage is lessened but shifts to other functions. In the REM stage, two things are apparent: the dreamer is always present in the first person, and they are immersed in a setting, a baseline of familiar context. It is thought that the individual is loading up on identity markers of self within the context of their environment.

6.1 Dreaming connects to the spiritual

For Anishinaabeg, when we dream, we are traveling, spiritually. Shawanda (2020) states, “through thought, prayer, ceremony, and dreams, it is where we can access information because the belief is our spiritual light is a central tenet to the cosmological dimension” (p. 38). Dreaming, then, is a form of building

knowledge. As Anishinaabe, our teachings instruct us to consider accessing spirit through non-conventional means. Prayer, ceremony, and dreams are valid forms of knowledge; we must work to find meaning from them and integrate them in our conscious world. Shawanda (2020) notes, "Dream Knowledge is integrated into our daily lives as we continually bridge two knowledge systems" (p. 38). Dreams are a means to connect both worlds. They might be prophetic; they might communicate a different way of consolidating information; they might provide comfort in seeking to communicate with those who have passed; and they might provide deep insight, not easily understood in our waking consciousness.

Anishinaabe babies are viewed as having just arrived from the spirit world. Anishinaabe scholar Leanne Simpson (2011) remarked, "[babies] are fresh from the Spiritual world, with a purity of heart and mind that is difficult to find in adults" (p. 43). Dreaming provides a method to help ease that new spirit into the material world they have entered. Babies and young children are filled with a sense of wonder that, once lost, is never fully regained. I often think about when the moment was that I, as a young child, lost that ability to enter and play in that delicate space of imagination. Our stories and dreams facilitate the ability to leave the material world, wander for short periods, and return.

Anishinaabe people are great travelers, and dreaming, a method for gaining knowledge, is considered an indication of Anishinaabe intelligence (Simpson, 2011). Diane Hill spoke at the *42nd Annual Elders and Traditional Peoples Gathering* at Trent University. She shared one phrase that continues to linger: "We are spiritual beings having a human experience" (Hill, 2018). These words emanate from ancient traditional Indigenous philosophy.

Pondering this further, one eventually asks: Who am I? What is my purpose? Why were we dropped here? Our Creation stories have value. I recall watching the YouTube video of Jacob Wawatie's *The Story of Turtle Island* (MQX, 2013). In summary, it is a captivating old story about North America (Turtle Island), Europe (the Elephant who lost its head), and Australia (the head), a story that explains the beginning of our continents with an edge of hopeful prediction. Essentially, in the creation of our world, the Elephant lost its head. However, Jacob shares a prediction that it will be the Turtle, North America, who will

help Europe find its lost head. I was curious how Indigenous people could have conceived the shape of these vast swaths of land so well without the benefit of flight. I was conversing with Elder Dougbaa Williams, Gidigaa Migizi, following my Ph.D. Bimaadiziwin presentation on January 24th, 2018. He found such things easily understood and simply stated, "their spirits were in flight, and they had every opportunity to see the land below; they saw what they needed from the sky" (Williams, D., personal communication). *We are spiritual beings having a human existence*.

Our goal is to discover why we are here and our purpose. As human beings, our bodies are time-stamped; we arrive without material goods and leave the same way. We take with us knowledge grown from a lifetime of experience. If we do make it to old age, we begin to prepare for our return journey by forgoing all things the physical body needs. Now in my sixties, I have witnessed the passing of a few people and know this to be true. We remember to provide a circle of comfort for family and community with a four-day sacred fire. Understanding the stages of life requires we accept our spiritual return when our time comes. While here, we have hopefully learned to love and to have been loved. Though we will miss our loved ones when they decide to walk out into the spiritual world, we try to avoid being overly distraught. This confuses their spirit, now traveling and visiting loved ones before their eventual departure through the Western door.

Recently, a young family member lost to drugs crossed over to the spiritual realm. My mother, who is experiencing debilitating Alzheimer's dementia, had difficulty remembering her. Shortly after her passing, my mother awoke to retell a vivid dream. In her dream, the pair had visited. Gone were the encumbrances of drug addiction and dementia, respectively. My mom shared that they had visited like old times; then, this young woman reached for her coat and said she had to go, but not to worry – she was okay. My mother was comforted by the memory, reassured until daylight filled with its overwhelming minutia of details, where her memories fade. I fully appreciate that the dream world can also be a place of healing and comfort. In this instance, conditions of mental health and cognitive challenge were not obstacles when communicating in spirit.

I was still curious why we do not remember more of our dreams. Lucid-dream control requires highly skilled techniques of bringing dreams into wakeful consciousness, which is difficult and takes practice. There is a belief that high levels of reflective self-awareness are needed in both the dream and conscious worlds, but more so in the dreamworld (Kahan & LaBerge, 1994). The concept of self within the waking world complicates self-understanding, and both worlds may not be aligned. In other words, how we understand ourselves is complicated by identity markers from our perception of self in the conscious world. Dreaming exists within "thin boundaries" (Hartmann, 1996, p. 165), where more shifting of realities is possible. Some scientific research points to where you leave the dream world, influencing the dreamer's ability to remember upon waking (Gholipour, 2018). Shawanda (2020) states, "dream knowledge requires patience because we may not always remember right away, and the knowledge will unfold when the time comes" (p. 40). Knowing this, we must honour our innate understanding of what is needed and have confidence in our ability to imagine, dream, and bring gifts from the dream world into existence. We can never fully understand dream messages in the moment; hence, it is essential to try to remember them.

Indigenous people have long valued dreamworld, and hunters found dreams helpful to find game in areas of vast terrain and small numbers of people. Hugh Brody (2000), British anthropologist and author of *The Other Side of Eden: Hunters, Farmers and Shaping of the Word*, found himself deep in the Canadian north following Inuktitut hunters. These Indigenous hunters knew the vast land mass and its various inhabitants. "Dreamers" were known to have the ability to access knowledge through dreams. They could dream of the hunt that would help them "see the correct choice" for the next day of hunting (Brody, 2000, p. 273). Dreamers, with extraordinary ability, could travel not only to far-off places in this dimension but also across time (p. 160). Their dream travel facilitated "movement through time as well as over the face of the earth" (p. 133). Brody (2000) also offered how dreaming allowed the mind to combine more information than waking consciousness could hold. Dreaming facilitates the co-mingling of memory, intuition, and information.

6.2 Sweetgrass dreaming

The braid is particularly evocative in how it relates to memory; however, overlapping past, present, and future temporalities, it directly connects memories to dreams. Sweetgrass Medicine is located in the northern section of the Anishinaabe Medicine Wheel, represented by Elders and their wisdom. Wisdom is considered the highest form of knowledge. Knowledge itself has its growth and a trajectory from "information to knowledge to wisdom" (Deloria, 1999, p. 14). Achieving the highest level of knowledge requires maturation, an ability to consolidate information, experience, and inspiration, that is touched by spirit. It is fitting that the sweetgrass reflects this. In keeping with the metaphor of the sweetgrass braid, Alderville members were keen to dream of learning systems that truly acknowledged Anishinaabeg. For them, this was expressed in a variety of ways: some within the current system and many others outside of what the provincial systems could realistically offer. In many reflections, members articulated how educational practices should include language and culture. Moreover, members were unified in their belief that pedagogy should be centred around on-the-land experiences. Broadly speaking, members felt this was missing in their education. Many added that, given the environment's state, connection to the land was in crisis. Members talked eloquently about their relationship to the land and the challenge this presented in understanding what it means to be Anishinaabeg today.

6.3 Reconciliation road

Members generally felt their educational experiences did not acknowledge their background. Where there were efforts, there were also problematic stereotypes and outright appropriation issues. In the previous section, I introduced Koren, whose quiet refusal to stand for the school's morning national anthem was juxtaposed with what she perceived as complete assimilation. Now, an adult, her artistic skills have flourished. She is a talented multi-media artist whose services are often sought after for workshops, not only for her obvious talent, but also her approachable demeanor to relate to people, especially young people. She shared a recent experience framed within the current context of reconciliation:

> *Fast forward to now, when I was able to show up in person for art classes and entrepreneur classes. So, I was there in the morning for the anthem and then workshop. Just to be a good sport and I*

didn't want to start anything, I stood for the anthem. I stood for the anthem, and during their announcements, they did a land claim, and they mentioned treaty 20 and the Mississaugas. I got emotional because instantly, I felt welcome, like they knew where they were, they knew what land they were on. I'm getting emotional talking about it still, right now [sobbing]. So, when I started the class, that's the first thing I talked about. I said, 'you know, we never had that when I was in high school, having a land acknowledgement and being aware of that.' So, there are these baby steps that are happening. There's still a long way to go, but that was a big deal for me to hear that, but I do feel it's good that they talked about residential schools. There's Native Studies classes now, but I feel that should be at the forefront of every history class being taught in Canada, across the nation. There should be a whole section in history class dedicated to covering the true history that has been buried for so many years. It would bring people together, and I feel like there would be an understanding of what it's like and what it has been like, and what still goes on, because it's not just history. This is still happening, and it's not called residential schools, now it's the foster care system.

One Elder felt our culture was something to be shared for the benefit of others in addition to our people:

And so, I think we need a curriculum that could be, say teaching them the roles of men and women, those roles of men and women, and it doesn't hurt the non-Indigenous people to know that either. So, teach them, too. We've got some really good people like yourself, Julie, and Melissa, and people in the community that know how to do all those things and don't mind speaking up, you know, and teaching. So, I think, we need to utilize those people. I know of one young man who works for a company, and he called and asked if we could use anything for the food bank. They bought us a nice tiller for our garden, and he asked if we could come and speak, and I said, "absolutely." Because I think, with every opportunity, you need to go and share, and it could be something simple, like what is a smudge? What are the medicines? Why do women wear skirts? What's the importance of men doing the fire and the women doing the water? Just the basics, people are just hungry to know, and I think that's the kind of things we need to teach in our curriculum.

Reconciliation is bandied about loosely, but for many of us, it does not include basic public education presenting accurate information. Members spoke directly about this issue, offering a widely held view that teaching basic information about truthful histories should not be the entire work of reconciliation; for them, it was just a start. Denis (2020) reflected on the divergent pathways of reconciliation. He shared the perspective of non-Indigenous people who saw it as a long overdue final chapter. In contrast, Indigenous people preferred to view it as the first step in the reconciliation process. Indigenous people understood the term 'reconciliation' to mean improved relationships. What is noteworthy is the effort to educate often falls to the First Nation community; it is something that catches the ire of Indigenous communities. Indigenous people do not have to be convinced of the value of non-Indigenous people learning basic knowledge about their histories and culture. They see it as a means to be understood, but also essential to challenge Western practice with innovative ideas:

> *We can work with a lot of adversity. We can learn from that. Those will be helpful pieces of learning in the future, I'm sure.*
>
> *Covid has clearly pointed out that the way of the future, in a population which is becoming denser, things about infection and the consequences of enclosed spaces and everything. We should be looking at better ventilation systems in our school rooms. I think we need to do an analysis of the educational system, how it functioned pre-Covid as to what can be done in the future to prevent some of the issues that resulted by not being adequately ventilated, closing down schools, for instance.*
>
> *I know the online learning was not totally adequate for a lot of people. It created a lot of difficulties, so our learning environments are changing, and I think that's a necessary part of the future, if you ask me. You know this was the hottest July on record. As the planet heats up, we might correctly surmise that further epidemics, pandemics will occur in the future. And, we should be modifying our practices, spaces so that we can respond quickly with the least amount of disruption possible because it's hard on kids too, as well as parents.*

So that's one good thing, I think that a cultural sharing mechanism that goes on, this would be good for non-Indigenous kids, too. You know, we have an integrated daycare here, for instance. Just because it's now a formal school system, doesn't mean that it cannot be a place of learning for all.

An older member recalled how her understanding of Indigenous issues could be fostered in post-secondary schools when the topics were avoided in earlier grades. Most members did not have school experiences that covered historical truths about residential school; therefore, the learning was new for them, too. Such experiences were foundational and life changing. One member shared:

It came into our second year at Trent (material on residential school). Now, mind you, we had Shirley Williams. She is the foundation of that topic, as far as I'm concerned. It came from her lips first, and she rallied many and brought many with her when she did. So, I thank God, I was there for that. I was with her and had her as my teacher when this all came out. So, really watching her speak about it, those first few times are things that you can only have been there to witness, like her words have transpired and crossed, you know, to include so many aboriginal people now, but then, to watch it raw when she was just beginning to speak on this was emotional, very emotional.

I watched that shift in my life change because I really had to look at my mother. I really had to look at Shirley William standing in front of me telling me these horrific things, and then I did look at my grandfather and know that these things were real, that this was not, you know, it couldn't be denied, coming from a Native person's mouth.

Movements may have been galvanized from such experiences as described above, with schools becoming sites of activism. One member, who had difficult childhood experiences, shared how education evolved into something personally enlightening. In post-secondary education, she learned what happened to Native people in Canada, and it helped her understand the trajectory of her life:

I was scared the first day because it looked like a great big learning institution. I thought, what am I doing here? I was very scared the first few days. Back in those days, Trent University was allowing

people to come in, without grade 12 for Native Studies. You know, you did some tests and a bit of computer work in a few packs, and then you were in. So, I passed, and that's how I got into Trent, with no education. I learned big time about myself in that program. I learned a lot of good things there about why life was the way it was for me. When we were talking about the sixties scoop, we were also talking about residential school. We were talking about everything. And, you know, they say, that we didn't know there were bodies behind that church, but we all knew. Our kids were shipped from Alderville, up to Muncie. They took them to Muncie, and that's a long way to travel back home. The reason I think they took them so far was so that they wouldn't be able to come home. I know about that from an Elder who was alive at the time, and he was a survivor from the residential school. He talked a lot about that stuff.

We were learning this at Trent and why things were the way they are with our people. We were in university, and that's when we started talking about our childhoods. There was a guy there, I remember him. He's the one that put the lawsuit together with the chiefs for the sixties scoop survivors. I remember going to school with him. We were all sitting around in a big circle, talking. I think that's where the seed was planted for him to go against the government because it's been a long process, that scoop settlement. Many people out there, like me, are waiting. Oh, they've got to check your documents and all this bullshit. It is a lot of bullshit because the lawyers get their fees, and then, the courts pass it on to collectivity, holding onto this money. They should recognize what we've gone through.

Nora Sawyer, former Chief and currently a band councillor, continues to sit on several childcare committees with various associations to improve understanding regarding Indigenous issues and children. She ardently believes in the value of educating non-Indigenous people:

I was on a zoom call last night. I'm on all these committees, and they were talking about 60s scoop children and whatever, and they were displaying their grief. When I think about five years ago, when I started on that committee. I was pushing that knowledge base out there and explaining why

we do this: like what we do when our mother dies, we cut our hair. I've done that with them for the last five years because I think they're ready to know and want to learn. I think they're learning; I'm trying to educate them.

Last night, I did a prayer. I light a smudge. I think it's important because we're talking about our children, we're talking about the lives of our kids, whether they are Anishinaabe and or not, Indigenous children, all children. We have to work with caregivers, too, and we need to look after them. So, I always light a smudge, and I tell them how important it is that we talk in a good way and we do our meetings in a good way. They like that, and it's an expectation now; this is how we do things, so that's education, that's teaching them

I remind them when they're opening a home up for a child. If you looked in my mum's fridge back in the day, there might not be a lot of food that western society thinks makes a good meal. But my mom could make a meal out of anything, and so we would never starve because we had enough in that cupboard. I try to educate them on those very same things. You might go into one of our houses, look in the fridge and look in the cupboard say, "there's hardly anything there to eat" because you're basing and judging on your western ways. But our ways, we can make a stew out of that hunk of meat we have in the freezer, those dried vegetables, those carrots that we have in the fridge, those potatoes that are over there. My mom could make our bread. We probably got a better meal that way.

Those are the kinds of things that I think are educating them. I explained one time; it was the last meeting. We ended up talking about going into a home and assessing the homes and saying, "well okay, you've got two bedrooms, but you've got girls and boys, so how are you going to split them up?" And I understand there are regulations; you have to do that. But I said, "so's you know, when I was growing up, there were three sisters, and we all slept in one bed. That's all we had. We had one bed upstairs, and you could see the nails coming through because we didn't have insulation. There was frost on the nails, and we were all covered up with big blankets. But you know

what? We were happy. We had laughs, and we had a good time, and we all laughed before we went to bed." So even though you might think that that house isn't big enough for the family there, maybe we think that, we can make do. I always share that.

I remember my mum on a Saturday morning, when we were kids, we would wake up, and there would be a kid on our couch. It would be the neighbor's kid, and we'd say something like "Oh, hi Robbie" or whatever his name happened to be. We'd go play and my mom would make breakfast. We didn't understand that there was a domestic and that child was brought to our home. My mom would just bring them home, and they were on our coach, and she'd say, "we're putting another potato in the pot, no big deal."

So that's education, teaching people that 'your way is not always the best way.' We made do because we had to. We're teaching them to understand that there's not just one way. And so, my role has been that. They do things in one way. We do things our way. Last night, there was a discussion. In child welfare, they're bringing something down called modernization, and it's a government statement that is basically says that they want people to work together as partners. Let's say we have a child that has some mental health issues. Well, some of the partners that are there, like Camh, have the mental piece; that's their role. They might be thinking, well maybe, CAS should look at that because that's their role. My comment has always been, "we have to get away from those silos because if we don't, we'll end up with another Jordan's Principle." So, they looked at it, and they said, "you know, you're right." My advice is, "don't be fighting over whose role is to do what. Let's just look after that child and figure it out later." So, you know, that's ***education****.*

There is little doubt about the commitment Indigenous people make toward the reconciliation effort. They answer the call by sitting on numerous committees as unpaid advisors or similarly carving time out to prepare presentations for yet another group of non-Indigenous people. They continue to do it because they believe in sharing knowledge.

6.4 Teacher preparation

As teachers began to teach Indigenous content, their comfort level was challenged, and their ignorance troubling for members. One participant involved in teaching reflected on what he observed regarding teacher familiarity with Indigenous knowledge:

> *When I was in school, I went to one of the local high schools. I came back to teach at CCI and after my first year, I got invited to help with professional development, and so here's the teachers who have taught me. Now I'm sitting at the front of this panel, and we're teaching them about Anishinaabe Bimaadiziwin gikinoomaagewin. I couldn't believe how little they knew, like I was shocked how little they actually knew about our history, or even anything about cultural genocide.*

Alderville parents shared how recent Indigenous content has been delivered at the high school level. While there have been gains, the overall role of teachers leading potentially emotionally charged classroom discussions has been overlooked in the reconciliation project. As Indigenous content begins working its way into the education system, predictably, mistakes are being made. For instance, teachers do not always consider the connection Indigenous students make to the material. Conversely, non-Native students do not feel any personal attachment, which has predictably evolved in bitter emotional exchanges between students. I have personally witnessed this at the university level as the general education of all students now includes a compulsory half-credit Indigenous Studies course. One mother of high school-aged youth shared:

> *High school was a traumatic time for me, partly due to personal things going on in my life as a teenager, but also due to the culture shock of going to a new bigger school in town. My children experienced a similar culture shock when attending off-reserve high schools during their teenage years.*
>
> *Some of the difficult experiences they have faced include learning about the genocidal history of Indigenous peoples in Canada amongst a classroom of mainstream students that were not culturally sensitive to the implications of this on our people today.*

My children have also been centered out and put into the position of being a "token Indian", expected to speak on or provide perspective to the materials being presented, without regard to the sensitivity of the material and its actual impacts upon them as individuals and members of the community.

In these situations, the teachers were not fully prepared to handle the repercussions of these discussions, including the triggering of intergenerational trauma and opposition between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. They did not provide appropriate support for them.

I strongly feel that it isn't the role of non-Indigenous teachers to be teaching this material; it would have been more appropriate for an Elder of Knowledge Keeper from our community to be teaching our kids about our history, from our perspective.

Similarly, another parent highlighted that classroom teachers were not fully prepared with enough knowledge to lead difficult conversations in a responsible way:

There were a couple incidents. First of all, he [her son] had Indigenous English or something like that, and the teacher there, I wonder if she read one book and thought that she could teach the course, so many untruths were taught. The worst part was that the other kids were actually soaking it in and taking it in, with what this teacher was saying.

For instance, the class was discussing why it was inappropriate to wear a Halloween costume, to wear a headdress or Pocahontas outfit. One student said, "I can totally understand; it's like wearing the Led Zeppelin concert T-shirt, and you don't even know who they are, and you don't even like them." She totally agreed.

It is hard to find the thread of connection here as it pertains to Indigenous people. Two separate issues were discussed and there was a missed opportunity to promote deeper understanding. While the content is long overdue for the general population, members were acutely aware of how it was being woven in the curriculum and voiced their concerns. For the reconciliation project to be a success, teaching partners would need to be on board, and members felt the role of the teacher was critical. Insightfully, members

expressed concern about Indigenous content taught in isolation, as the responsibility of one teacher, while others turned their attention to the other classroom matters. It resulted in a lack of integration throughout subjects. One parent, also an educator, reflected:

> *I have always had an issue with there being this one person who teaches Ojibwe language, and it's this one person's job to teach culture. We should all be taking that on, and it's better for the students to see that, too. Because when they see it, that is the norm, what we're supposed to know. When it's just that one person off to the side, you know a language teacher out there in the portable, all by himself/herself, it's always on the fringe. So ideally all teachers, even though it's hard for non-Native teachers to teach Native content*.

When members discussed the efficacy of teachers, they included the school's leadership. Without the administration assuming the reigns and direction of the school, it is a crushing responsibility for a sole classroom teacher to carry without support. The school community, with decisive leaders, requires input and collaboration with First Nation communities if the desire is to include Indigenous presence. Since Native communities and school environments are wildly divergent, it is a responsibility that requires leadership, evident from the following reflection:

> *The school community is not in sync with First Nation communities. There are no serious stakeholders from our community at the table to help develop curriculum, or even other areas of the curriculum, to even help develop social skills, for instance.*
>
> *Better social skills learned could help drive partnerships between all communities. Education is very much its own system with limited engagement from outside communities. A big issue is that the standards of the education system – provincial – are not congruent with the personal development of the student or the goals, aspirations, and needs of the families and communities they come from. This is especially the case with Indigenous students and communities, and marginalized people in general. The education system is not designed to gain meaningful input from First Nations communities and co-design standards at the provincial or local level.*

In my experiences as a student and educator, I came across certain educators who took a real, genuine interest in First Nations' issues, who were particularly sensitive to the needs and individual gifts of students, who knew how to connect with families and communities in meaningful and important ways. But that was because of who they were and their backgrounds – not because the teacher training or education system is designed to produce educators like them.

There would need to be more stakeholder involvement in the curriculum that was developed for the school and also the staffing of the school as well. Part of their training, part of the interview process too, can be built into the job description and the job posting, then anybody who applies to that job knows they've got some work to do, to learn about the community, if they want to teach the children that are coming from there.

I think it would be like when I was interviewed at another First Nation community; they actually had a community member sit on the interview panel, and they do that for all First Nations' related jobs. It wasn't just because it was an education position and they needed to assess my proficiency. They do that for all their interviews, which I think is good. They do that for all the band staff, the school staff, and all staff, so if you're going to go work anywhere on that First Nation, there would be a community member sitting in on the interview. Interesting. I think that's the way it should be.

Similarly, another parent added that teacher training and certification was a unique opportunity for considering future teacher assignments upon graduation:

I hope other education programs consider these learning outcomes for these degrees, maybe even make them mandatory for their license. Their assessment includes so many hours, some sort of quality assurance that our teachers have exposure to, at least techniques, understanding and that they can demonstrate they would know how to adapt it in a classroom, or where they would find the resources.

I understand non-Indigenous teachers might feel it's a little bit intimidating to teach an Indigenous lesson, but I think the trainers and post-secondary people working with student teachers, that's a responsibility on them to make sure that the new teachers have tools, they have resources, and are even aware of protocols. You know. Like what are protocols?

As participants shared their experiences and perspectives, it was evident that effective teachers in the education system had touched many. Members were generous in their view of teachers who made the journey towards understanding their community; in doing so, they exhibited commitment to their highly respected profession as teachers. These teachers were considered allies, as evident by one reflection:

I get to work with so many wonderful teachers throughout our local school board. Majority of the teachers I work with are non-Indigenous. I get to see firsthand the work that I'm doing, the continued growth and commitment of teachers embedding Indigenous content into their classrooms and curriculum, and the support of senior admin in ensuring that content is authentic and supported by our Indigenous Education Department. I love that! It's good to see our Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Perspectives being respected and a part of such content getting out there to students of all ages and grades. Teachers are championing that work, and I see that as a really good thing to have those folks out there in those schools, doing such important work!

Members acknowledged that teaching about Indigenous people could be challenging for non-Native teachers. Knowledge Keeper and language teacher Keith Montreuil shared:

A lot of teachers are not comfortable with it, even knowing what to say because it's scary for a lot of teachers to say the wrong thing. And then, have an angry mob come out because maybe they didn't know whether or not to do or say something, to be pressed into that position where they're supposed to know everything, you know, as a teacher. You can't live up to that and so just not having a conversation is the easy way. It becomes easy to say we got all this other stuff to do, we gotta get moving on, but a lot of it is they don't have the tools to have that conversation. Different discussions I've had with people who have taught at Roseneath previously, expressed that it would

be a good idea to focus on the First Nations. Where, if the students are coming to a school that has a tuition agreement with First Nation and neighboring community, the school should be looking for teachers that have those advanced qualifications (AQ), as a bare minimum.

This fear of tackling Indigenous content is well covered in Dion's (2007) argument of the 'perfect stranger,' whereby, teachers may be interested but cannot act, calling upon various reasons, and thus maintaining their role as the 'perfect stranger' (Dion, 2007). Keith went on to describe a learning experience he had with a teacher who displayed both humility and bravery in his effort to understand Indigenous issues:

I had an experience this past year, where a younger guy came to teach at the school, and you know, he was very extroverted. So, it wasn't hard for him to come to say hi and introduce himself. We kind of talked all year. He'd asked questions. As an aside, I tell you ***Teachers pay Teachers*** *is the worst place to get lessons about First Nations, and so he'd look at a lesson that he was thinking of doing, and he'd say, "Hey, maybe I'm learning, maybe I'm not, but what do you think about this?" and I'd say after looking at it "well, this is wrong, for this reason, this, for all these reasons, this is all wrong. That's outright racist, right there." He was open to ask and open to not to take it hard, I guess, to be challenged on his way of thinking, the preconceived thoughts he had.*

And, and so this year, they had the lobster fishing in the news, and he asked, "okay, so this is in the news right now; what do you think about all this?" We had a conversation about who's fishing out of season; they're harvesting out of season; who's season are we talking about here? And getting him to think about things from a different kind of view, not just what the law is, but whose law and has it always been the law? Getting him to think in different ways, and then, on his own, he started doing his research on the numbers were, of how many people are Mi'kmaq fishers, what percentage of harvesters makes up non-Mi'kmaq harvesters. Then with his class, we ended up watching a couple videos and news clips. We had a discussion, and I told him that it's okay to say that you don't know and don't have an answer because it's happening right now. And, if it were all sorted out already, it wouldn't be news.

He had older grades, and they talked about it, and when I talked to him afterwards, he was kind of surprised that some of the Indigenous students that he thought would really stand up for the Mi'kmaq, didn't. They couldn't understand why they would be fishing out of season, and it kind of opened his eyes, like even some of the Native students don't think the same, and I told him, 'well, not everyone does.' And maybe, I thought, I need to bring that up too because a lot of times, I'm guilty of just assuming that we think that way or understand or have uncles to teach us these things. We just see it on TV, and think, why wouldn't they just obey the law?

In his next class, they looked up the numbers of lobsters that were getting harvested because locals were cutting Indigenous traps and everything; they were being, really mean, doing violent things, burning down buildings. When he actually looked at the numbers with his class, and put them up on the Smart Board, the number of lobsters was so miniscule, maybe one or two percent and came to the conclusion "this isn't even a discussion. There's no reason for any of this."

It solidified in his mind, there's way more to what's going on here, not just what we see on the news, and what we read in the newspapers. We have to actually look at why people are angry. As a new teacher, or any kind of teacher who is unprepared, well that is by design.

This is an interesting exchange that demonstrates the journey of one teacher's learning. In this example, the inexperienced teacher sought mentorship from a First Nation staff member and developed a relationship. He reviewed lesson plans he had accessed and asked for honest feedback. Discussions led him to bravely consider a topic within the news cycle. After discussing the event with his class, he followed up his observations with Keith, who also felt there were new learning opportunities for them to explore. This teacher was encouraged to think of deeper dynamics at play beyond what is framed by the media.

Insightfully, one grandparent reflected on the potential backlash of reconciliation when teachers are unprepared to teach uncomfortable curriculum:

If you push too much curriculum, that really sets up a rise in racism and especially with teachers. Because they don't have the education, you know, to teach what they feel comfortable in. I mean all

the school boards have to do this sensitive sensitivity training now, well, that doesn't give them a scope as to what it is to be a Native person.

This is a prescient reading of the generalized temperature of reconciliation, which can run hot and cold. Authors like Denis (2020) have noted a tipping point where the effort for change swings the other way, and people become resistant to change, where old values of protecting nationalism are vigorously defended. These movements are most evident when the dominant groups' position is threatened. The Progressive Conservative Party's platform edges toward nationalism motivated by highly reactive ultra-conservative voters. It is evidenced by Smith's Alberta Sovereignty Act, Ford's Ontario's Notwithstanding Act, Legault's Bill 21, and Moe's Saskatchewan First Act, which are contradictorily aimed to undercut federal powers (Franson, 2022). Exactly where Indigenous rights rank in any of these provinces within the scope of conservatism agenda is anyone's guess.

It is worthwhile to discuss the uneven application of reconciliation. Provinces, school boards, schools, and various grade levels are on a continuum of learning pertaining to Indigenous peoples. It appears to be relative to many factors: where one lives in Canada, the administrative direction of the school, and the efficacy and comfort of classroom teachers. To be clear, not everyone is receiving the same information, at the same time, from competently similar educators. In conversation with one youth, she discussed what she observed. She noted frequent ignorance when it came to knowing and understanding Indigenous people, not mattering whether it was in her home community or away at university:

Comparing what I learned at Roseneath Public School, Cobourg high school, and finally at Trent, I wish we would have learned more in high school. Those students who are now taking Indigenous Course Requirements, like INDG 1001 at Trent, don't know much, or they don't know anything at all. I remember hearing students saying, "oh I never knew about residential schools, about the 60s scoop. I live near Oka; you know I live near there, and I didn't even know about it." It's very disturbing, really. Something needs to change; we have to learn, unlearn and learn again.

6.5 Indigenous content

A parent reflected on the disengagement of standard curricula and its incongruence with Indigenous values. For her, it was evident that there was little Indigenous representation in the school:

> *Some parts of school I liked. I liked math and writing, but there were other areas where I wasn't engaged. The Indigenous piece was problematic. The school was largely from a non-Indigenous perspective. I remember community members that were there in their education roles, but beyond that I didn't see representation of us as Indigenous students from Alderville reflected within the school. Even the Indigenous curriculum materials, at the time, were more general and seemed to lack connection to our community. They seemed to be created from a settler perspective for a settler audience. Though there were efforts, a medicine garden, for example, there was and is a lack of Indigenous teachers across the board. Every year, CCI is struggling for a language teacher. This shows an obvious lack of effort and planning. There is very little collaboration and consultation with our community, and overall, poor communication with the families and the community.*

Language survival was vital in the area of curriculum, but so was learning about Alderville's history. For reconciliation to work, members spoke about the importance of their history and its contribution to their understanding of who they are as people. One youth had this to say:

> *Indigenous Peoples, that was taught once, a little tidbit of history, and I remember. It was in history, in one week, we had to write an assignment. We learned about residential schools, but I don't really remember learning about local treaties or anything that was local. They were lacking in that, and it was also a non-Indigenous teacher; she only had so many resources herself. So, I think for me, it's just a fair opportunity to learn about your true history.*

An Elder and language teacher reflected on the curricular demand of teachers that were felt to be daunting:

> *We know how important Indigenous education is and how much it means to us, but when you think about the reality of teachers out there doing their job in classrooms every day, which includes the*

teaching of math, science, geography, and all the other topics and curriculum they teach. They have a lot of expectations on them. And then working through the pandemic and all the changes and stress that was attached to something that took away all that was 'normal' to us… It's been a lot on teachers.

And I really want to acknowledge that. That's why I feel it's so important that we truly value those 'champions' out there who remain so committed to embedding Indigenous perspectives and curriculum into what they are teaching. Teachers must juggle an awful lot and all these different topics that are not going to necessarily be a priority to them, but that's why its so important we keep supporting them to the best of our ability in showing how Indigenous thought and ways of knowing can connect in so many ways across the curriculum. I want that to keep being a natural part of their thinking about Indigenous education... like "oh yes, I should be able to bring in that First Nation perspective in the environment and science," or whatever class it may be…

Earlier Indigenous education, pre-reconciliation, was primarily handled in a one-off manner, limited to presentations that were disconnected from the rest of the curriculum. It was a rare opportunity for students to explore, often limited and relegated to a 'special' activity. These activities were event-based where teachers were removed, often becoming supervisors and observers. When the Indigenous activities were packed up and Indigenous people gone, the class resumed their familiar routine, with no integration with what had been shared. Melody Crowe has been dedicated to reframing Indigenous activities and having them connect across the provincial curriculum. She highlighted:

The other thing we're working towards changing, and we've been doing this now for several years, is not just event-based activities, where we come into a school or classroom as a one-time Indigenous activity. What we're committed to is the embedding of that learning throughout all curricula. Not that we can't have an event, of course, but we want to see it at a deeper level. And I love that; I want to see that continue because we're not just the 'fluffs and feathers' so to speak. Even though that's a beautiful part of our culture, our regalia, our dances, our songs, and all of that,

we're working towards having teachers and educators and children and youth see First Nation perspectives for the wealth of information that it is, that wealth of knowledge to share. There is so much richness in all of that.

There are ways of knowing, ways of being, that can be embedded. We can learn something about First Nation people and math, even though we wouldn't have called it math way back in the day, there's ways of tying FNMI (First Nation, Metis & Inuit) ideas with math, or science. Then, they see that reflected. It's so empowering for Indigenous children and youth. Yet, it's also just as important for non-Indigenous children and youth because then that's going to create a different mindset, no matter what they may hear at home about Native people. We're changing up the curriculum, expanding and creating opportunities for awareness; we're also making Indigenous content present and not just something of the past. I remember the excitement of some students when they learned about Native people being referred to as the ***first scientists*** *because of practices and modalities done thousands of years ago.*

That's why we want to keep going with all of this, those kinds of ideas, but it's crucial that teachers have the supports needed to embed all of that into the work they do and supports for our students, like the First Nation Room in the high school, Alderville Educational Assistants, and the After School Program. All these supports make a huge and positive difference! We know that when Indigenous students see themselves reflected in the curriculum, they feel supported; they have a better chance of feeling empowered and proud of their identity that can be proudly carried throughout their school years and then on into the rest of their lives.

Melody expresses the need for teachers to be supported and is sensitive to the demands placed on individual classroom teachers, a lament tracked in B.C. schools where reconciliation mandates are not matched with classroom support (Lamb & Godlewska, 2021). The educational system requires a layer of accountability and responsibility to wade into reconciliation waters. Another Elder felt that a supportive

environment is critical for First Nation students within the provincial system, especially during the early stages of reconciliation:

> *Actually, I think there's a lot that is still missing. What I like about what we have now is they have that education person, from Alderville, in the high school. There's a place of comfort, a safe place that the kids could go to. I never had that. I don't even think I remember being able to talk to the guidance counselor at the time. I don't think I could have, because they didn't understand. They wouldn't have understood, that was missing.*
>
> *I think we have to make sure that we have our own people in the schools, so that our kids have somewhere to go and speak and just cry, if that's what they need to do, maybe have a snack because I didn't have that. I had my peers, my friends, my close friends, but not always in my classroom. Because I was alone, having that racist experience in that classroom, some of my friends didn't experience that in their classrooms, so would they really understand? I think having a safe place is key, and I'm so glad that it's there for them.*

Members were aware of Alderville's presence in schools and voiced their support. It was viewed as helping students transition at critical stages: preschool, high school, and post-secondary. Though it would be ideal to have more Indigenous teachers, community members were adamant safe spaces within schools with Alderville supportive staff were needed.

6.6 Packed curriculum and expectations

Members commented on the pace and methodology of standard teaching practices and found them out of sync with Indigenous learning methods. Standardized testing came up frequently, and it was shared how this required standard was demanding for students and teachers. Consequently, they felt it affected overall student learning because preparing students meant "teaching to the test." Though the Ministry of Education claims otherwise, parents and community members remained unconvinced. One member who has worked in the educational sector had this reflection:

We need to slow the curriculum down. I feel terrible for teachers, for this very reason, because they're the ones that look like crap and feel bad. Like when that grade three testing came out, I remember the grade three teacher I was working with, she just about had a stroke. Because now teachers are being judged on this thing. I feel like they just gotta cram stuff down because our kids have to reach this level, because the US is this level, in teaching their kids. So, I feel like we're just smoking stuff down their throats and not taking a moment to actually embed that knowledge, like let it sink in, before you move on. Maybe not everyone's there, not all kids are there because so many parents are struggling with mental health issues too, and those kids are coming in tired, and they just can't suck in all that information, that fast. I just feel that they have to cram so much down the kids' throats, and the kids just can't process it.

The next day, you're moving on to something else. I feel like the teachers; they're spinning their wheels, you know, covering fractions for two days, "did a quiz nobody knew what they were doing, then oh my God so, I'm gonna have to go back to this for a day. But that's not even reasonable, not enough time." I think learning how life works is the way to teach because teaching kids to count and subtract with money is always great because everybody has money. I think we have to get a more hands-on way of learning, and it's not just a cultural thing. At one point, I would have said, yes, it's a cultural thing." Now, I think it's an everyday thing. Kids need to see and touch, to learn. We need a more tangible way of learning, where we're sitting with and working with a teacher. Kids can learn better that way. It means smaller groups and really looking at that curriculum because there is a lot of fluff in the curriculum. You know, stuff that could be taught later on, stuff they could better pick up later on. This early curriculum, you know, I look at some of my grandchildren's homework, and I could just laugh, but, you know, that's the gramma in me.

I think the teachers are being judged on the curriculum, that they've been handed, to get it into the heads, get it off their plate, get it out into the room, and say, "Okay, I said it. It's released, done, moving on to the next chapter." I feel like it's going like that, where, for the good teachers,

they realize, oh my, I'm just a robot up here, spouting off what I have to spout, knowing it's only reached maybe eight of the kids in my classroom. How disheartening that must be to know that when they look at their class and realize, I know 13 of my kids didn't even have a clue about what I just said, and I'm moving on to the next week's stuff. I feel horrendous for how those teachers must feel, and the good ones, they get discouraged, and it breaks their hearts to have to do that They're the ones that move on, because they can't deal with the stress because they know the system is failing, so they would want to move on.

I think we have to adapt to how the kids truly learn these days, and it's not just a race or religion, or thing. I think it's an everyone thing. There are so many people on the same playing field, what I once thought was just a race thing, about oppression, just how oppression brings everybody down and mental health is everywhere, everyone's struggling. And those teachers are struggling too, how they're going to do this, and now this online learning. I don't even know how a teacher can feel like a teacher. When a teacher goes in thinking they're going to have children that they teach and stop for a second and speak to, then they can't.

Like all the advancements in adapting, it's still the same curriculum. We're just showing new ways to push the exact same curriculum. You learn Native Studies once a week, or one week out of a year. I don't know who gets to change the curriculum? Can teachers change that curriculum? Can they choose how they're pushing it? Or are they so governed by what the stats have to be, or how many people need to reach this level before they graduate, that they can't! Is there too much being pushed on them, too, to try and cram stuff into little heads? Then it comes back down to blaming the teachers [very animated].

An Elder had a similar sentiment, but summarized**: "**maybe, somewhere along the line, the benchmarks need to settle down a bit. You know, because we're going by Western benchmarks**, what about our notches in the tree**?"

A member who is involved in the educational system who has experienced dissonance between Western curricula and Indigenous ways of being**,** felt dense Western pedagogies and methodologies were not well aligned with Indigenous ones. Ultimately, she found students were more responsive to Indigenous methods, but it was a problematic mismatch with Western methodologies:

> *It would require a change in mindset on the part of educators and administrators and, you know, the people who develop education policy. So, you know, Nicole Bell? She developed a Medicine Wheel Framework of Learning and it's built upon other Indigenous scholars' frameworks, but basically, learning happens in a circle. There are different stages of the learning process, and I can see this reflected in my own life and then everybody's learning. We start out in the East, where things are revealed, it's the dawn, the sunrise, that's in the beginning, life happens in the East. The word for dawn or sunrise actually means to reveal something, to reveal a new essence; that's what the word 'waaban' means.*
>
> *So, things are revealed in the east, you observe it, you watch it, you reflect it, and you copy what you hear and see and what other people are doing. Then you move into the South and towards the West, and you start taking what you've observed and copied and reflected on and start applying it in other contexts, on your own. You begin to develop more independence thinking with whatever it is you're learning: how to snare rabbits, how to speak Ojibwe, how to whatever.*
>
> *Then, as you move to the North, that's where the teaching or the gift of wisdom is given. So, you've had this journey of learning, and you've come to a point where you can share what you've learned with others. In essence, you can teach others what you have learned. In doing so, you actually end up starting your learning journey again in the East because inevitably, when you share knowledge or wisdom or skills or whatever, you discover things that you didn't know. Somebody asks you a question, well, "how do you do it this way?"*
>
> *"Oh, I don't know." So, you're learning journey starts again, and it's a continuous cycle. It's not linear; it happens in a circle, not like you get to a point where "I know everything, and I'm*

done." It just keeps going. Other cultures have that kind of concept of learning, where you're never the master of what you know; it's a continuous journey. But anyway, what Nicole Bell has tried to do is develop an assessment rubric based on this model; instead of giving a D or a C or a B or an A, instead of giving those labels, your learning falls into the stages of the Medicine Wheel. Are you in the first stage, where you're still observing and being exposed to the knowledge? Are you in the second stage of the Medicine Wheel where you can copy, repeat and reflect on what you've learned? Or, are you in the third stage in, where you're able to apply your learning in another context independently? Or are you in the final stage where you know enough and are confident in what you know that you could share it with others?

She built it; it's called a Medicine Wheel Rubric, and I think she calls it a Cir-bric, really interesting. I tried using it in my own teaching, and it was really hard because I still had to use the Ontario Report Card system and the curriculum, and the assessment rubrics at the same time. I had to make it fit together; it doesn't always. I did find that students responded more positively and engaged with the Medicine Wheel style of assessment than with the standard assessment rubric. With the provincial assessment rubric, it's different. Usually, you have a standard assessment rubric where there are levels 1,2, 3 and 4. What my experience has always been with students is they are strategic in figuring out the assessment, like "all I need is a level two, that's like a "C" like a 60%. I'm just gonna do what it says in level two and that's enough" and never try to build beyond the level they're looking at. But I found with Nicole Bell's rubric; they didn't really do that. They weren't just going to do the first stage in the Medicine Wheel. No, they didn't. I just found they engaged more with the upper, higher, and more advanced levels of learning.

Keith Montreuil observed that focusing on Western priorities established the trajectory of goals and responsibilities contrary to Indigenous values, making it challenging to have Indigenous knowledge coexist within it. Perhaps they are not compatible in terms of values and beliefs:

In the Western public school education system, we're not going to learn those things. So the Indigenous people who know those things, when they come to the school system, aren't valued because the things that are valued are already taught. It's different, and they don't even know what to make of it, you know, our oral history, our knowledge, our land, our Indigenous ways of knowing, all these different things. Even though I was going to Six Nations, I was still going to post-secondary, and my family reminded me, "don't forget who you are." You know, and then, there are lots of communities where they tell their young people, "Don't forget who you are when you go off to wherever you go." You've got to remember where you came from and who you are because they can change you, the way that you're taught and the way that people interact with each other, the power dynamics -all these different things, they change you.

I mean what's valued whether it's moving up the promotion ladder in a business, or even education, where people are trying to get to a higher kind of station in life. As Anishinaabe people, the things that we value is knowledge that we hold and carry and continue to keep picking up and how that's all interconnected, whether it be ricing, whether it be drums and songs and ceremony. They're all part of that foundation; culture is where it begins. And then, we bring in these people, like myself. I never went to university, and I get paid A0 on the pay scale (of A1-A4), the very bottom, and I had other teachers say, "I wish that I could take Ojibwe." One of the teachers said, "All those students, when they go to your class, I feel like they're actually learning things, that are useful and important to them. They don't care about the things they learned in my class; they're going to forget it anyway." It's two different views on what's important in our culture and Canadian culture.

I think about that because we have a little area for the remembering stones, where students can paint a rock, and it gets hung in our remembering stone area outside, and each stone is a memory or in remembrance of a residential school student that didn't make it home. The Wenjack family actually came to Roseneath, and we had a drum, and we sang some honor songs.

There was myself, my brother, our young men, and some really young guys. They learned how to sing, outside of school. As much as I would want to have drumming [in the provincial schools], I don't even know what you'd call it; I wouldn't want to call it drum club because our drumming is held in high regard. That big drum is called Mishomis, (grandfather), you know, that tells you how you're going to act around it. And the thing is, though, every day, when they come to class, they have 50 minutes. They don't even have a whole hour. I don't know how they're going to learn everything right; you know, to show the proper respect to the different [cultural] things that they would be learning?

I was talking to my friend; he is a teacher at one of the immersion schools in Minnesota, and so the Ojibwe down there have a story about snow angels and how you don't make snow angels because you're kind of offending that winter spirit when you make images in the snow. You can call bad things to you. That's their story, and so a lot of the nuns and different teachers would say "oh, go out and make snow angels," that kind of thing because they would see these things as superstitions. They wanted children to go do things that they were not supposed to do down there. And so, at this immersion school that he teaches at, they all learn that story, and it's a lot longer than what I just said. The students hear that, and when they go outside during recess or whenever they're out, they're not throwing snowballs at each other; they're not doing those things. They remember to have respect for things that we wouldn't think about in regular schools.

In the words of an older member, we are reminded of our contemporary situation and must always bridge it with sharing in this world. It is ultimately what we do, as Anishinaabe people – it is the gift that holds promise in a world upended by imbalance:

Another one of our great teachings ***is this, you're not required to finish the task****, but neither are you permitted to ignore important parts of the task.* ***Commit.*** *Commit and use your God given talents, your creative talents, everything you've got to focus on the problem together. And, not only*

will there be some pride in being part of that, and there will be some achievements, some demonstrable successes.

I think that it's important to gain support for any new initiative or any alterations; you have to have demonstrable successes. It has to be all of us, it ***has to be all of us****. We can't withhold knowledge, as Indigenous people, important survival knowledge because: A) we don't feel people understand; B) we don't think they're interested; or C) they'll only use it against us.* ***We have to get over that.*** *All of us are required to find the solutions that lay ahead of us,* ***all of us****. So, sharing, allies for sure, and sharing is the way. You know, it does no good to be satisfied with the fact you stood up for your values when you don't survive yourself, as a result of that. So, it's all about the boat, not so much who's commanding it, but who's in it. And we're all in it now together.*

6.7 Community resurgence: self determination

The project of reconciliation continues to struggle. All members I interviewed felt that ideas of reconciliation are needed to produce better understanding, but there were differences about its overall success and ability to impact future Indigenous learning. Some leaned towards a greater attachment to reconciliation within the existing provincial structures. Many others, however, have abandoned hope because of its slow pace and differing rigid ideals. The differences, they felt, were too great to form cohesion between a Western structure and the overall deeper goal of Indigenous learning. They voiced concerns about whether Western systems were capable of effectively adapting to their needs and, thus far, have demonstrated they cannot. These members expressed a stance that considers the community first, moving ahead to revitalize language and culture – independent of reconciliation. From this position, such members feel focussing on the needs of the community should be their goal. One youth shared the following account and felt immediate action was needed to reflect the critical situation affecting language, cultural loss, and potential loss of community:

I just think on a big scale, if we look at the system that we have, we still allow a government to tell us who isn't or is Indigenous. If we still allow that, in the next couple of decades, there will not be

Indigenous people. In terms of the government, we live under their rule. If we don't take it into our own hands and have our own way of making sure that these kids know their culture and know who they are, to learn their ceremonies, and their language, there's not going to be anything to keep.

Now, if you look at, in terms of like the white people, you know, the settlers, or whoever you want to call them, the non-Indigenous people of say Cobourg, I say absolutely sure starting that (reconciliation-type) knowledge in schools; that is good, at least discussing the traumas and all that, is extremely important for their understanding. Maybe some bring in cultural advisors, who can at least give the context and understanding of why we might do things the way we do, why we smudge, that kind of thing, that is great for them to know. I think, though, more intensely with our people, we really need to hunker down and do what we need for ourselves. I don't even know if Alderville has any fluent speakers? I don't know. We need to be a little bit more selfish in helping ourselves right now, and I don't think that's our way. That's not the way we are, so it's kind of like a tough thing for us to decide to do things selfishly, but I think, if the time is ever, it's now, to really focus on ourselves and focus on our community, to grow our own knowledge, but I don't know if we will.

I think at least the very least, we need to keep up with cultural camps, like immersion camps within the summer months because we're not going to come up with a school system in the next bit. Imagine a two-week really intensive camp. We can at least try and get kids interested in the culture for the rest of the year, you know, start up hand drumming, outfit making and having Elders come and talk to our kids. I think that would be huge. I think that's where we start, to do what we can. But ultimately, we do need something that is more intense, to be able to, at least, come back, a little bit, from everything that's happened.

It's so much bigger than anything we could do as a small reserve, like Alderville, like we're too small to do that on our own and that's why it's something that eventually would have to be like a partnership between all of these reserves, and we're not even that close to each other. It's like it

was all very intentional as to how we got separated from each other and were not able to interact as much as we would have wanted with, say Hiawatha, just across the lake, right? Like we couldn't even build and develop those ties. It was on purpose that we were separated into these small reserves with so little means to support ourselves, or each other.

In the future, we have to have some kind of partnership, like intensive cultural schools and camps and opportunities for kids to learn their culture, or else it's very quickly going to be lost. Start small, right? We've got to find the people to do that, where we include Curve Lake, Hiawatha, and us, kind of grow this thing where we're hopeful funding comes from the First Nations, so that we can continue to grow it. I could see something like that being a really good possibility.

It's great for settlers to learn all that they want to learn, like great, but at the end of the day, we still need to get ourselves back to a place for our culture to be alive, because it's all very surface level at this point.

This young woman's hope is reflected in the partnerships that could be developed between sister Anishinaabe communities like Curve Lake and Hiawatha First Nations. She felt this is where the community needs to focus its energy to achieve long-term community goals. Alan Corbiere's reflection in *The Language* podcast supports her thoughts: He felt the future of language retention was in neighbouring communities partnering to create nests of speakers. Supported by their communities, it would provide opportunities for speakers to engage with one another and grow speakers organically (Menoomnii & Shonias, 2022).

6.8 Connection to the land

When interviewing youth, I noted a particular urgency in their voice, with some even pessimistic about the future they were inheriting. In addition, they expressed anxiety over some of the issues they will be grappling with, evident in this youth's reflection:

It's our responsibility to get that knowledge and to keep it and to pass it on, but I feel right now there's such a disconnect, a really, really big disconnect within our community and also between the

knowledge holders and the youth who have to carry on with that knowledge. There's a severe disconnect, and it gives me anxiety.

If we stray any further from the land, we are done for, quite right.

*What I'm trying to do right now, is bring land use planning into our communities, so that we're not gobbling up all of our resources for gas stations and weed shops. It's gone way too far out of the gate, like it's far gone, and so, it might be kind of too late for our community, but there's still ways to mitigate, just like road mortality, and the amount of ecological functions. I got into so many conflicts with people about Gen 7 and having that wetland there. And they're like, "well, what's the big deal? It's in the middle of two roads anyways; it's not like there's anything living there. It's not like it serves any purpose." Well, yeah, it does. It's a ground water feature; it's connected to every little bit of water, as far back as Macklin Marsh. There are species at risk. I have seen listed species at risk; that are going to be extinct, and we are a First Nations community who put gas tanks in this wetland and are letting people from all over come through and reap the benefits of this gas station. Like it just it kills me, Catherine****, it kills me,*** *but that's why I'm trying to go to school and figure out through my work and through my education how to remedy the situation.*

I attended a conference last year called Adaptation 2020 about climate change adaptation. There was a chief from a BC reserve somewhere, a case study. He came in and talked about what they're doing in their community. Essentially, they live off the grid. They have their own solar panels, they have their own food sources, they hunt, and they harvest. The kids have to go away for school, but when they come back from school in the summer, the youth are in charge of the greenhouse. They have their own coordinator and then, a bunch of youth that get paid to come and work at the greenhouse all spring, summer, and fall. It was eye-opening; I didn't even realize that was an option.

There are ways to do this and other people who are doing it, and I really do feel like it is the only way forward to be more self-sufficient and to teach our youth how to be self-sufficient. I know,

obviously, we have to teach ourselves first because we've kind of lost our ways, but we already have that solar farm up there.

I don't know how long it will take for us to see what we want to see from it, but we already have that up there; we're already halfway there. We've already got a community garden, you know, and it's only going to get bigger and better, you know. Maybe one day, we'll be able to have our own greenhouse.

Just imagine in the future, that's a community hub. The fields right across from you [I live next to this place], the savannah, we got that back, and we're going to start transitioning that back into prairie savannah. It's not going to be a farmer's field anymore because we've been working to restore that stream. There's a stream that runs down into Rice Lake. We're trying to stabilize the bank and get rid of all the invasives. It's a cold-water stream with potential Brook Trout habitat, you know.

This young person's passion for the land juxtaposed with casual wealth accumulation by some members is almost heartbreaking; members' wants and needs are in collision. In rapid succession, the proliferation of gas stations and weed shops on our First Nation did not consider the future of our youth nor their connection to the past and their ancestors' values. Simpson's (2008) *Lightning the Eighth Fire; The Liberations, Resurgence, and Protection of Indigenous Nations*, asks us to consider if self-determining policies built on economic development have deleterious effects on First Nations. She argues that facilitating self-interest in band economic policies creates a "new elite of Aboriginal capitalists whose unquenchable thirst for profit has come to outweigh their ancestral obligations to the land and others" (p. 197). I have heard older members lament the loss of their quiet little village in casual conversation. For some, those tied to the land, the urban sprawl encapsulates a compromised future of possibilities. Still, according to this young member, there is hope, but much is left in their laps to solve.

Members shared that the educational curriculum needed to reflect an Indigenous connection to the land. Surprisingly, youth members in this study felt it was lacking in the curriculum, even though it is included in Ontario 2017 Curriculum of Environmental Education documents:

> *I don't know why throughout my whole life somebody, even in school, why we weren't learning about the environment. Like it's literally what we need to survive as a human race, but we don't learn about it at all. Not to mention it's an integral part of being First Nations and our culture, and that foundation. The land and the relationship to the land, and I never learned about that. Honest to God, I didn't learn about any of that, like how foundational it is to everything as a human being, not just even as a First Nations person. And why that was never presented to me as an option or as a pathway, I'll never know.*
>
> *I remember going to the Black Oaks Savanna, the presentations and just being wonk wonk. It's cool. There's a lot of grass and some butterflies. That's great, you know. Nobody made that connection for me, I had to make it for myself. Right. It's really rigid. There's no give or take, and when it comes to the curriculums or whatever, like the projects are about the guidelines, the rubric. Some of us don't all learn the same, and we're not all going to digest information the same and regurgitate it back out. You know, that's not knowledge; that's just memorization.*
>
> *Once you learn the historical context, it grounds you. You learn about the land that you're living on, or the land that you're on right now and then that makes you think about your connection to this place. You have a connection to everything around you, and you're not just here one day and gone tomorrow.*
>
> *You're part of this huge web of connectivity, and it all needs to be sustained, and that's your responsibility, or else we are goners. Everybody should know about that; everybody should have that. You're born, and you're taught that, or else we're done. It's crazy to think that it takes so long for us to come to those realizations.*

Rick Beaver, more than familiar with environmental education, shared his perspective on current environmental issues which dovetail with Indigenous ones. His view explored deeper located capitalistic values supplanting Indigenous ones that have led to near ecological collapse:

> *I would consider outdoor education to be a just a* ***great*** *thing to do and outdoor education, outdoor learning as a better word, where we teach both the Western penchant for deductive relationships in the environment, including ourselves; as well as the experiential one, where we bring in people who are actually working for the environment, to provide both their livelihood and their sense of belonging from within the Indigenous community. We have all of those kinds of people here right now. We have lawyers, we've got scientists, we've got artists, we've got trappers, hunters.*
>
> *Big problem in our society today is there's not enough emphasis on the things that don't earn us a wage, and that goes with our environmental issues we're facing now, the rabid adherence to an economic philosophy which does not adequately consider the environment. I mean, these things need to be taught in school because, within them, are the solutions to some of our most pressing issues today. Not only that, the other one, of course, is Indigenous education, which we've neglected for too long.*
>
> *You know, capitalist systems don't feed ecosystems; they pay no acknowledgement to the ozone in the air or the carbon dioxide. Now we're paying people huge salaries to fix errors for not having a different form of integration, and that's going to continue right on until we either A) find the correct solutions, B) or through trial and error, and we get a new recognized form of genius evolving. Now that genius, I happen to think in this day and age, is Indigenous knowledge, and you know it's been pooh poohed a lot, because it doesn't seem to have the rigor of the traditional scientific approach, the solution to problems,* ***but*** *it does. It's just that the timeframes are different, and the attitude is different. Those make* ***all*** *the difference in the world.*
>
> *Well, of course, Indigenous history. Never taught. I think that's a great oversight. I think alternative views of economics should be taught. How does economics represent human beings'*

integration with the natural world? That should be taught, early on. We need more sensitivity toward it, and we need a ***hard analysis*** *of how the current global economic system, monetary system has failed to protect life support systems and the planet, not just for us, but for all things. Those are travesties on Indigenous people; those are huge violations of our sacred law. That needs to be talked about. It's not being talked about; it should be talked about. I hope it will be in the future.*

Sustainability is not integral to the way economics is practiced today, in this world. You know, it just isn't. If you look at the whole structure, for instance, stockholders, who at every meeting will stand up and ***demand*** *a certain percentage of growth in their investments to be successful. You* ***can't go on like that forever****. You have an instance today where a simple computer keystroke can wipe out* ***thousands*** *of hectares of Amazon rainforest.* ***That is not right.***

And teaching the consequences of inadequate connections with the earth via such mechanisms as being chained to the way economies are supported and engineered and discussed, and implemented. That's half of the Indigenous people's problems today. Western societies running all over our unceded territories to put in friggin pipelines, anything they want, to take the minerals out of the ground, poison the water. It's not right; it was never right. ***It isn't right, and it never will be right****, so we need to have some re-education and a different approach to what we consider to be success in the world. I think the competitiveness of Western non-Indigenous societies has gotten us in trouble, you know; their need to be first and best at everything is not necessarily how you* ***end*** *up being* ***there*** *at the* ***end****, which is how this should be framed.*

It's just that Indigenous people have a different idea of what kind of life that should be, and for a great many of us, a good life would be, having clean water, good health care, recognition of our cultural importance, and our value in the future of humanity. That would be what we wish for, not Cadillacs, not any of the other mansions, you know, all over the place; it isn't a Texas dream for us; it's something else. And how much is enough?

And you know, we've had outdoor education, had the crap knocked out of it, in recent years. And now the litigation, you know, for a child falling down or hurting themselves in a stream on an outing. Those kinds of things are just ludicrous. And they're far too strict. We love the value of unstructured play and its value to personal development and growth. Why have we been going in exactly the opposite direction? For fear of getting sued or being liable? Man, I don't understand that at all.

It is an attitude, and it goes back to the days when, you know, they were trying to drum the Indian out of us; our learning is important learning, about how perch are important to herons, or bullfrogs to herons, and so many things about animal behavior. The solution to this ultimately, is education. Right now, the biggest problem is teaching people how to have a loving relationship with the earth and each other. That's the biggest issue right now. Education's biggest challenge is finding a way to do that, to assist people to do that. That's as simple as I can put it. It puts a whole different emphasis on the values of various types of learning then, doesn't it?

You're going to be better adapted as a human being, as some fellow or woman from way up North on the reserve who can survive in the wilderness, because they know how to work with the people who also live there. Their community is different, their knowledge of the natural order of things is different. Their happiness is about being in that place.

*I had a friend, once told me a story, you'll find it interesting. He was a fisherman; he was going through the bush, and it was foggy, but he'd always been to this little lake, to go fishing. They got lost, he and his buddy, and they panicked. The next thing he knew, he said his friend threw his tackle box up in the air, and he said there were plugs and lures hanging from the trees. I mean, he said it was **just crazy**, what happened to them. And when that's how you die out in the bush, you know. When they finally were found, they heard somebody calling from across the swamp they hadn't eaten for a couple days, and he heard, "I've got some candy bars here with me." Then, he said that he damn near ran across the water to get them.*

> *This is this **frantic dislocation** that we have and lack of comfort and knowledge and **love** that comes to us from the natural world; it's a two-way street. We figure that one out, everything solved. Everything.*

Though we both laughed, Rick's reflection on what he called "a frantic dislocation" from our natural world, resonated. Our troubling modern relationship with the land has steered towards dominance. Many of us have grown uncomfortable walking deeply into wooded areas and are more acclimated to domesticated areas. One of the activities I underwent while in a master's level Indigenous Knowledge course was to walk deep into the wild ravine area where I live. I instantly recognized my fear and lack of familiarity with non-human forest dwellers. I imagined myself being taken down by a pack of wolves, so I carried a big stick. Who's laughing now? The displacement of such connections frames how we see the world; what is noticed, feared, and avoided. Some members in Alderville still have that knowledge, that comfort of walking within nature and feeling a part of it. Participants also shared their concern that Alderville youth were less tethered to their culture and the land than their ancestors. It becomes a mantra that our language is disappearing, and old knowledges are sinking back into the ground. Therefore, our destiny is our concern, our business. Still, not enough of those learning experiences are fostered at a very young age. One youth member highlighted:

> *When I worked at the zoo, I got to go around to different communities in Ontario, and it was really, really, really eye opening for me because I got to see what other people had, and what we didn't, and vice versa. And so, I got to meet people up North. They pull their kids out of school in the fall for a few weeks for land based-learning, to hunt and harvest, and to attend ceremonies, to clean, to learn how to live off the land, like the way it should be. That's incredible! I would 110% just absolutely love that if we were able to do that for our kids.*
>
> *By observing the land, we learn so much and how everything is connected just by observing life cycles, over and over and over again. You can see the patterns in the cycle, and you can also see*

how the patterns are shifting, the little differences year-to-year. That is something our kids should be able to access without being at a disadvantage.

We need to find purpose and then bring it back to the community, to make it better, to add on to what's already there. I feel like some of these things started before elementary school. They start in Daycare. Up in Aamjwnaag, they have reading buddies at the daycare, but it's between the kids and the Elders in the Community. They have a vegetable garden at the Daycare that the children have to take care of.

You know, just basic stuff like that can make everything so much easier in the future, understanding all these connections and all these cycles, but definitely in elementary school. I learned that up north, they go out to their camp, and do that for a month or something like that. That's pretty amazing.

Members who reflected on band-run schools thought it opened possibilities for the greater community to be involved. In addition, many knew what was being experimented in other communities, and they expressed interest in learning more about educational practices in other communities.

6.9 Language

At Roseneath Public School, Anishinaabemowin was added about 25 years ago. Members shared that the instability of accessing language teachers has been a chronic problem throughout its inception. Additionally, members said they experienced an absence of focused grade-to-grade curricula as various language teachers cycled through year-to-year. One young member completing post-secondary education reflected:

We had Ojibwe, and I was a part of the crew that was exempt from French. And that continued to high school as well, because we took Ojibwe classes in public school. But this is where I struggle now as an adult, the language specifically because we had different teachers almost every year. It was very repetitive, as far as the same content, for example, numbers and seasons. I just found it very

repetitive, when you're just learning about it over and over again. I felt like I wasn't really learning anything new.

Keith Montreuil, who has become committed to language learning as an adult, shared his experience as a young student:

In Ojibwe class, I had five different language teachers, just because that's the nature of language teaching right now- where there's a lot of turnover. The first teacher I had was from Curve Lake and then, all my other teachers were from all over. A lot of students, too, were really frustrated because we'd learn one way to say something, introduce ourselves, you know, say hello, Mino Giizhigan, you know, it's a nice day, and then the following year, we have to relearn everything in different ways. It was really frustrating for a lot of my classmates. I ended up going into teaching because there was a non-Native woman teaching at the East (CCI), and the students were teaching **her** how to say things. They were all going to drop the class, and they were pretty upset. I had a couple of them come to me and ask me if I would teach them. The first one asked, I said "I don't know." Then another person asked, and then I thought all right, I'll go teach.

There was a general perception that there was a limited commitment to teaching their language. It was not given the same pedigree as French, the other second language option that was more established within the school structure. One member felt her interest waning, and it eventually culminated in her replacing Ojibwe as a second language in high school:

*I actually stopped taking Ojibwe. I moved over to Spanish because I was so frustrated. I just got this thing in my head like this isn't a language that's going to serve me, like **my own** language, that was my thought. So, I thought I'm going to go take Spanish and see about that because… I couldn't take French, at that point, because I'd never taken French. And then I remember actually feeling kind of frustrated that I didn't take French, instead of Ojibwe because by then, I was feeling like I had wasted time with Ojibwe. I didn't learn anything, except for two years with…. (a competent language teacher that older students remember). I could have been taking French the whole time*

and, you know, having a language that was going to serve me for traveling, or for work, or whatever. I was getting older, in high school, and I remember feeling that way.

For Ojibwe to be of value, the school would need to consider the efficacy of speakers. Adult members often shared the experience of one fluent influential Ojibwe teacher whom I heard about often in this study.

If we would've had her the whole way, we would be speakers, I feel, or we would at least have a passion for it. She was amazing and she whipped us into shape, which we needed and. I remember learning language, like for grades seven and eight. I still think about her teaching us coffee, that word coffee, and how long it is. I still tell people that word to shock them because she broke it down. She did the whole process, how it was a word and how our language worked, and I remember coming out of her class after two years, with a little bit more of appreciation for our language.

Some members also felt that the Ojibwe language was of little value to the school administration since language conflicted with other parts of the curriculum. As a result, their language was given low priority, seemingly below all other curricula, as shared by this member:

Me and other students in my grade had Ojibwe during English class. When we were in Ojibwe, our class would be having English. We'd come back, and they'd be doing French, and then, we would have to go to the teacher's lounge, the four of us to do our spelling. It would just be the four of us in our group, working on our spelling, on our own without supervision; there was no one helping us when we were in the teacher's lounge.

Another young member noted the problematic nature of the Ojibwe language within the school and its lack of integration within the curriculum:

I took Ojibwe at Roseneath, and I liked it, but it seemed fragmented from the rest of the curriculum. I liked to spend time with my cousins in the Ojibwe class, but even as a student, I noticed how disconnected the Ojibwe program was from the rest of the school. Despite having some "off the wall teachers" I enjoyed going. It was the only place where I learned anything about my community.

I had one teacher who taught me so much about the Ojibwe language. The more teaching she did, the more it challenged me. I could see where my weaknesses were, and it improved my level of fluency.

I took Ojibwe in high school until it was not offered anymore due to low enrollment. I took it again as a course in university, a beginner course. There were no intermediate or advanced courses at the time, which was a little frustrating. But I still enjoyed it.

I always liked learning Ojibwe, and despite the heavy focus on beginner topics and the fragmented nature of my elementary to post-secondary language courses, it still provided me with a foundation that allowed me to pursue Ojibwe teaching positions and to participate in adult immersion programming. I did notice that I was interested in language and had a growing passion for it.

One parent reflected that the community should drive education, and it could be an opportunity for a deeper commitment to language and culture, something not possible in Western systems:

Community members and family members could be involved in areas of teaching, depending on their skills and experiences. Language needs to be encouraged at the community level, too. Incentives could be designed to encourage more language speaking within the community. Leadership should be expected to participate in language development. It needs to be valued, and seen in use, so our children see that and know it is important.

No matter the direction we go in, language and culture need to be at the forefront, not something separated from the rest of the curriculum. In immersion programs, learning can start with one group, then add to it year by year for greater community spread. I just do not see western education interested or capable of doing this. We need a community or nation-wide strategy with direct interaction from the community. Western education is breaking down. Everyone needs to survive, and we need to look out for our community ourselves. We need to change what we have

and create something. We can start small and build upon it as we build our capacity as a community.

A Knowledge Keeper felt that only an on-reserve school could hold any potential for language survival and possibility for fluency:

> *I was at a conference two years ago. A school principal from BC had come to it; they had like a dozen speakers left of the entire language, like only 12 of them left, and all the teachers of that school, all non-Native teachers, too, would go to language class. And that blew me away; I was like, that's great! The knowledge that's in language, even for everyday things when we talk about reserves, in language, we're talking about leftovers, what's left, right? So, there's history in the language, and learning the language is so important to understanding the culture because it is the culture. It's one and the same. With that principal, as much as I felt this was all really great and nice, I was also kind of disheartened a bit. Through my own learning of the language, I know that in a class where 95% of their day in English, hearing a word here and there in their language, throughout the day, is really nice, but those kids aren't ever going to get fluent. They need to be in immersion, and that Nation, I forget which one it was, being in such a dire state, that wasn't drastic enough action for their people.*
>
> *Unless we have a school where our kids start September with two weeks to go ricing, then two weeks to go hunting, they would have a different school time, when it's ice fishing when the suckers come in, for the different moons, when we're talking about the moons and what's going on in the world and following that up with global warming now because everything's way out of whack. Our schools don't have that.*
>
> *We would need a lot of minds on that one, of what it would look like, because English right now, it's like our prestige language in our community, you know, when we go to a business to trade or buy goods. It's all in English, when you're getting gas, when you're signing cheques, when you're talking on the phone. That's our prestige language, and we've got to flip that. That's going to be*

tough. If there was a place, in schools for those older knowledge keepers to be with those young ones, to me, that would be an ideal thing for really young minds to know all the old way of how we actually did things.

We could make our sarsaparilla and wii kenh tea to soak our nets before we go set them. We could, all of us, still have all that knowledge, but we wouldn't have to necessarily always do it that way. I think the structure of relationships, where we have our Elders with our real young ones and those other ones at the end of their adolescence, spending time with their aunties and uncles. I think that whatever shape that it [community led education] takes, whatever year that happens to be, what that will look like, I think that would be ideal. It took thousands of years for our great great great great grandparents to know what they knew. People didn't just do things for the sake of doing them; everything was thought out, tested and tried, you know, does that work? Is this valuable? Should we keep this?

I read those old, old stories, and journals of different missionaries about who they talked to when speaking to our people. They knew there were story keepers and the ones they found to talk to hundreds of years ago... Those old ones, even then, were lamenting about how much had been lost already and that they didn't remember much themselves, whether from disease or different things, a lot was lost. These missionaries were coming up to them, asking them about what stories they kept, and they'd say things like, "if only you could have talked to this one who was around then." I try not to think about that too much.

If Alderville wanted a school, they could have one. I firmly believe that, and you know, it wouldn't just be us, because if we did it, Hiawatha would want to do it, and Curve Lake, too. They'd send their kids over here if they had to. There are schools in the cities that don't have tuition agreements, and so they don't offer language but there are Indigenous students in those schools, and they would love to have language. I know that, because there's been talks about it with everything being virtual right now. There was virtual Ojibwe last year, and so students that never

had an opportunity to take Ojibwe before, were signing up because they could take it online. Yeah, if we go all 'Field of Dreams" here, "if we build it; they'll come."

There were so many insightful thoughts from members. This participant talked eloquently about the nature of knowledge production, something threaded through Leanne Simpson's (2011) concept of 'naagonige,' which states that we do not discount culturally embedded knowledge for the novelty of change. Our ancestors did things for specific reasons. This member is hopeful and determined that Alderville explore new learning options for students. Younger parents further reiterated the potential of an on-reserve school, with the goal of Anishinaabe language survival, evidenced by this parent:

I think it should be an immersion school, so they're not just taking one language class a day. The language would be used to teach everything, rather than it being its own little thing; so immersion-based would be my dream. There would be more teachers and more support staff, and more community members in the school, instead of having one teacher to 30 students. It would be small groups of teachers and staff and community members with students. You would have solid small-group teaching and one-on-one teaching going on throughout the day.

A parent of young children felt the current education system did not prepare Alderville students to understand themselves as Anishinaabeg anchored to Alderville. Any serious learning about who they are as Indigenous people is gained outside of the school structure. Therefore, it does not instill the pride that they could have received from their own school that is in full control of the curriculum:

To backtrack a little bit, during public-school language keepers from other areas came to Alderville and were working with the community to kind of help us revitalize our identity with culture. They had started the powwow and regalia making and fancy shawl dancing lessons for the girls. I remember dancing in the first powwow during my public-school years with other members, my age. We all made regalia, and I remember connecting all that back, so that was kind of early realizing that "we're Native," that we were different from the other kids in Roseneath.

I feel like that was the two coming together, the realization of being Indigenous was happening for me. Those first years of school, yes, we had Ojibwe, but it wasn't crystallized. We had community events, but in my head, I hadn't really realized that my identity could be different from the other kids I was in school with because we were so blended with non-Indigenous kids. It didn't really connect to me as an identity, until the powwow started. Then the language blended into that, because we were hearing the language at powwows. "Oh, I know that word" and as a kid, you're realizing this is special, then understanding some of that with ceremony as well, was neat.

There was still no connection to identity woven throughout, no connection for our youth. Like we do powwows, and we do youth events, but we don't connect them to history. We don't connect them to language. We don't offer the incentives or buy-in for youth at a young age as to why being Indigenous and being from Alderville holds value.

And I don't feel like our youth feel that, until they get older and recognize it on their own. I just don't feel like I'm seeing it instilled in them to go out into the world and identify themselves in their language. I don't see them feeling that confidence, and even having that understanding of how we ended up in Alderville, from Grape Island? Why are some of our members in the States? We don't have those contexts, pieces of how we are connected to the Ardoch Manoomin? We are, but how? There are all these pieces of the Alderville story that I don't think our youth are exposed to, in a way that can really help build them.

Thoughts about language learning were not confined to schools; members reflected on the potential to access language with modern technology for the benefit of all members, irrespective of their age. For example, one member of middle school-aged children shared a view that online learning had potential:

I think with what we learned during the pandemic and using zoom, I think it'd be great if we could find someone, anywhere in the region, to be able to pick up the language and teach it. All of the different Mississauga nations could get on board, and one person could teach everybody in the group. They could have like 50 60 70 people in the zoom meeting for learning. I mean it's not ideal,

but it's a way that we could cross the territories, and you don't need one person, finding an expert, in every single community; you could have one for several. So that would be one way of teaching traditional things. We would need the most up-to-date technology to do it, and we've always been adaptable people.

One young parent similarly shared:

We have the challenges, but we also don't have the barriers that we thought we had. Like you are two minutes away from me [we are neighbours], and we're on video. We've adapted as a world to talk on video, so we don't have the barrier of travel and time. We don't have the barrier of connectivity as much anymore. To me, we have to find the people to get the Elders on the screen and get the youth on the screen and then facilitate it, get everybody talking. We can do it; it's not about traveling. If someone went in to visit an Elder and helped with their phone for a visit, I believe the opportunities are there in my mind.

Keith Montreuil, a language teacher, felt that commitment to the Anishinaabemowin language would move members towards greater cultural knowledge, something not possible when speaking and thinking in English. However, to achieve this level of fluency, it would require full immersion, much like other language immersion programs, where the goals are growing speakers and preserving culture:

As far as what Alderville needs, I would say we need our own school, we need a school where we're learning in the language and we're learning on the land. Start in our Daycare and move to kindergarten and every year add a new grade, just build it up that way. They have an immersion school in Wisconsin; there's one I think in Minnesota and the Freedom School the Mohawks have. They show how much better their children do when they learn their language through school. In school, statistically, the marks that they get are way better than their peers, and the misconception is, learning another language makes it too tough for them. Maybe at the start, they might lag a little bit, but once they get to junior and intermediate grades, they just soar.

Initially, that's where we're lacking. The ideal is getting to a place where the language is spoken in the home, so I'm not just thinking of my nephews' generation, or even their kids, maybe more down the road; that's how far we've got to think, right? We'd want to get to a place where we have the language in the home, and it gets used at school, and maybe when they get to intermediate, there's more English in the school. Linguistic research shows that students will retain their language when they use it through adolescence, through their teenage years. If they've used it throughout, hearing it at home or wherever, as long as they're using it through their teenage years, they'll have it. But you know, as they say, it's easy for kids to pick it up really quick; but they can also lose it real quick, too. So, it's got to be consistent, kind of using it throughout their early life into their formative years and continuing on.

Alderville youth expressed a heightened sense of urgency and felt the community needed to become serious and galvanized in charting its direction. Out of all the participants in this study, youth were especially expressive; some even resigned to a bleak future, which had fallen out of the Anishinaabeg values need for successive generations. One youth who has grown his own cultural knowledge from family connections and then through personal choices beyond his community had this insight:

I've talked about this with colleagues, and we've had great conversations. They have French immersion class. Why can't we have Anishinaabemowin immersion? Why can't that be developed? We have the people who can help develop books for that. We have the people who can develop programs like that. It's just finding teachers, that's the thing. When it comes to our language, it's a hard language to learn, and it's not easy to teach. If they were able to implement an immersion program, I think a lot of Indigenous kids would just grab onto that. I hear so many language teachers talking about that, too. How come we don't have an immersion class?

You have these non-Indigenous teachers who fly in communities, where those First Nations language is Ojibwe or Cree. And then these kids have to learn from them, and they have to learn in English. I mean, it's not necessarily a bad thing, but at the same time it's like, if you want to be a

> *teacher, you want to come teach in our community, well, you're going to teach in Cree then, or in Ojibwe because we want to preserve our language. And that's a couple of things my colleagues and I have kind of discussed. So, there's a lot of things that people don't really share and don't really talk about, but you know these are some of the things, I mean, we've got to kind of start having that conversation now.*
>
> *I'm not putting people down either, but I've just always found that, okay, you want to save it, you want to preserve it,* ***start teaching****. Just start gathering people together, and go meet out in the bush* ***now****, teach them about the plants, the trees, the animals, and their names. So, I think of Alderville, for instance, holy, we could have a big class at that Black Oakes Savannah, right there. There's so much language in that Savannah, over there, and I think people just need to start seeing that now.*

A younger member noted that we must simply believe in ourselves, appreciate our knowledge, and act on it:

> *It's sitting right up there [Black Oaks Savannah], like this nice little package, but nobody's accessing it, like there's nobody. It is so hard to get community members to go to that place; it's crazy. People from all over the world come to see the Savannah and come to see that ecosystem. It's so rare; there's plants and animals there that are not found anywhere else in North America. And nobody cares, like it's crazy to me.*

One young father saw the possibilities of putting intentions into action, to manifest momentum where education and learning could coalesce:

> *I think they can go together. I really do think they can go together, but I also think that's why homework does exist. You have to do things at home too. I mean education and learning are both very vital because I mean if you take away the whole structure of school and you just send your kids to someone to learn, like they're learning from that person. It's the interweaving of one space to*

another and what you grasp from that space in-between. We can set that time aside, but there has to be a balance for Indigenous perspectives, especially now.

Honestly, one of the biggest things that I noticed is that if our stories, our essence, our culture isn't intact, it creates a wandering. It creates pressure. It creates anxiety. It creates all these unnecessary hurdles that could be solved if we just interweaved our identity.

Not to say that we're pushing ourselves on people; it's just like letting that presence be known, that understanding. And it can happen in subtle ways. I mean, it's happening now, which is really cool.

In our local school, the local high school, and then in the institutions that exist now, there's a lot of Indigenous Studies happening, in peeling back those layers. I think it's something that can work, and it's always going to be fine tuning. There's not one way to do it; everyone's going to do it differently. It's really going back to that wheel, I guess, always trying to refine it a little bit, retweak it or restructure it.

If this doesn't work, how do we move forward? That is one really good thing about Indigenous people is that we all talk, but like how do we make it work? We all talk! How do we want it to look? We can all envision it, but now, we have to plan it out, put those words into motion and move forward.

6.10 Community

Lack of community engagement was a frequent topic. Young people expressed feeling overwhelmed by pressures to live meaningful lives, be economically independent, and to save the environment and their community. Additionally, they reflected on not seeing enough community members as committed partners. There was impatience directed at the progress of community goals in maintaining language and culture.

Generally, members shared that any planning would need to involve the community, including exploring systems developed within other First Nations during a community consultation period. Brian Beaver, former band councillor, added this perspective:

> *Community input would be a start. We would want to consult with the community to find out what their needs are, and what they would like to see. We would want to ensure that we have the appropriate knowledge ourselves. We want to learn from other communities, other educational processes, what they have that we might need, that might help us. We don't have to start from scratch, building everything.*
>
> *There's a lot of good programs out there, so there may be some that we could borrow from. I think we need community input, and we need perhaps a variety of methods of learning. We'd want field trips; we'd want people to go out into other communities, learn, talk and pass on information to the members.*

Another youth shared a similar sentiment**:**

> *I think we should just band together and just make up our model, about how we can support our kids. How can we do this? You know, that's where the process begins, in my opinion, and you know, hearing from the parents and guardians, too.*

Young members felt the rhythm of community activities was central to developing any educational plan. Learning activities must build on existing community programs to reflect their uniqueness, not just an implemented iteration of another First Nation. Whatever the direction, education needed to reflect the community; it is where we start, noted by the reflections of the following Knowledge Keeper:

> *The provincial system is not going to be able to do all that to the degree that we would be at the Community level because it will be a lot of work.*
>
> *Community is an important part of traditional knowledge and ways of being. Every time one of our Anishinaabe members passes away, all the teachings they have go with them. All the ways of the old ones that taught them, go with them.*

So, most definitely, the community needs to be a part of that work of transferring of traditional knowledge from one generation to the next. And we know that we have had initiatives in our own community, like bringing in the people who trap and talk about that, give hands-on demonstrations of that, same as wild rice harvesting in all its stages from the gathering of it, parching it, dancing it, to winnowing it and learning the recipes of cooking with it. I know there's been things like that off and on over the years, but we just need more of it; we need it to happen on a more regular basis.

We need to provide those with the knowledge of these kinds of traditions the forum in which to share. The young people will take part if it's there for them to participate. It's a must if we want our people to be more than Anishinaabe in name alone. Ahaw.

Another parent succinctly added:

I'm not even really thinking about me; I'm thinking more about my community, my people, to help them to see them succeed.

Indigenous people have different ways of knowing and ways of learning. Members thought community-developed education projects afforded new possibilities:

It could mean letting go, freer thinking. I think anything goes, and we could tie in the educational curriculum Ontario standard learning, in the right settings. We need more people to be on hand right away, more people. I don't think this is the job of one person, to educate all of the kids in Alderville. I think that would be so much more hands-on. That's dreaming; I know that's dreaming.

One Elder was very enthusiastic about the prospect of developing learning possibilities for students from a community perspective:

I think that there would be an Elder in every classroom, not so much Elders, but older people because we got a lot of people in our community that sit in their homes and they don't contribute. Maybe they think they can't, or maybe they think they don't have anything to contribute, so I think a big database of the knowledge keepers, all kinds skills, for example: so and so can hunt, fish; so

and so can do this; and so and so can do that, and so on. Let's bring them into the schools to do all that. The only thing is that Elders and old people oftentimes don't have an endless supply of money to put gas in their car, but you know, what I mean, you could say, "could you come on Thursday afternoon and sit there for the afternoon?"

"Absolutely, that'd be wonderful," they might even say. That's the kind of thing, I think, that we need to do.

We need to teach the 'culture of the day,' too. There's a lot of musicians, artists here, there's a lot of people that learned a lot of things. What is it that we do well in Alderville? And then how can we teach our kids that, as well. It's important that they learn the 'culture of the day.'

My dad could tell you every tree, what it meant, its importance was, and its role in the woods. We need to bring that back because, again, that's the culture of who we are. We've got a lot of guys who know about the trees and bushes and all that kind of stuff. I know a little bit.

I think we need to open that curriculum up and open it up to meet ***our*** *needs because we are always being educated to learn those western things. They're important, don't get me wrong. I'm glad my mom made me go to school. And I'm glad I went to high school, and I'm glad I went to post-secondary, but I'm* ***most glad*** *about all the things I've learned, other than what's in the education system. Without those, I wouldn't be who I am. So, I think we need to bring all those types of things back into our system.*

Members felt taking more control led to possibilities for healing. One Elder had this to say about support roles within the community:

I know it's almost impossible, but when you talk about if the sky's the limit, what could you do? I was also thinking about maybe an auntie group or something, because, I know, for kids around here, there's lots of aunties. Say for someone who is really at their wit's end, that there's a group of people for them. They might not use them, and they might be afraid to talk to them, or they might

be too scared to delve into what's going on in their lives, but I think, deep down inside, they'd know that there was that support group here for them.

I know that is because we have an initiative with Wikwemikong First Nation and they're women from each region. We get together, and we have been getting together for two years, and it was just wonderful to see each other last week. And I've got to get it out to the community, to say you know, missing and murdered women is a big thing that we are involved in right now. If you have a woman who's struggling with something, it could be parenting; it could be whatever. Now, we don't have a budget or anything to travel; that's the only thing. So, if we could do it on our own then we would, and I would.

I think that's key to this whole reconciliation piece, in this whole truth, of moving ahead. Our kids need to know that there's not going to be that, ever again, 215 plus children taken. Never, ever again. We have a child's well-being as a law, which is active. I'd like to have a house where I could just be there for them, as a grandma, you know, as an auntie, or whatever, because they need that. A lot of our kids don't have that nurturing and that hugging and that "I love you" and "you're doing a good job" and some of us got that nurturing in there to share; that feels so good for my heart, you know, and I'm getting all emotional here.

When I was at the Health Center, I brought it up, to the council, about a safe place, at one of our houses, if we've got a house somewhere. Why couldn't we keep that as a safe place? We did it in Rama. Let's say, we had a family violence issue. We have the shelter here, which is an advantage. I mean the shelter kind of does that, but we have situations, where it might not be a shelter thing, it might be just a single parent with kids, and they might need some respite, that kind of thing.

I talked to council about that, and so, I think it's something that's going to be pursued here. You still do things here, from your heart, and that's all that matters. That's what my mom said, "it's what's in here, that counts. What's in your heart."

6.11 Challenges

A few members reflected on their concerns that fit within community autonomy centred around Anishinaabe values. Some members shared a common pitfall they observed Indigenous people make as they attempted autonomy. There is the potential of colonialism being rebranded within Indigenous Nations, especially when systems continue to be designed by Western orthodoxy. One member reflected on her experience in the childcare system as services were moved under band control:

> *I think they adopted the white people's way. They put a twist on it and say it's Native, but it really isn't. They're still following the white people's way. It's the same with our government, that's why our governments don't work very well, because they're still following the white system.*
>
> *You know, they need to go back and relearn how our system 150 years ago worked, how our children were cared for. Just because they've just adopted one little Native piece in the Children's Aid manual, they're still using the white system as it to pertains to our Native kids.*
>
> *I don't believe that it's working. It doesn't work because we're still getting our kids apprehended, even now. I know we don't have a lot of foster homes on reserve, so a lot of our kids are going away. It's still happening. If you go out west, there's so many organizations out there, and they're saying "we're doing it the Native way," but really, they're not. It's just a white system being adopted and run by Natives.*

It is a sentiment that warrants consideration. I often wondered this myself within the education services we provided. Although we met the criteria for education funds to be released and technically managed them, our policies were developed to meet Indian Affairs requirements. Limited funds required excessive proposal writing and reporting to meet near-impossible objectives. As a result, the government's objectives and the community's goals did not always align; but the dominant group controlled the process. Hence, the level of First Nation autonomy when designing systems for Indigenous people merits critical attention. Otherwise, community members will experience more harmful iterations of colonialism at the hands of their people.

Another issue I identified from members was potential waves of resistance from within, particularly from well-established community divisions and influences. One such influence has been the colonizing presence of Christianity and resulting tensions between Anishinaabe traditional values and firmly held Christian beliefs. One Knowledge Keeper reflected on how members can be overly cautious in co-existing Indigenous culture:

> *I get really annoyed when some say, "oh, but not everybody follows this way; it's not for everybody." I don't like the word 'traditional' now because that word does not have a good reputation. People will make remarks like, "oh, they're traditional." I have learned through my own healing that a lot of us carry shame for not growing up with our language, for example. We have had to find knowledge keepers to help us learn our ways of knowing,* ***our*** *worldviews. This was life-changing for me.*
>
> *There's a lot of shame out there with not knowing our culture. I carried that for a long time, too, and had to do that work on my shame. I opened myself up to it to heal. I had to ask for help, and the Creator put those helpers in my path as I looked for that help. I remember the first opportunity I had to sit in the healing circle; I went for it, dove right in, and thought, yeah, I want this. It was a lot of work, and I think that's the part that sometimes scares people. They don't want to get in touch with things they've pushed away for many years. It brings it up. But, if it's done in a good way, if it's done with an opening smudge, that opening song, that opening prayer, then the Creator and the spirit world will take care of us.*
>
> *Early in days as a helper, I started to put into practice what I learned from Elder Eleanor Taylor and share with others what I learned. I'm very careful. I always say, this is where it comes from…everything you see comes from the spirit world. It comes from that place, from our ancestors. So, I always do that. I went to some of my Elders that I respected, and I asked them "should I be doing this?" Because I started doubting myself. I'm not an Elder.*

Maybe I shouldn't be lighting this smudge and passing it around. Maybe I shouldn't be doing this opening prayer. Maybe I shouldn't be singing and drumming. I asked an Elder once if I should be leading ceremonies or offering the teachings I have learned. She said she was very happy the younger people are doing this because that is why those teachings were shared with you. We want you to pass them along because our Elders are getting tired, and we need the younger ones to keep the teachings going. The teachings are intended to be shared. I recall in the beginning, I would get nervous when people expressed their emotions, but I received a teaching on that from Diane Hill. She said that our tears are our bodies letting go of fear. Our tears are a gift. Carrying things that are not ours to carry, letting go of that- very life changing experience for me. An early told me, "You can't give what you don't have to give"- a great teaching about self-care.

How many years have we been living without our Indigenous health practices, use of plant-based medicine, and the very teachings the Creator wanted us to have? I will always be grateful for what our Ancestors went through to keep this way alive as they knew that one day, we would pick it up again. I have heard our Ancestors had to go deep into woods to practice ceremonies so we would not lose them. It was at a time when the government and church outlawed these practices.

Me, I'm just really excited by what is happening, even in our own community, with our resurgence of Indigenous ways of knowing and the pride in that. The missing piece for a good life is the teachings left behind from our Ancestors. It is the young people that are leading us back. The missing piece in education is our Indigenous ways of knowing our culture.

For this individual, culture must be present at every step, not only as an option, but as natural as breathing. This Knowledge Keeper understood their culture's strength and lamented resistance from within.

I was working within the education system when smudging was first introduced in the schools. The colonial school apparatus was not built to accommodate Indigenous practices seamlessly. Indigenous-run schools can develop their learning spaces to incorporate Indigenous practices; however, there are still

tensions between conflicting value systems to work out. An older member reflected on the inherent divisiveness of the community and found it disheartening when considering possibilities for the future:

> *I find myself often wandering off in thought about the future, and saying "what if?" And a lot of what we have discussed here about learning, I find myself saying, "what if we had a strong educational system that directed our behavior in such a way that we acknowledge the importance of having a healthy environment." I honestly believe that healthy environments create healthy communities. They certainly support them and aid them to get to that point.*
>
> *And I think, even in the current economic situation, we would have a better financial footing. Look at what the Williams Treaty has done for this community. The things that they can consider supporting and yet, the opinions of other people that wanted it* ***all*** *for themselves. I mean, I think of that a lot too, to know that there are still people out there, who from them, the most important thing is* ***themselves****, rather than the* ***community*** *that they're part of.*
>
> *I think about that a lot, the divisiveness of things, and how material things have tended to divide people. So, our rewards need to be altered, too and the only way you can do that is to teach them, teach them about the value of different things. I don't know, some of my ideas are so utopian, I believe, that they may never come to pass and so, I find myself being somewhat accepting of the fact that this is the way it is always been with humanity, and this is the way it will always be.*

This older member was disheartened by the treaty process a few years back. As a result, a significant group of members lobbied for the entire settlement to be parcelled out to living members and not hold any funds in trust for future generations. It was divisive issue. In the election that followed, the issue became central. Though most members voted to install leaders who would protect the interest of future members, the process was disturbing for members reminded of their Seven Grandfather Teachings. As Anishinaabeg, our teachings are valid, and we need them more than ever.

6.12 The R and R discussion

6.12.1 Reconciliation

After discussions and much reflection, I imagine this section to be prepared for a non-Indigenous audience interested in the reconciliation project. Some Indigenous people may find it interesting; however, I understand their impatience with the topic. We have, after all, been having this conversation for a few decades. I get it. Still, the topic was threaded through many discussions as it flowed from questions which explored experiences and perspectives. From some members, there was a deep desire to be heard, to be understood, and then, ultimately, in the interest of our younger generation, to improve relationships with non-Indigenous people. With greater cultural competency, understanding would follow, is the thinking. Battiste (2013) argues that we are currently experiencing the decolonizing phase in Canadian education. She says:

> I have long accepted that decolonizing education is not a process generated only for Indigenous students in the schools they attend… decolonization of education is not just about changing a system for Indigenous people, but for everyone. We all will benefit by it. (p. 13, 22)

It is true, decolonizing education is beneficial, and reconciliation is part of it. In his interview, the late Artbaa Beaver called this Indigegogy and described it as a spectrum of Indigenous education, which is why it seems uneven. In general, people are situated unevenly through the spectrum. Throughout the years, there has been an expansion of Indigenous content and perspectives within the local school. Anishinaabemowin is taught as a second language, though there have been challenges. The presence of land acknowledgements, too, has a few kinks to work out. Anishinaabe culture is included when our local schools facilitate annual powwows. However, Alderville members are interested in school content including deeper Anishinaabe perspectives, not just one-off displays of inclusion. In the context of reconciliation, the topic of teacher preparation emerged often, and members shared that teachers were not always prepared to handle emotionally charged classroom discussions that further divided students.

Alderville First Nation Chief Dave Mowat (2022) called reconciliation “a wieldy word that a lot of us are stumbling around with.” He prefaced this during his opening remarks of a community meeting

regarding reconciliation. Among audience attendees were individuals who identified as settlers and allies; they were neighbours, academics, and local politicians, along with Alderville community members. In the spirit of reconciliation, non-Native people attended to deepen their understanding of the Alderville community and their connection to Canada, which was unsettling for some. This is critical to meaningful reconciliation. It's okay to be uncomfortable, to be challenged; it's part of the truth process of Truth and Reconciliation.

In terms of Truth and Reconciliation, Alderville members shared that the conversation was long overdue and understood that mistakes are a natural consequence of learning. In *Resurgence and Reconciliation,* authors Ash, Burrows, & Tully (2018) agreed that making mistakes is a predictable consequence of the process. They stated, "Resurgence and reconciliation is not a linear process. Mistakes are often made, and setbacks are legion. Trial and error accompany any process that recognizes the messiness of political life" (pp. 8-9). As reconciliation conversations have rolled out in classrooms, teachers are clearly not always prepared for the realities of the hardened positions settler people take (Denis, 2020; DiAngelo, 2018). Any discussions regarding reconciliation should include the presence of settler consciousness. Having witnessed the divide among students in university classrooms, I can appreciate how conversations potentially collapse. Being emotionally charged can further damage tenuous relationships and thwart the potential for relationship building. Teacher preparation needs to include how to moderate discussions for student learning. It is not as easy as dutifully rolling out the information and having everyone instantly accept it. Given that I was working in the educational system when reconciliation activities were experimental, I will share two personal anecdotes of when reconciliation efforts, though well intended, went sideways. I will call the two narratives "Promises, Promises, Promises" and "Gee, Those Indian Drums are Loud."

6.12.2 Promises, promises, promises

Secondary school education is available to Alderville students away from the community, in the closest town of Cobourg, which typically results in an hour-long bus ride. At one time, there were three

high schools; two were provincial public high schools, and one was a Catholic High School. In 2016, with declining enrolment, the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board (KPRDSB) merged two provincial high schools.

When Cobourg Collegiate Institute (CCI) merged, many Indigenous students were now located within one school and not dispersed in two smaller ones. In the spirit of reconciliation, an invitation was extended to Alderville education staff and leadership for a planning meeting. Alderville representatives, myself included, met with architects, the board, and school administrative staff to discuss the plan for allocating space for a more significant number of Indigenous students. The prospect was exciting, to have a dedicated space for our students to access support. We would provide the staff member, and they would provide the space. We left the meeting assured that two critical Alderville issues were in place: a room for our students and our education staff member; and the protection of a Memorial Award for a past Alderville student. The Award and Memorial Basketball Game acknowledged the untimely passing of a promising young man just before his graduation. It provided a prescient teachable moment about teenage binge drinking. The activity united the school and First Nation community. Every year the community was invited to attend the game, and it was an opportunity for relationship-building and sharing Indigenous knowledge for the entire school body.

After the meeting, James Marsden (Alderville Chief at the time) hung the architect plans outside his office where visitors and family members could see. Because the Chief's office was beside the receptionist, the plans were viewed daily by members waiting for an appointment or visiting the Band Office. Yet, when CCI opened for students in September 2015, neither the dedicated space for Indigenous students nor the memorial award was a part of the new school. A stunning dismissal.

From Alderville's perspective, this was an insult, and left them wondering about the purpose of any school or board meeting. Somehow, over the summer, the promises were forgotten. When school started, the Alderville support staff member was available as we promised, but the individual was directed to a desk at the back of the Ojibwe class. This was not an optimum arrangement for our support staff member to

meet with students, or for the Ojibwe language teacher to lead a class. Both were deemed superfluous to the inner functioning of the school environment. We were in utter disbelief at how this was supposed to work. There was an absolute lack of accountability. No one seemed to know who, or why decisions were made the way they were, only that they were made, and that was that. Immediately, we took action, meeting with the principal and teachers to have some remediation to the issue. A solution was found, but not after intense advocacy from Alderville.

I tell this story because I have experienced the perils of short memories, sometimes lasting only a few months, one summer at best. It affects the credibility of school staff who say they are working in the interest of reconciliation. It is also demoralizing for First Nation communities, to continue to argue and advocate for the same things over and over; to make a little ground, only to see it retracted. When adversaries are nameless and faceless, it is hard to fight back. Even worse, when it is a structure or a mighty elephant of a system, it destabilizes people because they know they are on shifting ground, built on uncertainty. This does little to build relationships. Moreover, it solidifies where the locus of power resides.

An extension of this story is carried over to the gala evening opening of said high school. The event was planned for Thursday, May 26, 2016, with invited students, families, community partners, dignitaries, and politicians. The next part of this story involves a well-entrenched school board trustee, Gordon Gilchrist, and a former Conservative member of parliament. A controversial character, he turned his attention to school politics when he retired to the Cobourg area. A few years prior, the local paper had published a letter from Gordon Gilchrist entitled “Turn Off the Immigration Tap” with the following statement: “most immigrants don’t understand Canadian values and bring their old-country feuds and hatreds to be paraded and re-fought on Canadian soil” (Alphonso, 2008). The reaction was swift. Although he was sanctioned, he was not persuaded to retract his comments. However, none of this affected his ability to be re-elected, and he continued with his bombastic flare until the gala opening of the new school.

6.12.3 Gee, those Indian drums are loud

Once the new high school was retrofitted, a celebration was scheduled. In the spirit of reconciliation, our youth drum group was invited to the grand opening of their new high school, and the boys practiced in eager anticipation. Some were current students of CCI, and some younger boys were from Roseneath School. The younger ones were especially interested in seeing the new school they planned to attend in later years. Several dignitaries, including the Minister of Education, Liz Sandals, attended the event. It was a highly successful evening with many events strategically planned in tandem throughout the school. The young jazz band would play a set, and our drummers would play the next set. The evening ended on a sour note when it was learned Gordon Gilchrist, board trustee, had casually made disparaging remarks about the Native drummers to the sitting jazz band. While our Native drummers were performing, he commented to the resting jazz band, "I wouldn't have been so eager to take over this country if I'd known that this was the kind of music they played here. How much would it take for you guys to go over there and tell them there's more to music than banging on a drum and yelling? I don't feel so bad that we took over their country" (Rushowy, 2016).

This older man of considerable rank acknowledged his part in colonizing practices of Canada. He invited young students to be complicit from a position steeped in superiority. Maybe he thought he was being flippantly humorous, I'll give him that, but his denigration of young, proud Indigenous students in their new school washed shame over the night. He, of course, denied his remarks, preferring to absurdly allege that his objection was due in part to the level of noise the drummers produced. He was worried about the damage such activity might do to their ears. Again, the reaction was swift. An independent investigation found the report to be credible. Teachers' unions, fellow trustees, and our community were in solidarity regarding his swift removal. The school board responded with a letter:

> The drummers he was referring to are students in our schools … It is now up to the electorate to make their voices heard and demand change.

> On May 30, the government of Ontario released its Action Plan for Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples and the Premier publicly apologized for "brutalities committed for generations at residential schools and the continued harm this abuse has caused to indigenous cultures, communities, families and individuals."
>
> Trustee Gilchrist ought to know that the process by which Europeans "took over this country" was to humiliate and forcibly remove indigenous children from their communities through the residential school system. Our teachers and our students will know this, thanks to the steps taken by our Ministry of Education and the professional development and the curriculum resources that the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario is providing to bring a deep understanding of First Nations, Métis and Inuit history, culture and perspectives to classrooms.
>
> When Gilchrist made his disparaging remarks about students in our school system – the school system he has been elected to represent – he was talking about children whose parents and grandparents may well still bear the scars of this brutal system. Trustees are elected to serve the public interest in our school boards and should be held to the highest of account. We ask that Trustee Gilchrist do the right thing and resign from his position immediately. (Northumberland News, 2016)

Gordon Gilchrist answered with the following quote: "it's foolish, off-the-cuff nonsense … the board swallowed hook, line and sinker" (Anderson, 2016). Our community was not silent, and James Marsden, Alderville First Nation Chief, added:

> Racism exists. That is why the province is introducing programs that will help build trust and respect into the relationship with First Nation people. The disturbing comments made from Trustee Gilchrist go against what the province is trying to achieve. He is in a position of power and trust and should step down immediately. (Anishinabek News, 2016)

In conclusion, there was enough pressure brought to bear that he eventually resigned, but not before his boastful stance, which included that "he was a victim of a witch-hunt" (Houston, 2016). His supporters

called the remarks unproven and that he was judged according to mob mentality swayed by tides of political correctness. In 2018, he chose to run again and reclaim his seat, and though he was not successful, he could still count on the support of his loyal constituents. This is relevant since it flies in the face of successful reconciliation mandates and why relationship building is complex. Reconciliation requires we find those pathways, but the concept of reconciliation is interpreted differently by individuals and not easily accessed through education alone.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau acknowledged the goals of reconciliation and shared it as his platform in his United Nations 72nd Address:

> Our efforts to build a better relationship with Indigenous Peoples of Canada are not only about righting historical wrongs. They are about listening and learning and working together. They are about concrete action for the future. The reconciliation we seek, has lessons for us all. We can't build strong relationships if we refuse to have conversations. (Prime Minister of Canada Justin Trudeau, 2017)

That was before an international pandemic, waves of conservative populism spreading across the world, and a shared reality that we are vacillating between near environmental collapse and the threat of a global war. Once again, Indigenous issues trail off the map.

Reconciliation requires time, sincerity, and capacity for it to succeed. Dealing with a system compounds the effort. It is far more effective to develop relationships with individuals than entities. Organizations are comprised of diverse, potentially divergent subgroups of individuals, and systemic goals may not align with its collection of individuals. Denis (2020) articulated how group identification leads individuals to experience history differently and conversely defend their group. Racism exists; white superiority exists. Simply teaching about injustices does not ensure their dismantling. No matter how sincere, teaching about reconciliation does not guarantee racism will cease. Some people, well ensconced within power structures, are in no hurry to relinquish or share it.

Reconciliation is about changing society, and it is like a slow generational crawl, taking a few steps forward followed by inevitable steps backward. It is vulnerable to the rhythm of elected trustees, governments with different agendas, or individuals convinced that they are losing ground as Indigenous people stand on their own feet. If we have the luxury of a few decades, we can stand back and see the path the tortoise has traveled, but it's not always easy to see it when we are in the moment, slugging it out with the predictable ebbs of dissonance. We can, after many years, see some ground has been gained, but it is an energy-draining exercise that requires much investment from Indigenous people.

It has been that way with my experience. Sure, there have been improvements. Indigenous presence has become more acceptable and is working its way in some regard within education, but it is incredibly slow and does not work at all in favour of First Nations. Instead, it works the other way as Indigenous communities lose ground on language, culture, and lands.

In terms of reconciliation, both members and Indigenous theorists, consider shifting settler consciousness valuable but limited. While positive, it does not address what is, or is not, happening within Indigenous communities. As we wait for change, language acquisition is at critical mass and needs immediate intervention. Concerns within First Nation communities are paramount, and since Western society remains unconcerned with them, First Nations must prioritize their own communities (A. Simpson, 2014; L. Simpson, 2014, 2017). Indigenous theorists feel that energy-draining reconciliation efforts should not be pursued at the expense of community goals since they largely serve non-indigenous interests. It is their view that a deliberate act of refusal is warranted.

Some members favor a 'both ways' education system, where students learn about two different points of view. First Nation curriculum is infused with components of mainstream education to prepare the student for both worlds, as Corbiere (2000) stated:

> In essence, then, we First Nation people want our languages and culture to flourish, but we also want to participate in the economy, which means speaking English. It would appear that the two goals are at cross purposes, and indeed these goals have been presented as incompatible by the

> English-only community. However, recent research has indicated that a well-planned bilingual education can enable these two types of competing goals to be more compatible. (p. 113)

This is also known as bilingual education, and it is not a new idea. Many scholars and researchers support the legitimacy of bilingual education. What is different is the position that Native communities are not looking to have Indigenous experience taught in isolation or as a subset of the curriculum. Rather, Native people are exploring a more comprehensive approach that would ultimately transform educational experiences for Native students. An ability to enjoy both worlds seem to be the goal, as illustrated in Tunison's (2007) *Aboriginal Learning; A Review of Current Metrics of Success*, where he quoted an Elder; "If you talk to young people who are strong in their culture and ask them about their academics, you will find they have graduated and some are going to college and university" (p. 12). There is a view that the two worlds may have a possibility of morphing together. However, there are practical concerns that include packed curriculum and community extensions. Additionally, a 'both ways' approach would have to consider where the positions conflict, where they might converge, and how to map out this terrain for students.

6.12.4 Resurgence

The next section addresses Indigenous people who are concerned about stability within their communities. It is not to suggest an either/or approach when discussing issues of reconciliation and resurgence. Within thoughts of resurgence, settler presence is removed, their contribution unnecessary. When Indigenous communities are exploring resurgence, their focus is not healthier relationships with settler communities. Instead, within these efforts, First Nation communities are looking deeply within to pick up the pieces; language, culture, connection to the land, and community are vital. It involves a hard look of where we are and where we intend to go. Resurgent approaches, and they are many, are not concerned with waiting around for Western systems to catch up or support our efforts. No. Resurgence is about jumping off the conventional train and charting a different destination, with a different route.

Dreaming is not linear; we can imagine new possibilities concurrently. We must dream in all directions to conceive who we will become, stirring thoughts and mixing dreams that will turn us into

ancestors that will make our grandchildren proud. Dreaming is important for gaining insight, and our teachings instruct us to remember what was communicated in our dreams. It is knowledge that is to be taken seriously.

I will share a personal example that happened many years following a traditional ceremony: In the dream, I met an Elder who had passed on to the spirit world. I had not met her in our conscious world, and had no idea what she looked like, but instead conjured up some stereotypical images. I remember two things about the dream: the Elder looked nothing like how I imagined, and the dream being flooded with the colour yellow, with plenty of flowers and plants. In my dream, I was having a conversation with this Elder. Upon waking, I waved it off as an odd, superfluous experience. Still, the dream was of what I would call of the lucid variety. Much later, in conversation with a community Knowledge Keeper, I described the appearance of the Elder, and my dream interpretation was confirmed. The member became keenly interested to know what message had been communicated, but sadly, I had little to offer. It is with embarrassment that I discounted the experience and had not paid closer attention. I tell this story because I am the proverbial cynic, my mind shaped by decades of colonized thinking. It is at these junctures where I am challenged to the core, and I realize that our deeper Anishinaabe philosophies are continuing to shape my thinking. For me, dreaming is important, though I feel new to the table. Though it has metaphoric application in this section, it is an accepted methodology for accessing Indigenous knowledge. It potentially offers more unrestricted thinking; however, our ability to harness it is rudimentary.

In *Ojibway Heritage,* Basil Johnston (1976) shares the story about how roses disappeared (pp. 43-45). I took a bit of license here with my understanding of the tale, in a modern context with a contemporary problem I am trying to illustrate. It goes something like this:

> *There was a time when roses were numerous, their vibrant colours intoxicating as they exploded on the landscape. It seemed impossible, but nonetheless, their brilliance became routine, even mundane. They were taken for granted. And as this happened, they started to thin. Their colours every so slowly started to fade. They weakened from a lack of appreciation and became vulnerable*

to attack. It was beginning to affect creatures who visited them, like bees, hummingbirds, and bears. As rose bushes grew sparser, they drooped and became fodder for rabbits. Unfortunately, it was the rabbits who were blamed for the condition of the roses. A council of animals flew off in desperation to deal with the rabbits, some yanking them roughly by the ears. The poor rabbits had their ears stretched out of shape for their presumed offence, and worse would have become of them if the rose themselves hadn't spoken on their behalf. One from the rose family said, "Had you cared and watched us, we might have survived. But you were unconcerned. Our destruction was partly your fault. Leave the rabbits be" (Johnston, 1976, pp. 44-5). The rabbits, the roses felt, were simply reacting. It was their nature to eat what lay on the ground; that is their job. Waste tumbles through their bodies and leaves nutrients behind. The rabbits were released, but the experience damaged their ears thereafter. The roses did return, but never in significant number, or quite as brilliantly as they once were. They became rather rare, their beauty appreciated only on special occasions. Since they couldn't count on protection from others, they learned to protect themselves; they grew thorns to discourage over-picking and, in some small way, ensured their survival. The stately rose, though appreciated, is not any everyday plant.

The story about roses is a cautionary tale about what happens when we fail to notice. When we fail to notice, we fail to care, and when we fail to care, we stand to lose the very thing we've grown detached from – that thing we say we love.

As I reflect on the tale of the rose, I consider what members said to me in conversation. The disappearance of knowledge was a critical theme related to language and culture. Among members' reflections was the prevailing fear of culture and language slipping away, out of reach. Culture and language consistently rank in two of the top three priorities by community vote via annual priority surveys. In the rose story, they once existed in abundance, enough that they grew commonplace and taken for granted. The familiar became underappreciated until they eventually faded away. Such is the experience of our language. Once widely used but then forced out of circulation and replaced by the colonial language of

commerce deemed fitting for everyone. As it fell out of practice, it slid into the periphery and beyond the edges. Members are unified in their concern for language. Still, once out of use, practical daily use of it becomes complicated for restoration efforts. Even though we may not speak the language with the precision of our ancestors, we must embrace it as a living language that returns it to our young people, and "only then will they become strong in heart and spirit" (Johnston, 1995, p. 181). It is not their fault, our fault, or our ancestors' fault for the state of the language; but it is our legacy, and we must find solutions.

Dr. Lorna Wanosts'a7 (Lorna Williams), a fluent speaker of her traditional language, understands the challenge of nurturing and growing traditional language speakers: "I know that they live in a time where the colonizer's language is so dominant in everything we do. It's a real challenge for our young people to not just learn, but to use our languages" (Auger, 2022). She insightfully recognizes that language requires natural space within our communities to grow speakers. She shares a prescient Indigenous view regarding the connection of language to lands: "our languages also help us understand our lands" (Baker, 2022). The two are integrally interrelated; these ideas of land, knowledge, and identity are interwoven with our conception of identity. She is wary of offloading all the burden of language survival to coming generations. She highlights that, "we can't just place the burden on our children … they need others to talk, too" (Baker, 2022). Our young people and those who have yet to arrive need to know that we are genuinely committed to carrying out language revitalization efforts to create vibrant communities for them and for language to exist. Moreover, Dr. Lorna Wanosts'a7 noted that would like to "see communities and adults committed to learning the languages, to create more language nests to increase the number of speakers" (Baker, 2022). Many Alderville members were in complete agreement with this perspective and understood the challenges that lay ahead.

While interviewing one of the grandmothers, I was taken by her reflection on how to grow storytellers. It is a norm, she observed, that Anishinaabe children are natural talkers. They have a community context to practice, all within a supportive environment of relations that is natural and without judgment. Members spoke about having language present and being used in meaningful ways that

demonstrate its importance to younger people, not worrying that our attempts are imperfect. Alan Corbiere recently shared how his focus on language mastery prevented him from gaining more profound proficiency when he was featured as a guest on *The Language* podcast. Corbiere reminded us that the goals of language revitalization must remain central and not sidelined by issues of speaking Anishinaabemowin perfectly (Menoomnii & Shonias, 2022). Perfection prevented him from sharing what he knew with his children, and he advised that we prioritize language wisely in our daily lives. Children demonstrate the teaching of imperfect effort every day. From the moment children enter this world, their attempts are many to adapt to their new world.

We must endeavour to have Anishinaabemowin as a living language, not just a beautiful, rare rose to be admired on special occasions. Because living language reflects their people, our ancestors spoke it in ways that echoed their lives. It is the same for us; language evolves with borrowed words and new vocabulary reflective of our modern condition. With a dash of good humour, Elder Shirley Williams shared how a young group of boys challenged her to find new words symbolic of their hockey experiences in a modern context. Shirley had to confer with other speakers to develop words like jockstrap, based on the function of the word. Language evolves; even the English language evolves. Ours should be no different. Anishinaabemowin is a beautiful, living language and requires a commitment to learning it. Consequently, there needs to be a commitment to language acquisition from within the community, without excuse, as shared by the following father:

> *But also, what happens at home? Because honestly, there's not a lot of push. There's a lot of talk, but there's not a lot of push. I hear councils of the past talk about how they want priority for Indigenous kids to have education and Ojibwe language but not enough push in our own community to do it for ourselves, which is really unfortunate.*
>
> *There is a reason why we put ourselves in the environment, so we can learn it, because of how vital it is to our identity. But then, there's like the fallback of not everyone's doing it. There's only a small percentage of kids doing it, which is unfortunate.*

If you want legwork to happen, it has to be pulled by everybody. This is the horse we have to carry; everyone has to really push this. It doesn't matter what is going on. If you're not trying to be as Indigenous as you can be, then what are you doing? Are you just trying to assimilate and get by, or do you want to see a future for your children?

I do not believe anything I could say would say it better. This young member advocates for us to do the work for ourselves because when we don't, we are vulnerable, leaving it up to people who either lack the preparation or inclination to do it for us. Other members expressed their sincere hope that more of the community would follow and begin to walk the talk – to commit to language becoming more widespread.

One of our Anishinaabe greetings is "boozhoo" and it invokes a shared understanding of culture, history, and identity (Noodin, 2014, p. 67). One Knowledge Keeper observed that moving forward had to come from within and commented on how successes from other communities were built upon their sense of determination, and that inspired him:

If you want something done right, you do it yourself. These other communities know what they want, and they're just doing it. No thought to obstacles; all the "whys." – Why- we can't do something? -Why- we aren't able to do anything? No, we're going to find a way to do it, and I love that.

A young father felt the community needed greater involvement and engagement. He alluded to the recent Williams Treaty Settlement and the opportunities it potentially generates:

There's so much conversation, but there's less action, right? That's what it is, like we need to start putting our feet down and actually doing this. Some of us are, but it's all done independently. It's not done through programming. Programming staff are trying to do their best; they're interweaving those bits of culture. It really needs to be put on the individuals, but not forced.

No matter what First Nation we're talking about, they will say, "Band Council has money. They can do whatever; they can do it. They just don't." No matter what First Nation you go to. But it's setting those priorities, and it's obviously a conversation now in Alderville. I think Alderville is put

into a really interesting position because the way treaty negotiations have gone, there's clearly money sitting there. But it's setting those priorities, obviously a conversation now in Alderville.

We have our Band Council election coming up, and everyone's trying to build their platforms, but these should be priorities, regardless of the time of year, or an election year.

Pride gets thrown around a lot. It's not the word I like to use because people have a lot of pride in being Native or being from Alderville, or they'll say I'm a proud Ojibwe, but then, what does that mean?

I love the one phrase I was always told in school "show your work," you always have to "show your work," even if it's math, "show your work." In my own time, it's taken a while to figure out what that means to me, being Ojibwe. Setting that as a priority, how integral that is to my kids and everyone around me to know who we are, as Indigenous people? And coming back to those simple teachings and why we are bonded to this Earth because it is for us to explore. We need an immersion school; we need a school in our own First Nation; we need our own teachers. We have the people to make the plan, to make that a reality. We have that.

For him, developing an Indigenous school within Alderville more aptly echoed the community's resurgent values. However, this member also validly observed that resurgence efforts are long-range goals that should be independent of elected councils that change every two years.

Other members shared how sovereignty aligned with community needs after colonial methods have failed. However, it bears noting that there is stasis from within. If we consider that the Alderville community, by and large, prioritizes language and culture through annual community surveys, why is there not enough Anishinaabemowin practiced by members? Colonization has worked to weaken traditional structures and divide people from within. It has been the strategy since the arrival of Europeans. Trauma and healing are experienced differently, given individual experience. The following young member had this reflection:

You won't get the same answer from everyone in Alderville. If you're asking about education, they'll be similar, obviously, but not everyone has the same understanding or perspectives. A lot of them weren't raised with it, or it wasn't considered important, so they are not going to share what you want, because maybe they don't have what you want.

It's all an understanding of where we've come from because some people went to school or they didn't go to school; they were on reserve, or they were off reserve, and what they did in that time with their families really shows you. Not to say they were less or more Indigenous; there's a different essence of sharing and understanding within everybody.

It's tricky with education and Indigenous knowledge because there are not many of us [speaking the language or practicing cultural traditions].

And it's not to say that if you don't know your language, you don't know who you are. Use what you can. That is not to say nothing is not enough, like you are worthy as it is, already. You're already enough. It is just building upon that, to be more because, hearing "aanii," when people say "oh it's not aanii, it's aaniin" like these little conversations can happen within that because it's fun banter when people start talking about little bits of language. It really changes the tone entirely because it brings ourselves into space more.

The following description from a member explained how fractured knowledge impacts transfer from generation to generation:

We have to take on that responsibility because we always know that we're accountable to the seven generations before us and the ones after us. We have to do right by them so that everything's taken care of, going forward. I mean that's where a lot of our education has to be.

It's not to overwhelm kids but also, when you look at it now, we've got four generations technically sitting in limbo, and what do we do with them? I look at my own family. I have my kids, myself, my mom, my grandfather. That's four generations, within those 14 and what are we doing, in that same time? We're just one part of that, four generations within those 14.

So, not everyone's at the same space. Even in my own family, not everyone's in the same space. We're all doing our best, but we know how important it is to be Anishinaabe. Those are the things that really come into place, but then within other families, I mean everyone's at a different place, as well; they've had different experiences, so we're not the same. They didn't have the same upbringing, so their understanding of what being Anishinaabe means is different for them. They're coming back to that, though.

This young person adeptly explained how members can be at different places in their conception of identity and cultural knowledge, even varying within one familial unit. Identity issues manifest differently because of individual experiences. This is a critical observation that is indicative of the complex dynamics within families and, by extension, the community. Many of us are still struggling from traumas experienced in our lives directly or from the traumas our ancestors carried and passed down (Walters et al., 2011; Cutcliffe, 2005; McNeil, 2008: Antone & Hill, n.d.). Our experience as Indigenous people has been altered by colonization. As we return to our culture and language, we return changed; "Biskkaabiiyang", we are "returning to ourselves" (Simpson, 2011, pp. 49-53; Geniusz, 2009, pp. 51-52). We are required to decolonize ourselves as we pick up the bundles we were forced to put down. Conversations with members regarding the future evolved to include adapting traditions within a modern context to help the community rebuild. Tim Smoke used traditional roles in a contemporary context:

It was allowed it to happen, unfortunately. No fault of anyone in the past; over the last hundred and 50 years, we were told one thing and got something else. That's always the story; no matter what Treaty was signed, whatever it was, we were told one thing, and something else happened.

So now we're at a time where we can say, if we are self-determining treaty people, we're sovereign people. We determine our own standards and principles. What do we abide by? Who are we accountable to? How do we govern? I mean, it's gradual steps because people want to consider our governing system something of the past, but it's still present, very present. It's a part of who we are now.

I feel If we're to pursue anything from an educational standpoint, we're going to have to do it on our own and we're going to get a lot of criticism from outside communities or the province. But it's something that's been necessary since the beginning of colonization. We have to do our own work. The biggest hurdle we find is who to blame for why our education is failing. It is failing because we're not doing it ourselves. So, if we want something, we have to do it, and no one's going to do it for us.

So, right now what's really important is we go back to those old roles of responsibility, but we adapt them to our modern times. I remember when I was working in the band office, and I was the receptionist. People made fun of me for being the male receptionist at the band office, but then, ***no****, if you look at it from the perspective of a traditional runner, you're the one conveying messages back and forth. You are working in a community, so balancing those old roles with the new ways is how we make this work, but also bring the best parts of ourselves into these new roles. You can see Indigenous people, especially people in Alderville, they're all natural helpers. They all want to help everyone, but how do we do it? So, you see some people stepping up to be firefighters; you see people stepping up to be paramedics or even teachers and then you have people that are wood carving, like that was a thing. Those are old traits that get passed on. And you can see a lot of success when that happens. I mean, it is old threads that come back in a different environment, but it's still that mindset of building something.*

That's where you're starting to see success because then we're harnessing their gifts in different ways, right? We have people becoming lawyers, as well, which is really cool, and then that's like different levels of advocacy for each other. It's not to say that we've lost ourselves, but we're rebuilding ourselves in this new way, and we have to keep building upon it more.

So, it's a community effort; it's not one person to all the kids. I think Alderville, right now, is in an interesting position because we have older people. We have people who have knowledge. We

> *have people who can share stories and are considered historians. We have one person from Alderville who's becoming a doctor, not as in Indigenous medicine, but we have those people.*
>
> *I think that it was maybe after my first or second sweat. They were asking me what I wanted to do after high school, and I think it was one of my uncles, and he said, "it's not what you go to do; it is what you come back with." It's always what you come back with because it's always that understanding that we are providing for each other. Whatever we learn is not for us to hoard or hold on to; it's always something to share.*

It will be a community effort as the community rebuilds by reconnecting with themselves, each other, and their natural world.

6.12.5 Sense of optimism

For some younger members impacted by inheriting a world rife with challenge, many expressed an overwhelming lack of optimism. There are many challenges; that is true. However, they deserve our optimism that it can be achieved. Neal McLeod (2007) adds, "we must attempt to dream and have visions. Without dreams and visions, we will truly be a conquered people" (p. 99). I was touched by one insightful comment from one of the members: "Perfection and grace look different for us." I took this to mean that we ought not to look for pure forms when trying to hang onto what we can; we should not be paralyzed by feelings of inadequacy because our attempts are not perfect. There is beauty in our resilience and our deepest sense of "knowing" in the face of so much that was taken. How beautiful that we are the people who, despite everything, have the insight to know to care.

Part 7: Braiding Sweetgrass

Figure 9 - Gifting Sweetgrass, rendering by Alderville artist Koren Smoke

7.1 Smelling, knowing, and dreaming about sweetgrass: thoughts on the three strands

In the first strand, 'Smelling Sweetgrass,' Alderville members of all ages shared how school experiences brushed with racist overtones shaped their perceptions about education. Some were overt and traumatizing, while many were what Denis (2020) calls "laissez-faire racism," recreated routinely in local classrooms and schoolyards. *Canada at a Crossroads; Boundaries, bridges and laissez-faire racism in Indigenous-Settler relations,* evolved from his doctoral studies that delves deeply into subtle, deeply ingrained forms of racism that are made more acceptable. The average Canadian might be surprised to hear this, particularly when there is a shared assumption that Canadians are firmly committed to the reconciliation process. However, further to Denis's argument, belonging to one's social group is deliberately impervious to change and resistant to school mandates of inclusion. Having the reconciliation topic reach schools does not guarantee its ability to change minds and attitudes. The burden of school to

entirely shift attitudes may be unrealistic. Not that the effort isn't worthwhile, but schools are only one site of transformation.

Nonetheless, episodes of racism created uncertainty as to whether or not schools could be safe spaces for learning. Moreover, these experiences often contrasted sharply for students with their experiences at home and in their communities. For example, the first question, "Who was your first teacher?" explores the critical first years of learning. Members often described learning as an exploratory phase within the context of care and support of beloved family members. Classroom teachers and their effectiveness were well-discussed, and Alderville members reflected on perceived teachers' efficacy. Interviewees shared that their best experiences were with teachers who were kind, recognized something unique about them, and were generally inspiring people in their own right.

The second strand acknowledges different Anishinaabe ways of knowing gleaned from two questions: "What are your thoughts on learning and education?" and" What do you consider a meaningful life?" Many participants shared their unique understanding of the nature of knowledge. They were cautious about the influence of capitalism. They felt a connection to the land and an orientation to their language and culture was omitted from their educational experience. Knowledge, for them, had not been fully unlocked, and their potential as young people was left unexplored. Many experienced identity issues that did not help them understand their purpose or value as individuals, or how their gifts could serve their community. Alderville interviewees felt the school and community were divergent spaces with few intersectional opportunities.

The third strand of research findings offers an opportunity for Alderville members to share reflections about what was learned from their experiences and to imagine the next phase of education for Alderville's young members. I did not limit this exploratory strand; instead, it was wide open as a visioning exercise. The following questions were asked: "What was missing in your education?", "What are the most serious issues affecting First Nation youth from Alderville?", and "What would it look like if you could imagine an educational system without limitations?" Future possibilities were divergent, given divergent

views. The results indicated topical threads of reconciliation and resurgence. Indeed, diversity can be challenging, but it can lead to exciting opportunities.

7.2 Critical takeaways of the study

1. Threads of both reconciliation and resurgence are present within the community. Separating them would not reflect the direction of the community.
2. Language is a critical stage. Future community goals need to develop Anishinaabemowin' s language proficiency and culture. It cannot be a question left unanswered for the next generation to solve. Instead, the community must dream in different directions, despite the challenges.
3. Racism is alive and well in Canada, a tough blight that hangs on in the reconciliation process. Reconciliation requires changing attitudes, which is a long, complicated process, reflective of an individual's sense of self and belonging or their investment within social groups. Schools are limited in dealing with attitudinal shifts and societal change. Educational mandates do not necessarily translate into change for several reasons. Teachers are essential in the process but cannot, and should not, carry all the burden.
4. Provincial classrooms are not structured to include enough hands-on, land-based learning activities to engage Indigenous learners. The orientation of Western education and Indigenous understanding of learning are divergent. For Indigenous people, the development of self is guided by community values and not through the importance of the individual. Performance metrics are central to evaluation models which crowd an already dense curriculum.
5. Though the challenges are many, we must remain optimistic that we can work together as a community to benefit future Anishinaabe youth. Youths need to hear that their effort is worthwhile and must feel supported to take on the challenge.

7.3 Provincial classrooms

Alderville members reflected on their experiences in the educational system and offered perspectives moving forward for younger generations. Many recounted harrowing experiences of racism and shared how these experiences shaped them as they became adults. The goals of reconciliation involve

transforming attitudes preoccupied with motives for improving understanding. It is an important goal that can move societies towards inclusivity; Graveline (1998) argues, “in spite of the potential and actual contradiction, I support the use of conscious-raising in the classroom, to engage in struggle within schools, to change them and society through the personal transformation of students” (p.118). The foundation of brokering better relationships is required at all levels, and education is a system that helps support this goal. However, it should not be considered the only vehicle to this end. Jeff Denis’s (2020) pivotal observation is that group positioning is a powerful reinforcer of the colonial relationship between settler and Indigenous groups, making attitudes slower to change. Denis's book covers the dynamics of group belonging that is impervious to education and goals like reconciliation. Therefore, it is unrealistic to count on education to do all the heavy lifting.

Facilitating change within Western systems is required, no matter how discussions about innovative learning strategies happen at the community level. They will serve relationships better. Though there are attempts and progress is evident, the pace is painstakingly slow. There are promising opportunities for reconciliation that include adapting the curriculum to include Indigenous perspectives. Educators should become familiar with the following repository sites: the TRC website[21], the University of Toronto, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), Infusing Indigenous Perspectives in K-12 Teaching,[22] and the National Centre for Collaboration in Indigenous Education (NCCIE). [23] These sites provide learning opportunities and tools for teachers for classroom integration of Indigenous content in curriculum development. There is an expansion of learning opportunities and a growing bank of resources. Nicole Bell and Terry Lynne Brant’s (2014) *Culturally Relevant Aboriginal Education; Teacher Education Series* is one such source. A prime example, it is an accessible summary with case studies that provide thoughts on how

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[21] https://nctr.ca/about/history-of-the-trc/trc-website/

[22] University of Toronto, Ontario Institute in Education. (n.d.). Online TRC Materials for Educators - Infusing Indigenous Perspectives in K-12 Teaching - Research guides at University of Toronto (utoronto.ca) https://guides.library.utoronto.ca/c.php?g=251299&p=5004969

[23], The National Centre for Collaboration Indigenous Education. *Keeping our tradition strong.* https://www.nccie.ca/ Indigenous Education

to handle challenging classroom episodes such as racism, incorporation of Indigenous history, and insensitive media coverage. Additionally, The Kawartha Pineridge District Schoolboard, which serves Alderville, has an Indigenous Education Department. The website lists available staff to assist teachers in developing Indigenous content within their learning activities. An Indigenous Education Department is something that all teachers should explore with their school boards.

Learning about the land where your feet stand can be transformational. Students from the required Trent University INDG 1001 course shared the depth of learning about the history of their homelands, noting the transformational quality of this learning as they gained a fuller picture of the colonization of Canada. It is recommended that educators engage in some understanding of the history of the places they call home to appreciate the modern context of Canada's path of colonization.

7.4 Community considerations

Smith's (2003) keynote address to the Alaskan Federation of Natives, Indigenous Struggle for the Transformation of Education and Schooling, discusses the nature of the "politics of distraction," which refers to the over-managing of all First Nation activities under the control of the Indian Act. Requisite trivial tasks are demanded of Indigenous people that are meant to keep them busy and leave little time "to complain, question or rebel "(p. 2). Any band employee who deals directly with the Department of Indigenous and Northern Affairs understands how this works. Reporting and "accountability" are frequent qualifiers for funding envelopes to be opened. Releasing funds requires inordinate reporting, which keeps our minds busy and hearts empty. First Nation communities must acquiesce to government structures that often remind them who is in charge.

Other distractions occur in the abuses practiced from within. Colonized thinking is further perpetrated when dominant status quo ideals become internalized to form new oppression from within – "the colonized colonizing themselves" (Smith, 2003, p. 2). So ingrained is colonial thinking that we freely practice it among ourselves in ways that divide the community. To avoid these colonizing tendencies, we must become critically "conscientized" (Smith, 2003, p.2). According to Smith, Indigenous communities

must transform themselves, a path towards decolonizing and transforming; he calls this the "inside-out model of transformation" (p. 3), where change must come from within ourselves and our communities. Being over-managed has led to a lack of confidence in our capabilities. It has resulted in communities believing they cannot lead their communities, despite their creative ability. Richard Wagamese's (2013) experience with *ennui* illustrates how a lack of cultural continuity trickles down to an "acceptance that this is all there is and all there ever will be." Disheartened, Wagamese had plenty of advice and left a stinging rebuke for what lay ahead. He said, "there is still much work to be done, and we had better roll up our sleeves and get at it. The hardest battle in our fight to save our children is against ennui."

Our Peoples' Education: Cut the Shackles; Cut the Crap; Cut the Mustard (Kirkness, 1998) was similarly direct, calling out Indigenous communities for being immobilized by their own rhetoric, pointing to many internal contradictions. Kirkness (1998) asks our communities to consider a fourth "R" built from within -this "R" standing for "rhetoric" (Kirkness, p. 12). We say language is important, but do not make an effort to learn it. We say our knowledges are important, but then default to Western ones. We say Elders are important, but do not involve them in meaningful ways. We say parents are important, but they do not feel included. We say the land is important, but then engage in poor land stewardship. Over time, the claims all begin to sound like hollow platitudes, something mentioned by some members of this study. Kirkness (1998) advises, in a colloquial metaphor, that we need to "cut the crap,**"** talk less, and commit to more action. The answers, she argues, can be found within ourselves and our communities (Kirkness, 1998, pp. 14-15). We have the knowledge; now we must believe in it and ourselves.

Centuries of colonization and decades of determined assimilation have created rigid notions of belonging within the community: on/off reserve geographical location and status/non-status designation. Blood quantum debates over status were designed to divide and conquer Indigenous people simultaneously. Other separations, such as family clan belonging and religious affiliations, divide the community further. Differences can translate into rigid boundaries for relationship building, microaggressions, and lateral violence. Working with teenagers in Alderville, I have witnessed their identity

confusion: too Native for the outside world and not Indigenous enough for their community. I sensed a confusing melody of corked fury and questioning of where they belonged in the community. These threads of heterogenetic factors complicate community identity. However, like many others before me, we must find a way – an accounting of our legacy is what we leave behind.

We can acknowledge colonization's impact when considering growing expectations for culture and language acquisition. The challenges are many and should not be left entirely in the laps of young people and coming generations to solve. They must see us, the adults, carrying the load, and showing them that we are walking the road too. After devoting 50 years to Indigenous languages revitalization, Lorna Williams shares that "our languages also help us to understand our lands but continues to see many challenges ahead. We just can't place the burden on our children" (as cited in Baker, 2022). Williams (as cited in Baker, 2022) highlights the need for circles of speakers where natural conversations would occur; children and youth "need others to talk to, too." Language nests are an effective way to grow speakers, and she sees the value in digitalized online formats that encourages exploring modern tools to assist with language competency. Furthermore, Williams (as cited in Baker, 2022) is keen on new future directions for Indigenous languages. She exclaims hopefully: "what we come up with in 10 years will really move our languages into a better place." Leanne Simpson (2014) explains how our young people are in critical need of a cultural foundation to lead their communities:

> We place tremendous pressure on our youth to gain western academic credentials. This seems highly problematic to me; we desperately need a new generation of thinkers who are articulate and brilliant from within Nishnaabewin, a generation that can think within our philosophies and enact those philosophies as a living and breathing imposition to colonialism as every generation has done in some capacity before us. Otherwise, we risk losing being Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg…The land must once again *become* the pedagogy. (p. 14)

7.5 Becoming ancestors

A recent Cajete (2020) article, *Indigenous Science, Climate Change, and Indigenous Community Building*, revisits the esoteric, existential question posed by Anishinaabe elder, Michael Dahl, in conversation with Winona La Duke: *What Kind of Ancestor Do You Want to Be?* (p. 10). This profound question calls us to bring forth ancient pearls of wisdom and generational ethics necessary for the survival and well-being of our communities. The question assumes that we are already ancestors in training, a beautiful analogy that situates our responsibilities. In a recent essay, "How to be Better Ancestors," LaDuke (2021), assumes our role as ancestors and offers that our disconnection from place has led to our not caring for the land; She offers: "transience means that we do not come to know and love a place" (Hausdoerffer, 2021, p. 143). Instead, she advises that wherever we live, we learn to cultivate a relationship, to "make this place your home, and defend it like a patriot" ((Hausdoerffer, 2021, p. 143).

All areas of Turtle Island need advocates. Our Anishinaabe stories highlight the importance of traveling as Original Man explored the world. His travels taught him many things about himself. Although we are connected to particular places, we travel for many reasons, such as knowledge, kinship, and belonging to other communities. Our central core of being Anishinaabe adapts to new experiences as we set down roots. Sometimes we return; other times, we rebuild in new places, remembering who we are and the teachings we carry. One member, who had an off-reserve experience and returned much older, reminded me that assimilation was happening both on and off-reserve and had the distinct impression methods were harsher in their home territory. In this case, the determination of self and family made the difference.

7.6 Community revitalization

Indigenous science, a cornerstone of Cajete's (1994, 1999) lifework, is premised on multi-contextual systems derived from generations observing organic cycles. However, colonial disruption over the past few generations has hemorrhaged traditional knowledges. Recent Cajete (2020) offers an Indigenous approach towards community revitalization with a goal of sustainability for generations. He has not given up on the vehicle of education; he imagines Indigenous knowledge and Western sciences

partnering to create innovative, creative ways towards human survival. For Indigenous communities, he recommends the following foundational precepts to consider when Nation rebuilding:

1) **Be Clear about Resources and Premise**. It requires understanding the purpose that connects with Indigenous community ethics and overall vision. It is based on the renewal and sustainability of the community.
2) **Community Building has a Spiritual Purpose**. All communal relationships are framed from spiritual values of the sacredness of all life. It includes the "spirit of the community" and involves all members.
3) **Practiced Relationship**. The worldview of Indigenous people is predicated on relationships. Therefore, restoring the health of the community is paramount. Building a healthy community will require problem-solving, practice, and effort.
4) **Deep Commitment**. Community development is not easy. Transformational change is a long-term process. Yet, this is the most critical factor to the success of community projects.
5) **Learning from the Experiences of Other Indigenous People**. Collaborating and learning from other communities are essential. It is one of the best resources grounded in shared experiences and different problem-solving paths explored.

(pp. 9-10)

Cajete's (2020) five practical observations about community revitalization are useful. First, efforts must be clear and supported by community purpose. Community rebuilding requires commitment from its members. Cajete's advice about learning from other Indigenous people is well taken. In this sense, Alderville and neighbouring Anishinaabeg communities could learn from each other's best practices, or even combine efforts where it is mutually beneficial.

Though a heady topic, resurgence does not necessarily call upon grand gestures that may overwhelm communities before they begin. Corntassel et al. (2018) claim that resurgent efforts can be "quiet, transformational, intimate actions that occur on a daily basis in ways that are seen and unseen that

form the basis for revolutionary shifts" (p. 18). Sure, some watershed moments and catalysts gain a particular group momentum, but change is slower and more deliberately personal. Acts of resurgence include consciousness in our daily struggle that returns our sense of dignity and offers purpose. Seismic shifts occur from significant and even small acts of intentional change. They become a part of who we are and how we exist; they "can be very simple practices that appear mundane" (Corntassel et al., 2018, p. 34). There are many examples of resurgence, including using the language daily (within our capacity); being more present in our community and family roles; generating an Indigenous view of our current world; renaming places; growing food; actively caring for others; and continuing to actively resist assimilation. All these efforts are lived and passed on to successive generations. In exploring these options, cohesion is shared with other members, forming a collective of intention.

In addition, it is essential to restory colonial narratives (unsettling the settler narrative) about ourselves and the ones settlers tell about themselves (Corntassel et al., 2018, p. 76). it is important to share the narratives of Indigenous peoples, like those in this study. Corntassel et al. (2018), in summarizing the quality of community resurgence, includes an "every-ness [that is] is about remembering, restorying, re-interpreting, reconnecting to past and future generations, relating to one another to maintain continuity and wholeness as people, then dreaming [which] can be an everyday act of resurgence" (p. 88). These simple acts of everyday resurgence do not depend on vast systems to carry us along; instead, they begin within, like knowledge.

7.7 Optimism

Optimism, a belief that our goals are achievable, is needed. Within Indigenous communities, the practice of division has stretched across decades. Micro-aggressions and lateral violence have further weakened Indigenous communities from within. Manulani Meyer (2004) is direct in advising that we must have faith in ourselves when she writes:

> Get rid of the belief, I mean really get rid of it, that we are somehow inferior. That's an old one but it still lingers…Can we step away from the predictability of a system that sees us forever as 'deficient' or can we chart a new course. It is an exciting and lucid time. (pp. 7- 10)

Moreover, Manulani Meyer (2004) explains that when Indigenous people practice their knowledge, they begin to appreciate their valuable, profound ideologies. Furthermore, Winona LaDuke reminds us that although we have endured, our suffering has evolved into an understanding that carries « beauty and joy in the midst of heartbreak » (as cited in Hausdoerffer, 2021, p. 144). She advises us to, « hold [our] sorrow and grief, remember, but be grateful for this good life, this Minobimaatisiwin…do not underestimate yourself, nor the power of what is larger » (as cited in Hausdoerffer, 2021, p 144). This passage reminds us that despite losses and trauma, that fundamental teaching has survived, and we can still live a good life. Each generation before us has suffered losses, particular to the challenges of their time. To be sure, we are also living in a difficult time, which may seem too overwhelming. We might feel leaving the work to "the professionals" is the best way forward. Manulani Meyer (2004), however, advocates for the presence of the whole community to be involved in young people's learning. She suggests: "schools need us desperately – to tutor, enliven, collaborate, strengthen, and enjoy" (p. 9). Though there are complex heterogenetic factors within, our teachings remind us about the value of diversity. Our fundamental Grandfather Teachings, specifically 'Zaagidwin (Love),' reminds us to selflessly care for one another for the health of our community. To function well as a community is to set aside differences, consciously remind ourselves about our relationships, and avoid pitfalls that serve to divide.

Optimism is important because the alternative is to accept defeat. I am reminded of a recently aired CBC podcast with guest Samantha Nutt, founder of War Child Canada, who remains inspired in the face of some of the darkest episodes of oppression (as cited in Galloway, 2023). For Nutt, she felt glimmers of hope come from moments of resistance and even defiance. Resilience is not a word she favours since it does not include overhauling the system; the term 'resilience' implies surviving despite oppression. It is a more passive word because it leaves the systems of oppression in control. Conversely, defiance is a call to

action that elicits solidarity to force change. The inspiration for change gains momentum and instills hope. However, optimism must be fed with consistency, and a capacity of will unaffected by changing governments, disappearing support, evolving leadership, and waning interest. This is the territory of how optimism evaporates, and hope fades. The good news is that maintaining hope does not require grand shifts, just consistent gestures of moving forward and a commitment to the cause, which can be slow and even generational. Pathways can be slower to complete a community vision. For Nutt, gains erode faster than when partners become cynical, disengage, or give up. Optimism can and should involve us all and is necessary for younger generations to carry.

7.8 Assembling the braid and considering ways forward

Alderville First Nation Education Services is keenly interested in the findings of this research. Our community is at a critical juncture. The recent Williams Treaty Settlement (September 13, 2018) has made it possible for Alderville First Nation to explore future initiatives involving sovereignty matters. By popular vote, education, culture, and language are critical priorities.

> ***Alderville Parent:*** *I'm interested in seeing what the results are from this study. We are so in our little silos in Alderville and our communities in general. This could be an opportunity to start sharing and working together. There was a language survey done in 2009. The most startling thing that hit me was 78% of the people thought some form of Ojibwe immersion should be seriously considered. This was about 13 years ago, and there hasn't been a whole lot of progress toward this goal at a community level. Where to start, then? We now have the Williams Treaty Fund to help support community projects through grants. We could think of ways to support students to get the training needed for those community plans. We need to start somewhere. This could be a pivotal moment.*

This was not the first time I heard this; other members shared similar sentiments. Members were well aware of the potential of the Williams Treaty Fund for future community planning. This is an example from another parent:

Alderville Parent: *It would be an immersion school, but it's kind of started. It's similar, and it could start in the daycare. This would be like a full-fledged program. I've never written it down, but I'm just thinking about how they subtly began to weave in bits of culture in those early-year programs. I've seen it for myself, even in daycare- but, giving it more of a grasp and push. When we talk songs and language and culture, I've never seen it so gratifying until a child receives their name in the language. That's when it really makes sense for kids, or when they understand their clans, and where they come from. I remember when I was in daycare, some kids didn't know they were Indigenous, and they were at a daycare, a Native daycare, and they didn't know their Native. Suppose you can start on that foot, those first early years. In that case, it only creates more success for understanding and grasping fulfillment and belonging, more than anything. Identity is huge.*

As conversations segued into the future, members were animated and hopeful by dreaming of the possibilities. They were especially interested in culture, restoring the Anishinaabemowin language, on-the-land learning, and incorporating their history. Though many extolled the school board's efforts in their commitment to Indigenous education, they felt that the provincial model struggled to meet their vision for the future, as the provincial system was too rigid to accommodate Indigenous knowledge and practices. There was also an added belief that a Westernized school's role was not to teach such knowledge.

1. **Scan of Anishinaabemowin language sources**. What is out there? What can be adapted? What could be developed? This would include written sources, digital sources, language Phone apps, Leap Frog-like digital versions for children, podcasts, and picture books
2. **Exploration of language nests** and how they could be adapted to Alderville for different age groups. Exploration of connections to regionally close Anishinaabe communities.
3. **On the land learning opportunities.** Scan of sources. Development of sources. Review of age and grade materials for Alderville adaptation: Black Oaks Savannah, Ricing, Hunting, and Fishing.

4. **A review of historical content** to be adapted for school-aged children. Mississauga Anishinaabe Migration from Grape Island, Alderville Settlement, Industrial Day School, Alderville School, Monument, Key figures, Family and clan affiliations.
5. **A review of Indigenous community-based education models**. Consideration to explore other First Nation schools' language/ culture/history programs and level of immersion programs. Develop visuals for presentation to the community.
6. **Explore language/culture program extensions** that are age appropriate. Immersion programs, language camps, preschool summer programs, summer camp options for school-aged children, options for youth (with other communities) and adult-specific program options.
7. **Community sharing**. Establish regular updates for community. Develop a website for information sharing that is linked with Alderville Education Department.
8. **Develop short-range and long-range plans** educational plans for the community, that have capacity to grow from one band council to the next, from one generation to the next.

Manulani Meyer (2004) is hopeful, and so I am: "If knowledge is power, then understanding is liberation" (p.60).

Though Alderville First Nation is a small Anishinaabe community, our teachings share the insight that our size does not matter. Our Anishinaabe Creation Story celebrates the ingenuity and contribution of a tiny muskrat. After a flood had wiped out many people and creatures, there was no land, only water. Nanabush and a small band of animals sat on a log, determined to come up with a solution to find a patch of land. If only they could reach the bottom of the water and return with a bit of soil, they might have a chance. Nanabush went first, but his lungs were not strong enough. All the animals gave it a try and came up short. The last animal left was Muskrat. Thought to be insignificant for his ideas and slight frame, the community of animals laughed at his intention to help in the face of a big problem. How could someone so small be helpful in serious moments such as these? Yet so resigned that there was little to lose, the community of animals supported his efforts since he was the opportunity of last resort. So down to the

depths of black water, Muskrat swam. Gone for days, the other animals assumed they were right and considered his mission a lost cause. Nonetheless, almost lifeless, his weak body returned, with that tiny bit of mud crammed in his claw before he collapsed and ultimately met his end. The turtle offered his back in memory of Muskrat's sacrifice. As the great winds blew in from all directions, mud was stirred up and grew to form a land mass in the shape of a turtle. Muskrat's contribution was a community success; the animals could all declare safe refuge on their new home, Turtle Island. His giving of himself in the wake of all condemnation is a life lesson to us all. You do not have to be big to be significant, and an important job that considers the future of everyone is always worth the effort. This research story is about our small First Nation and their walk in the educational system; it is a good story for our youth to carry.

7.10 Conclusion

When I began this study, I imagined the sweetgrass braid as a beautiful metaphor for exploring the integration of past, present, and future temporalities; mind, body, and spirit holism; thinking, feeling, and doing; and then the sections of this study- experiences, perspectives – combined with thoughts for the future. It makes sense to my way of thinking, and I have tried to maintain fidelity to the strands which could be threaded together. However, the braiding analogy is complex, and its meaning has deepened. In Anishinaabe culture, I have learned that it is customary to prepare sweetgrass with care and offer it intentionally tied together, not braided. The receiver can then finish the gift by braiding it, incorporating their care, thoughts, and prayers. Kimmerer (2013) states, " writing is an act of reciprocity…it is what I can give back in return for everything that has been given to me" (p.152). And it is what I can give in the form of this study.

Gifts are never given passively, without thinking; they signal an intentional gesture towards relationship building and friendship. When the gift economy is activated, it sets into action "a bundle of responsibilities" (p. 28). Like tobacco, relationship building is the intention of the 'gift.' As I finish, this study has evolved into something quite different than where I started. For me, a deeper understanding was impossible without the trust of community members willing to share. Within the context of this study,

sweetgrass is given in friendship and gratitude. There is interplay, a circle in motion, between me, the researcher, and the community.

Sweetgrass grows best communally. It is not typically cultivated for its seeds since it has its way of multiplying unseen beneath the soil. The parent plant sends out rhizomes, allowing generations to travel on their own, finding water sources, sunshine, and other living communities beneath the surface to thrive. It respectfully coexists and practices reciprocity. Where there is a lack of exchange and sharing, the plant disappears. The sweetgrass framework has been a guiding teacher for this study; it instructs how one grows within a community. As it grows into maturity, it sways gracefully to catch the slightest breeze as it softens the landscape. Its sweet aroma floats along the wind and reminds us to stop and take notice. Harvested with responsibility and care, it makes a beautiful gift for burgeoning relationships further cultivated into friendships.

Alderville members shared their experiences with the intention that it would serve its young people here, and those yet to come. It is fitting to end where I began and attempt to close this circle. Kimmerer writes, “to be good ancestors, you have to build good soil” (as cited in Hausdoerffer et al, 2021, p. 182). For regeneration to occur, the soil needs to be rich in nutrients for new growth as new plants emerge. Healthy soil supports the many possibilities of life because « life begins in tiny pockets of good soil. Soil is a worthy ancestor for it is simultaneously the repository of what has come before and the garden of what is yet to come » (Kimmerer, as cited in Hausdoerffer et al, 2021, p. 183). Good soil is needed for seeds to germinate and become the plants they are meant to be. Healthy soil means it has been cared for, respected, and acknowledged; it supports life that has yet to burst through the surface. Eventually, we become soil, and our bodies will enrich future possibilities of life. I have heard Elders refer to the unborn as « those whose faces haven’t pushed through the earth. » This powerful image of their arrival grown from the rich soil made from their ancestors’ bodies is metaphorically compelling. They arrive nested in care with everything they need if we, their ancestors, have cared for the soil and planned for their arrival. Let us be those good ancestors.

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Appendix A: Research Interview Questions (March 2021 version)

Topics and Questions for Guided Conversation: Parts or all to be used given the age and quadrant positioning of participant

I will introduce myself, explain the nature of the study, the application of the Medicine Circle and the quadrant that the participant represents as well as a very general overview of the 3 parts of the study

before beginning the interview. Discuss procedures for interview participants should memories become uncomfortable. (Smudge available, as well as contact numbers).

Opening Subset: Warm Up Questions which could be a part of the pre-interview process.

a. **Could you introduce yourself?**
b. **Since you know that I will be interviewing about your experiences that you had in the education system, please give me your thoughts on that? Do you have any questions about it for me?**
c. **Is there anything about this research that you are wondering about?**

1. **Who do you consider to be your first teacher? Tell me why this individual was important to your learning as a child.**
    - family member, teacher
2. **What do you remember about your school experiences? What kind of school was it?**
    - on-reserve, off-reserve
    - school content, practices
    - teachers
    - self-development
    - high school/ post-secondary – preparation for the adult/employment world.
    - connection to the family/ school
    - what kind of learner were you?
    - favourite subjects, teachers
    - anything memorable
3. **What do you think are the most serious issues affecting education and Native youth today?**
    - native teachers, native perspectives, language, understanding
    - social issues
4. **What is your definition of a successful/meaningful life?**
    - learning to own potential
    - developing talents
    - preparing the future, (good job)
    - financially secure
    - having choices
    - being happy
5. **On reflection, was there anything missing from the education you received?**

- what had you liked?
- What was missing?

6. **For a moment explore the concept of learning and education. What do they mean to you? Are they similar/ different? Explain how you understand the two words.**
7. **If you could imagine/ design an education system without limitations of budget and all other challenges, what would it look like?**
    - teachers
    - curriculum
8. **Anything I haven't covered?**

Appendix B: Letter of Information

Letter of Information

Participation from Alderville First Nation Members

This research is being conducted by Catherine Davis (Ph.D. Candidate) in the Faculty of Indigenous Studies at Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario, under the supervision of Dr. Cathy Bruce. This letter is an invite you to participate in a research study about Alderville First Nation members' educational experiences as part of graduate credit requirements for Catherine Davis in the Indigenous Ph.D. Program at Trent

University. This study has been granted clearance according to the recommended principles (http://www.ethics.gc.ca/default.aspx) of Canadian ethics guidelines and Trent University student graduate policies.

What is this study about? This research aims to understand the educational experiences of members from Alderville First Nation, a First Nation located centrally in Ontario. Ontario Education has long-standing practices of creating a curriculum that does not reflect the goals of the First Nation communities. This study will require one interview session of 60-90 minutes to be video-taped on Zoom technology. At all times, I will observe social distancing protocols as deemed appropriate from both Trent University and Alderville First Nation.

The study aims to privilege educational experiences of Alderville members so that we may explore significant themes about education. We will investigate these powerful themes through members' experiences and narratives.

Benefits and known risks of the study? As we reflect on education, we will explore how modern educational practices could improve for Anishinaabe youth through member perspectives. There are no perceptible risks beyond your comfort level with sharing your educational experience. This will be respected with the utmost sensitivity, and anything deemed uncomfortable will be immediately reviewed. It will be your decision whether to continue or not. Before we begin, we will discuss procedures in the event this should occur.

What is involved to participate in this study? There are two different levels of participation in this study: one video-taped interview of 60-90 minutes, observing Covid 19 restrictions. This does have follow-up indirect time for you to read through what I have prepared for your approval or consent.

When and where will the study take place? Interviews are planned to begin in 2020 and will continue until completed. Social distancing protocols will be honoured.

Are there any costs to participate? No and there is no payment for participating in the study.

Is my participation voluntary and without compensation? Yes. Although it be would be greatly appreciated if you would answer all material as frankly as possible, you should not feel obliged to answer any questions that you find objectionable or that make you feel uncomfortable. You may also withdraw at any time with no adverse consequence. Should you wish to withdraw or have a break during the other sessions, all you have to do is ask. Should you wish to withdraw entirely from the study, you only need to convey your wish to me (telephone or email), or you may want to contact my supervisor (see below). You will be asked to indicate whether or not you would like your data removed from the study. I will send a confirmation letter back to you acknowledging your request to be removed from the study, either with or without your data.

What will happen to my responses? Since there is an interest to have your name used, you will be asked to expressly give your permission to have your full name within this study. This, too, is optional. You may remain anonymous and not have your information shared beyond the parameters of this research study. The results of this study may be published, further disseminated, talked about, and shown at conferences or other gatherings. The goal of the project is to teach, change, and ultimately to educate. We hope that this study, learning through your educational experiences, will be an impetus for deeper conversations about First Nation education. You will be given a copy of the finished study. Copies of our written exchange will be saved in hard copy format and kept with other data of this study on a password-protected encrypted laptop. Collected data will be safely shared onto Trent University research servers where research data is safely secured according to provincial/ university guidelines. There is no known physical, psychological, economic, or social risks associated with this study.

The interviews will be recorded, and a copy of the interview will be shared with you. Your responses and corrections are welcome at every stage. The recorded Zoom sessions will be shared with you in their entirety, as well as in any edited form. Your approval must be given before they are to be shared. If you would not like them shared, that will be respected and the recorded session destroyed or provided to you (if that is your wish). In this case, they would not accompany the final submission, which will form this dissertation.

What if I have concerns? If you have any complaints, concerns, or questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Catherine Davis at (705) 927 -7423 or email catherinedavis@trentu.ca OR Dr. Cathy Bruce at (705)-748-1011 ex 73760 or email cathybruce@trentu.ca. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Jamie Muckle, Regulatory and Compliance Officer of the Office of Research and Innovation
jmuckle@trentu.ca

Again, thank you. Your interest in participating in this research study is greatly appreciated.

Appendix C: Consent Form

Please sign one copy of this Letter of Information/Consent Form and return to the researcher. Retain a second copy for your files

I have read the following statements above and have had all questions answering the study and what is involved. I understand that I will have one videotaped interview session of 60-90 minutes in length with the researcher, Catherine Davis, and one day visioning exercise with other participants of the study to be held at a central community location in Alderville to explore the future of education. I wish to freely participate in this interview and visioning exercise but understand that I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I also understand that I may choose to not answer questions which may make me feel uncomfortable.

I agree that the interview can be recorded. (Circle one) Yes No

I am aware that I must give my full approval for any of recording to be shared for the purpose of this study and with my approval may be shared at other venues, conferences and may include the general public. (Circle one) Yes No

I agree to have my name used in this research for the purposes of the Researcher's study on Alderville First Nation Education. (Circle one) Yes No

A copy of the final report and anything written bearing my name will be shared with me prior to submission for clarity and accuracy (Circle one) Yes No

I wish to have a copy of the completed Dissertation for my records (Circle one) Yes No

Your Full Name: ______________________Your Signature: _________________________

Date: ________________________________

Address: _____________________________Phone Number: ________________________

Email Address: ___________________________________

This study has been granted clearance by the General Ethics Board according to Canadian research ethics principles (http://www.ethics.gc.ca/default.aspx) and Trent University policies (http://www.trentu.ca/urs/research-ethics)"

Appendix D: Verbal Consent Form

My name is Catherine Davis, and I am Ph.D. Candidate at Trent University and member from Alderville First Nation.

I am conducting research about educational experiences and perspectives of Alderville members. I will be collecting these reflections from a varied group of Alderville members. First, according to our Anishinaabe Teachings, I will be including members positioned around Medicine Wheel: children (by way of their parents), youth, adult, senior and Elder. Additionally, I will be seeking to include on and off reserve

experiences, as well as members from different families, clans and belief systems. I will however, be interested in conducting interviews with members interested in the vitality of improved education for Alderville members and the continued commitment of strengthening our Alderville community.

Your participation will be needed for a total of a 60–90-minute interview during the spring and summer months of 2021.

This research has minimal risks. It will have the potential to benefit both the Anishinaabe and educational communities because it will help in further understanding our Anishinaabe community as we pursue relevant quality education for our youth.

You can identify yourself in my study or you can choose to have a pseudonym. Please know that that I will do everything I can to protect your privacy. Your identity or personal information will not be disclosed in any publication that may result from the study. If I do want to use direct quotes, I will seek your approval beforehand.

The ZOOM call will be safely secured on Trent University's server and my notes will be kept on encrypted USB safely stored in my home. The ZOOM videotaped meeting and transcript with be shared with you.

☐ Have you received the letter of intent?

☐ Do you have any questions about the study or what is expected of you if you agree to participate?

☐ Do you consent to participate in this study, after given more detail? If yes, continue. If no, stop

☐ Do you understand that you do not have to answer any questions that you do not with to?

May I record our interview on ZOOM technology? Saying no to the recording will have no effect on the interview. Saying yes provides me with critical detail when developing the transcript of our interview.

- Yes ☐ No ☐ I grant permission to be ZOOM recorded (Video-taped)
- Yes ☐ No ☐ I grant permission to be Audio recorded
- Yes ☐ No ☐ I grant permission have my name used
- Yes ☐ No ☐ I wish to remain anonymous, but you may refer to me by a pseudonym

The pseudonym I choose for myself is: ______________________________________