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Experiences with Indigenous Education in College: Stories from the Early Childhood Education Classroom

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Experiences with Indigenous Education in College:
Stories from the Early Childhood Education Classroom

by

Cheryl A Kinzel

A THESIS
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Abstract

Drawing from socio-constructivism, I work from the qualitative methodological approach of narrative inquiry through storytelling, oriented by critical pedagogy and informed by Indigenous methodology, in order to understand non-Indigenous adult learner perspectives in how Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing were experienced in the early childhood education (ECE) program at an urban post-secondary college in western Canada. Exploration and analysis of these stories through the lens of critical pedagogy and within a storytelling approach helped identify the participants’ initial transformative learning experiences with Indigenous knowledges and Reconciliation. Critical reflection on these themes led to the identification of several key findings: 1) the promise of transformative learning may be found in the students’ initial reflections en route to, 2) understanding reconciliation as an acceptance of the truths and realities of Canadian history, and 3) the necessity of experiencing Indigenous knowledges. Through the metaphor of building a nest, I see the promise of transformative learning as the foundation, or the sticks and twigs of this nest. The work of Reconciliation provides the string and the mud that, although messy, with perseverance can bind this nest together. Finally, Indigenous knowledges, or Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing, represent the contextual feathers that line this nest and provide a place of comfort.
Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, C. A. Kinzel. The interviews reported in Chapters 4-5 were covered by Ethics ID REB17-1305, issued by the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board for the project “Experiences with Indigenous Education in College: Stories from the Early Childhood Education Classroom” on October 31, 2017 and by the host institution Research Ethics Board on November 24, 2017. This thesis has been professionally copy-edited.
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*This work was created with the additional support of coffee, wine, and chocolate.
Dedication

This work is dedicated to my grandfather Victor Narcisse Moise Monette who set me on this lifelong path of learning with one whispered phrase.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The *Calls to Action* issued by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada speak to the moral and ethical obligations that the Canadian government and society must undertake in order to reconcile relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Representing my own enactment and responsibility, the following dissertation represents a step in the direction of meeting Call to Action #12 under the heading of Education: “We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families” (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2015, p. 2). In this opportune moment in history, I am inspired to share my attempts and my learnings through this study.

In this chapter, I include the following elements as a way of setting the broader context for this study: overview, terminology, researcher perspectives, the background of Western European knowledge used hegemonically, and a brief history of education for Indigenous peoples in Canada. I then outline my research problem, purpose, and research questions followed by my research approach, the rationale and significance of this study, along with researcher assumptions and biases. I end the chapter with the organization of my dissertation and a summary of this introductory chapter.

I believe that knowledge is socially and contextually situated as well as power-laden. Knowledge is created through relationship in interaction with others within the context of any situation (Freire, 2000/1970; Kincheloe, 2008; Kovach, 2009). I believe that the history of colonialism in Canada has worked to negate and exclude Indigenous knowledges from formal and informal learning environments. In an attempt to rectify this damaging situation, it is my
hope that this study will be read by leadership at the college where I am currently employed and will support the inclusion of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing in more community studies programming. As a faculty member at the University of Manitoba in education and a member of the Ahousaht First Nation, Marlene Atleo (2013) argued that non-Indigenous Canadians can work to change formal education to support social justice principles that affirm both Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners through cross-cultural praxis. For the purposes of this study, I am further inspired by the influential work of Paulo Freire that explores the role of developing critical consciousness in working toward social justice. Freire critically explored situations of oppression to foster dialogue which leads to praxis "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire, 2000, p. 51). In a similar way, but in a different time and place, I, too, am inspired to support post-secondary education that focuses on social justice and Reconciliation.

To achieve this objective, I have drawn from the qualitative methodological approach of narrative inquiry and storytelling, oriented by critical pedagogy and supported by Indigenous methodology. I have used this methodology to answer the following research questions: How do non-Indigenous adult learners in an early childhood education program at an urban post-secondary institution experience the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges within their program? And, how can this knowledge inform the development of resources to support the inclusion of Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy in the early childhood education program? I opted to take a blended methodological approach in order to understand non-Indigenous adult learner perspectives in how Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing are experienced in the early childhood education (ECE) program at the college where I work. Exploration of these stories has allowed me to identify non-Indigenous learner understandings of Indigenous epistemology and
pedagogy in the context of the ECE program. This knowledge will support the development of resources for the early childhood education curriculum that respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Call to Action #12, which calls for the development of culturally appropriate ECE programs for Indigenous families.

Embedding Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy within the ECE program at the college further aligns with the Accord on Indigenous Education signed by the Association of Canadian Deans of Education (2010), the Universities Canada Principles on Indigenous Education (2015), the Colleges and Institutes Canada Indigenous Education Protocol (2014), the Calls to Action issued by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2008). As these national and international documents signal, now is the time to work toward Reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada by furthering social justice in post-secondary education.

**Terminology**

For the purposes of this dissertation, I define Indigenous education specifically as a teaching system that includes Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy. I define Indigenous epistemology as the way of understanding and knowing from Indigenous perspectives, and Indigenous pedagogy as the art and science of teaching from Indigenous perspectives. I use the Indigenous concepts of being, knowing, and doing as terms to explain Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy (Anuik, Battiste, & George, 2010; Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2013; Belanger, 2014). I reference the term lived experiences to define knowledge that research participants, children, and adult learners gain through first-hand involvement in everyday life (Oxford Reference, 2018). I use the term Eurocentric to refer to a world view that prioritizes and positions as neutral the epistemological and pedagogical practices of Western Europe (Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2013;
Kovach, 2009). I use the term *curriculum* to include all aspects of the student experience in the early childhood education program, in and out of course work. When I speak of *Reconciliation*, I refer to meeting the *Calls to Action* of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which outline ways in which the federal, provincial, and territorial governments in Canada can support Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples; the *Calls to Action* implicate all Canadians in a shared responsibility to work toward Reconciliation. Since this study is mired in praxis-based approaches, I am also using *cultural validity* as a way to provide guidance and support that I am doing research in a “good way” in this study. Doing research in a “good way’ means that I am striving to honour Indigenous knowledges and peoples. I focus on Reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples related to the practices of a post-secondary institution which privileges Western European knowledge systems but that has recently demonstrated commitment to the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges in the epistemology and pedagogy of the institution.

**Researcher Perspectives**

I come from a family of storytellers; thus, researching the storied experiences of adult learners seemed a natural fit for me. In sharing this study, I have attempted to follow a narrative format because, for me, the power of truth lies in the story and how that story is told. I have been inspired and motivated by two Indigenous scholars who deeply influence my choice of writing style: Dr. Tracy Bear, a Nêhiyaw scholar and my friend of over 20 years, who emphasized the need for me to foreground Indigenous voices in my story, and Dr. Margaret Kovach, another Nêhiyaw scholar, whom I have not met, but whose book *Indigenous Methodologies* has impacted how I approach my work. Both scholars emphasized the need to tell a story and, in this spirit, I offer my story of research.
I have drawn from narrative inquiry or storytelling oriented by critical pedagogy and supported by Indigenous methodology to research how non-Indigenous learners in the ECE program at the college experience Indigenous ways of being and knowing. My belief in humanity has been troubled by the truths of colonialism and the ongoing practice of adopting dominant cultural epistemologies and pedagogies in formal education as appropriate for different cultures—particularly when the post-secondary institution is located on the traditional lands of Indigenous peoples and serves Indigenous learners alongside other learners. My journey has brought me to a place where I am called through my professional, personal, and educational roles to work toward Reconciliation in post-secondary education.

In this research study, I rely on the concept of Reconciliation as a catalyst to prompt those within the institution to value the knowledge and experience of Indigenous learners, faculty, and staff of the post-secondary institution by including it in the day-to-day operations of the college. I want to also ensure that Indigenous knowledges and experiences are reflected in the content of the courses and the programming offered to all learners. My particular focus in this study was to engage with non-Indigenous learners as they explore their own stories of experience with Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy and to take up their experiences as a means to inform the development of curriculum resources for the early childhood education program on our path to Reconciliation.

My journey through life thus far has been transformational in that it has changed how I view the world. This journey has brought me to a place of critical reflection about who I am and how I am in the world. My story starts generations ago but, for the sake of brevity, I will begin at the point of my marriage, at age 23, to an Indigenous man. It was at this point that my maternal grandfather, Victor Narcisse Moise Monette, pulled me aside and told me that we had “Indian
blood.” This was a surprise to me, as no one in my family had ever mentioned it before. I carried this knowledge with me like a precious jewel, sharing it only with partners, close friends, and with my children. I did not explore this secret further with my grandfather while he was alive, and I regret that decision to this day.

Fast forward 21 years later, through a divorce, my life as an elementary school teacher, another marriage, and the birth of my three children, and we are placed in the next part of my story. I became deeply engaged in adult learning when I accepted an instructor position with the college in January 2013. My teaching assignment was to deliver the Early Childhood Education diploma program to a cohort of learners from a First Nations community in Alberta. Although I had past experience teaching Indigenous learners in my classes, this was my first experience teaching a group of Indigenous learners in their home community. As class participants became more comfortable with each other and began to explore the curriculum, the difference in what I was teaching and the cohort’s experiences of child rearing in their own community became increasingly obvious. It was then that I realized that I was teaching from a Eurocentric standpoint, something I had never really considered before. I had structured my teaching style on models from my undergraduate courses and textbooks that presented the world through a Western European lens. My own educational experiences did not explore the colonial history of Canada and the lived experiences and realities of Indigenous peoples in Canada—I was replicating the same distorted form of education.

The glaring misfit of this Western European teaching model to a First Nations community became increasingly apparent to me and to this cohort, as it clearly did not meet the needs of the Indigenous learners. The students in this cohort wanted to learn how to best support the children of their community using their own Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy. They
told me that they wanted to raise their children to honour and know their traditional ways of being, knowing, and doing (Kinzel, 2016). I was moved by their commitment to be, and to teach, who they truly were. Together we embarked upon a project of co-constructing an early childhood education curriculum (Kinzel, 2016). I brought my knowledge of Western European early childhood practices; the learners brought their knowledge of traditional community child rearing practices. Together we reflected on curriculum materials, kept what fit for this group of learners, and integrated traditional child rearing perspectives from community knowledge-keepers. The success of this co-construction of curriculum was evident when 18 First Nations members walked across the stage to receive their diploma, the largest post-secondary graduating class ever for the Nation. The coming together of knowledge traditions had set these learners up for success.

I was motivated and encouraged by this cohort of learners to begin a deeper exploration of the Indigenous family connection shared by my grandfather so long ago. I began to research my family background and look at old family photos. I spoke to all of my aunties. I wandered down several dead ends, but then learned that my French ancestors came to Canada in 1666. They settled in the Saulteaux region, and eventually moved to what would become southern Saskatchewan in the Gravelbourg-Meyronne area. I hired a genealogist from the Glenbow Museum to trace my roots, but he was unable to find the link I was looking for. Further research over the last few years has uncovered information indicating that the Francophone settlers who moved to the Gravelbourg-Meyronne area in the same time period of my grandfather’s family were French and Michif-speaking Métis (Hamilton, 2006; Lalonde & Lapointe, 2000). I lean toward thinking that the Indigenous connection to which my grandfather had referred occurred long ago in the beginning of my family’s time in Canada, and that this knowledge was passed.
down orally through the generations. I also think it likely, as I have been told was common practice at the time, that when opportunity presented itself, my ancestors wrote “blanche” on the census form as a way of moving the family away from the racist attitudes that dominated the colonial powerholders and those of the dominant cultural group, further entrenching our colonization. Whenever I am feeling unsure of my journey to explore my ancestry, I look at the photographs of my great-grandparents, my grandfather, and my mother and her sisters when they were young, and I am reassured that what my grandfather told me was my truth.

Given the hidden nature of my family background and my positioning, I feel it necessary to situate myself personally and academically as I explore notions of Reconciliation within the post-secondary world (Archibald, 2008; Battiste, 2013; Devine, 2011; Kovach, 2009; Regan, 2010). I do not claim Indigenous identity, as I have no lived experience with being perceived as Indigenous; I am not yet claimed by a community, and I have not yet found documented ancestral connections to an Indigenous community. I have the story my grandfather told me, and I have knowledge that my French ancestors came to Canada in 1666. I have photographs of my great-grandparents, and I have a mother with dark brown hair, dark brown eyes, and dark skin. I also know that I believe my grandfather. Armed with this information, I continue to explore my Métis identity but situate myself outside of this community—for the time being.

I am beginning to craft what I believe to be my theoretical perspective and approach to learning, and in a broader sense, to approach how I perceive and interact with the world around me. I am drawn to social constructivism and critical pedagogy (Freire, 2000) as a framework, and narrative inquiry or storytelling as a methodology. I believe that research should work toward positive social change. Situating myself as a privileged member of the dominant social/cultural group, I believe it is my ethical role to work toward Reconciliation. I will focus
my research efforts on meeting the *Calls to Action* by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, specifically focusing on #12, which speaks to the need for culturally relevant programming for Indigenous children and families.

The college where I am employed is a large post-secondary institution in Western Canada. The student population is comprised of learners from many different cultures; however, the educational framework predominantly favours Western European epistemology and pedagogy. When I returned from teaching on the reserve to teaching on the main campus, I realized I had experienced a transformative life event that had forever changed me; I felt uncomfortable with the Western European teaching methods that were standard practice at the college. I needed to explore my own experiences with colonization through this transformative learning event (Mezirow, 2003). Indigenous learners and learners from non-Western countries share the unfortunate situation of having their own traditional knowledge systems and ways of being, knowing, and doing unrecognized or honoured in North American post-secondary institutions (Archibald, 2008; Asher, 2009; Battiste, 2013; Choules, 2011; Kovach, 2009; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2017; Smith, 2012). The college is located on the traditional territory of the Blackfoot Confederacy and the ancestral homelands of the Métis Nation. It is located in territory where the Treaty 7 Nations and the Indigenous and non-Indigenous graduates of the ECE program work in centres and programs that include Indigenous children and families. In recognizing the original occupants of the lands that the college now occupies and their traditional knowledge systems, my students and I work toward meeting the *Calls to Action* of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Reconciliation, for me, involves broadening the scope of early childhood education practice to honour and include Indigenous epistemologies and pedagogies, and child-rearing practices.
At the college where I am employed, I currently work toward my social justice goals by serving as the college-appointed representative on the Truth and Reconciliation Post-Secondary Task Team. This team is made up of representatives from six post-secondary institutions. We advise our respective institutional leadership on ways we can collectively work to meet the TRC *Calls to Action*. I am a member of the college Indigenization Strategy Advisory Group and, most recently, the co-applicant on a successful Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) grant (2016) in partnership with a First Nation to co-construct Indigenous early learning materials. My current role is in leadership and as a researcher at the college who works in partnership with Indigenous communities. In these roles, and throughout the data gathering and member checking portions of the study, no early childhood education faculty reported to me, nor did I teach any students; I do, however, acknowledge that I am in a position of power in my professional role.

Locating myself as a privileged researcher who is simultaneously exploring the possibility and path of her Indigenous heritage, and as someone who supports the inclusion of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing in the curriculum of the college, was an important aspect of this research study. Because of my lack of connection to an Indigenous community and because of my lived experiences so far, I find it ethical to locate myself in this research study as a non-Indigenous academic who is exploring my Métis identity and working toward Reconciliation. I find external pressures to choose from a binary of Indigenous or non-Indigenous to be extremely challenging, and I wonder if this perceived need to choose one or the other is a common experience for many Métis peoples. On the other hand, I believe this complex positioning, which comes with my story, has helped to support strong relationship-building with the research participants, the college, and with Indigenous communities. Identity, as many
scholars have pointed out, can be a crucial component in the success of any Indigenous study (Archibald, 2008; Battiste, 2013; Kovach, 2009; Regan, 2010). I believe that it is my moral obligation as one living and benefiting from historic colonial structures to work toward meeting the *Calls to Action* from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

To provide relevant context in the next section of this chapter, I explore the background of publicly funded education in Canada for Indigenous people. By including this history, I underscore the negative, hegemonic legacy of publicly funded education for Indigenous Canadians, and how this formal schooling has also negatively affected non-Indigenous learners by limiting their knowledge of our national history.

**Background**

**Hegemonic forms of Western European Epistemology and Pedagogy**

Epistemological and pedagogical systems frequently represent the values of the dominant community from which they have developed. Here in Canada, as in many other colonial-settler nation states, such systems have developed in ways that privilege one way of knowing and understanding over other ways of knowing and understanding (Battiste, 2013; Kerr, 2014; Kincheloe, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Taylor, 2015; Pidgeon, 2008, 2016). This system of hegemony privileges the unquestioned use of Western European epistemological and pedagogical systems as the standard in many Canadian post-secondary institutions (Alexander, 2016; Kovach, 2009; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Taylor, 2015; Pidgeon, 2008, 2016). As Kerr (2014), an Indigenous scholar from the University of Winnipeg stated, “educational spaces in higher education continue to support and perpetuate structures of colonialism through an epistemic monoculture based in Western scientific materialism” (p. 83). This view positions itself as neutral and maintains that all non-Western European epistemologies and pedagogies are
somehow biased or not free of judgement (Kerr, 2014; Kincheloe, 2008), a view that Kincheloe (2008) emphasizes:

Utilizing a crypto-positivistic, evidence-based science that excludes complexity; context; power; multiple modes of research design; the ever-changing, in-process nature of the phenomena of the social world; subjugated and Indigenous knowledges from diverse social and geographical locales; and the multiple realities perceived and constructed by different peoples at divergent historical times and cultural places, dominant power brokers attempt with a great deal of success to regulate what people view as legitimate knowledge. (p. 2)

Positivist scientific epistemology and pedagogy advances the idea that knowledge may be understood to be universal, testable, and generalizable, and that it is neither subjective nor contextual (Battiste, 2013; Kerr, 2014; Kovach, 2009). This reductionist view does not support an understanding of the multi-layered, inter-connected, and complex ways that Indigenous cultures view the world (Archibald, 2008; Battiste, 2013; Kovach, 2009; Kincheloe, 2008). Other knowledge traditions such as interpretivist approaches seemingly overlap with Indigenous epistemology, viewing knowledge as “oral, particular, local, and timely” (Kerr, 2014, p. 88), dependent upon the context and circumstances at hand.

This continuum of theoretical practice and frameworks gives strength to our practice as researchers and educators. When the goal is to support students and create a better world, joining hands and moving together toward supports adults in their learning journeys as well as moving toward social justice. Indigenous methodologies are an emerging area for post-secondary academics to work within, and there does not exist the same volume of published research as exists for other more prevalent theoretical frameworks. Indigenous and allied academics are
currently articulating these ancient traditions into print. In this research, I bring together aspects of two relevant adult learning theories, that of transformative learning and critical pedagogy, which I believe support and align with the Indigenous methodology that this work nests within.

In light of the ubiquity of Eurocentric epistemology and pedagogy, non-Western European participants studying in the post-secondary system do not typically see their values or belief systems represented in the educational system in which they are immersed. Those learners who arrive in post-secondary education from outside the dominant culture experience the education system differently, depending on how their own values are defined (Battiste, 2013; Kovach, 2009; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Taylor, 2015). For many Indigenous learners, post-secondary education is a hegemonic system where their cultures, languages, and traditions are not included, and where their knowledge systems are not recognized as legitimate ways of being, knowing, and doing within the institution (Alexander, 2016; Battiste, 2013; Kerr, 2014; Kovach, 2009; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Taylor, 2015; Pidgeon, 2008, 2016). By continuing to ignore the knowledge traditions of the original occupants of this land, researchers engage in the utilization of a “hegemonic epistemology in league with a dominant power-soaked politics of knowledge operat(ing) to privilege the privileged and further marginalize the marginalized” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 5). Kincheloe further argued that it is necessary to explore the diverse contexts within which knowledge is situated in order to understand a particular phenomenon. In the words of Kincheloe (2008), “We must challenge forms of knowledge that are presented to us as value-free” (p.17). In other words, context and perspective matter.

This understanding of the hegemonic nature of many Western European academic practices in some Canadian post-secondary institutions highlights the problematic nature of non-Indigenous learners’ colonization of thought. We have been educated to believe that the
epistemological and pedagogical practices we experience in public schooling are neutral, normal, and right (Alexander, 2016; Kincheloe, 2008; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Taylor, 2015; Regan, 2010). The history of post-contact education in Canada for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples has contributed to the negation and erasure of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing; the void left by the negation and erasure has been filled with many misunderstandings.

**Eurocentric Education in Canada for Indigenous Peoples**

In exploring the concept of educational development in a sociocultural framework, Matusov, DePalma and Drye (2007) highlighted the problematic situation of contemporary education: “Educational stakeholders are involved in a dialogue about what constitute educational values and priorities that in their own turn define development. This dialogue may take the form of ‘cultural wars’ about values or the form of collaboration” (p. 418). In many Canadian post-secondary settings, this cultural positioning now navigates between Western European and Indigenous cultures as the post-secondary institutions begin to move in the direction of meeting the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s *Calls to Action*.

Indigenous scholars Bastien (2004) and Battiste (2013) stated that Indigenous peoples have historically educated their communities in traditional ways, prior to and since colonization, through successful methods of cultural transmission. This truth is self-evident when considering the millennia of survival by the First Peoples, and the evolution of highly complex cultures in what would become the Americas. This traditional system of education was disrupted by targeted colonial policies and practices enforced by newcomers, and this disruption—which some deem cultural genocide—continued during the period of the Indian Residential Schools; children were removed from their homes and their families, and punished for speaking their traditional language (Battiste, 2013; National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2015).
The public educational experiences of Indigenous people in Canada from European contact through to the current era illustrate stories of colonization. The oppressive history of the Indian Residential School system in Canada is well documented in government records and by Indigenous scholars and residential school survivors (Antone, 2000; Anuik & Bastien, 2010; Atleo, 2013; Battiste, 2013; George, 2010; Curwin Doige, 2003; Greenwood, de Leeuw, and Fraser, 2007; Hatcher, 2012; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996; Kovach, 2009; Ledoux, 2006; National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2015; Preston, Cottrell, Pelletier, & Pearce, 2012). As with their Aboriginal peers, allied scholars Schissel and Wotherspoon (2016), Francis (2002), Francis, Scully, and Germain (2006), and Frideres (2016) argued that the history of education for Indigenous people since contact has been one of cultural genocide.

Honing in on studies that focus on early childhood education for Indigenous children, Canadian scholars Greenwood et al. (2007) highlighted the impacts of this colonial legacy: “The lives of Indigenous children in Canada are guided and formed in many ways by historic colonial factors, by intergenerational traits, and by current socioeconomic and demographic elements experienced by Aboriginal peoples” (p. 5). These multiple factors are addressed in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action as places in which government policy and practice can make positive change for Indigenous communities, families, and individuals. Historical public schooling for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada has seen Western European educational theory and practice used as the educational framework for all groups regardless of their ancestral origin. In the pre-World War II era, the focus of schooling for Indigenous peoples was aimed at assimilation, through which it was hoped the First Peoples would integrate (disappear) into the general population (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996; National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2015). After World War II, the focus of
schooling for Indigenous peoples continued the assimilationist project (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996; National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2015). In this post-war era, occasional efforts were made to accommodate particular cultural practices and share those practices with non-Indigenous learner populations as additions to the social studies curriculum (Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2013). These efforts were no doubt prompted by Indigenous community-led efforts such as the National Indian Brotherhood’s “Indian Control of Indian Education.”

In their study of how off-reserve Indigenous early childhood education took form in Canada, early childhood education academics Preston, Cottrell, Pelletier, and Pearce (2012) asserted that Western European constructs remained the primary format for education instruction in Canada. Many scholars who have studied Indigenous education in Canada argued that the current public education system frequently does not respect the cultural values, history, languages, or knowledge differences between Western European thought and Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing (Alexander, 2016; Anuik et al., 2010; Archibald, 2008; Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2013; Cooke-Dallin, Rosborough & Underwood, 2000; Hart, 2010; Hatcher, 2012; Hongyan, 2012; Kovach, 2009; Ledoux, 2006; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2017). Mikmaw educator and scholar Battiste (2013) and Cree scholar Kovach (2009) each argued that the mainstream education system in Canada adopted the Eurocentric assumption that their education models and knowledge were superior to Indigenous education models and knowledge, when, in fact, mainstream education models are just one of many ways of knowing. Their assertion of a biased form of education being forced upon all learners is a central tenet upon which my work rests.
The prevalence of Western European curriculum in the majority of Canadian post-secondary settings illustrates that institutions assign subjective value to a particular cultural practice by valuing one practice over another; this system represents another form of colonialism. Many scholars argue that contemporary Canadian educational practice for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples frequently negates Indigenous knowledge traditions, continuing the history of cultural suppression (Archibald, 2008; Cooke-Dallin et al., 2000; Greenwood et al., 2007; Kovach, 2009; Ledoux, 2006; Matusov et al., 2007; Poitras Pratt, Louie, Hanson, & Ottmann, 2018). This pedagogical decision is formed within the dominant cultural context and does not indicate best practice for all cultures (Kovach, 2009; Matusov, DePalma, & Drye, 2007). In fact, one could argue that this practice is a continued form of colonization.

**Research Problem**

The oppressive history of the Indian residential school system in Canada (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2015) is well documented by The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The current state of public education for Indigenous peoples can be viewed as a continuation of the colonial project (Archibald, 2008; Anuik et al., 2010; Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2013; Cooke-Dallin, Rosborough, & Underwood, 2000; Hart, 2010; Hatcher, 2012; Hongyan, 2012; Kovach, 2009; Ledoux, 2006). The Indian Residential School system represents the influence of the oppressive history of colonialism in Canada and the negation of Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2015). Unfortunately, this negation still holds true for the youngest of our learners who are cared for and educated in a diverse arena of child care settings.

The dominance of Eurocentric curriculum practices which negate Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing is particularly problematic when used in settings that include
Indigenous peoples and when the programs are located on the traditional lands of Indigenous peoples (Archibald, 2008; Battiste, 2013; Cooke-Dallin et al., 2000; Greenwood et al., 2007; Kinzel, 2016; Kovach, 2009; Ledoux, 2006; Matusov, DePalma, & Drye, 2007; National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2015; Nguyen, 2011; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Taylor, 2015; Smith, 2012). This research study was designed to explore the storied experiences of non-Indigenous early childhood education learners as they are exposed to Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing in their ECE program. Insights from analysis of the data will support recommendations for the development of curriculum resources embedding Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy in the ECE program.

**Research Purpose**

Drawing from socio-constructivism, I employed the qualitative methodological approach of narrative inquiry through storytelling, oriented by critical pedagogy and supported by Indigenous methodology. I used this methodology in order to understand non-Indigenous adult learner perspectives of how Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing are experienced in the ECE program at the college. Exploration of these stories helped to identify non-Indigenous learners’ understanding of Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy, and this knowledge will inform the development of resources for the ECE curriculum to support the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Call to Action #12, which calls for the development of culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Indigenous families.

**Research Questions**

In order to explore the inclusion of Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy in the ECE curriculum, the proposed research study concentrates on the following overarching research question: How do non-Indigenous adult learners in an early childhood education program at an
urban post-secondary institution experience the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges within their program? This primary research question has led to a following sub-question: How can this knowledge inform the development of resources to support the inclusion of Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy in the early childhood education program?

**Research Approach**

I believe that research and knowledge practices are contextually situated. At the post-secondary level, this gives power to the dominant group who, in this case, are typically of Western European heritage (Battiste, 2013; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012). I chose narrative inquiry through storytelling, oriented by critical pedagogy and supported by Indigenous methodology for this study. I gathered the stories of non-Indigenous learners as a method of rich qualitative data collection (Archibald, 2008; Freire, 2000; Kovach, 2009), and I nested this work within an Indigenous storytelling approach which views story as a holistic method of understanding the world (Archibald 2008; Kovach, 2009). I have chosen to use the terminology *nested in Indigenous methodology* because I am still finding my own path on my journey of discovery of my Métis heritage. I am neither Sto:lo, as is Jo-Anne Archibald, nor Nêhiyaw, as is Margaret Kovach. Although I feel strongly that I am aligning my methodology with theirs, I am not comfortable with claiming either of their approaches as my own, and therefore refer to the nest which I am building as drawing from various strands of Indigenous knowledge traditions and Western approaches. This methodological nest is also representative of the strong relational approach taken in this study; the metaphor of the nest gently holds this work together and provides a foundation for understanding.

Critical pedagogy as a theoretical framework supports a praxis of reflection and action that may lead to transformation of oppressive social or cultural structures; this social justice
focus is an integral part of Indigenous methodology (Kovach, 2009). It was important to explore power relationships in the college environment within which I work through engagement with critical pedagogy. Exploring the non-Indigenous learners’ stories of experience with Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing to support the development of curriculum resources represents potentially transformative research that works toward social justice.

My role in Reconciliation, as I understand it, was to explore how non-Indigenous peoples can contribute to Reconciliation (Regan, 2010). With this in mind, I researched the stories of experience of the non-Indigenous learners in the ECE program at the college. Following the advice of the Indigenous centre director, I invited an Anishinaabe Elder from the college to engage with the research project and to support it through her guidance. She was also engaged to lead the initial group information session that explored and explained to the research participants her own understandings of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing, prior to the storytelling interview sessions. The intentional involvement of an Indigenous knowledge-keeper as a guide through the various research stages, including knowledge framing session, data analysis re-storying, and research sharing, ensured that I followed and respected cultural protocols and that I undertook respectful research in a good way (Kovach, 2009).

I engaged with critical pedagogy through a process informed by Indigenous storytelling traditions (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009). I believe that reflection upon the stories contained in this research study will aid the development of curriculum resources that support the inclusion of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing throughout the ECE curriculum.

**Rationale and Significance**

The Accord on Indigenous Education (2010), the University Canada Principles on Indigenous Education (2015), the Colleges and Institutes Canada Indigenous Education Protocol
(2014), the *Calls to Action* from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report (2015), and the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (2008) all support a move toward providing an environment for learners that supports Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing. I felt this was particularly important when considering the ECE program at my post-secondary institution, which graduates over 100 learners a year who will enter the field of community support and work in centres and programs that serve a high population of Indigenous children and families.

For Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to move toward Reconciliation, a trusting relationship must be reinstated (Davis, 2010; Regan, 2010). Trust is central in a learning relationship, and re-establishing trust with Indigenous communities is a major challenge in the face of Canada’s colonial history (Atleo, 2013). Learning needs to be situated in the context of the realities and experiences of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in order to move forward toward social justice (Atleo, 2013). While the deeply negative outcomes of the past colonial practices of the Canadian government and people should be recognized and acknowledged, I believe Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples can work together to learn from these experiences and to work toward dismantling the continuation of the colonial project (Ermine, Sinclair, & Jeffrey, 2004; Regan, 2010).

In this research study, I drew from the stories of experience of non-Indigenous adult learners to support the college in the development of curriculum resources that explore inclusion of Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy in the early childhood education program. Their first-time experiences with Indigenous knowledge indicated that this may have potential to support early transformative learning.
Researcher Assumptions and Biases

I have been at my institution as a faculty member and now in a leadership position for over five years. I did not include Indigenous learner research participants in this study as I sought to understand non-Indigenous learner experiences with Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing. I assumed that the Elder-led group information session that occurred prior to the individual interviews would provide a common language and understanding of the terms Indigenous epistemology, pedagogy, ways of being, knowing, and doing. This common understanding was necessary as a basis for gathering data in the subsequent interviews with non-Indigenous learners and analyzing their early experiences with Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy. By including only non-Indigenous peoples as my participants, my assumption is that they will derive benefit from their involvement in learning experiences that will then inform my study.

As I explore my own connections to community and in learning to be a Métis woman, I feel I must ensure I walk the path of research and academe in a careful and responsible way. As with Indigenous scholars Yvonne Poitras Pratt and Jacqueline Ottmann (2013), my assumption is that Indigenous epistemologies and pedagogy will add value to the post-secondary education system and particularly to the education of future teachers of young children. I also hold a strong bias that it is only by joining hands and minds to move forward together that we will become stronger.

Organization of Dissertation

In this first chapter, I have outlined the story of my subjectivity, my research problem and research purpose. In Chapter 2, I engage in a review of the literature that explores Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy or Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing, and beginning
efforts in Reconciliation of select Canadian post-secondary institutions. I engage with relevant concepts within adult learning, transformative learning, and critical pedagogy to lay the foundation for my theoretical framework. In Chapter 3, I address the elements of research design that were used to guide the study, including the methodology and process of the study. Chapter 4 presents findings and analysis from the five individual conversational interviews that took place after the Elder-led information session. Within the concluding Chapter 5, I use the lens of critical pedagogy to further explore the themes found through the data analysis and make recommendations for future policy, practice, and research.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the research design that I used for this study, and I recounted a story of my own subjectivity. Drawing on the history of post-contact and publicly-funded schooling for Indigenous people in Canada as a background from which to explore colonization through education, I concluded that while the system of Indian Residential Schools was in place for Indigenous children and youth, the mainstream education of Canadian non-Indigenous children was also steeped in colonialism (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2015). Finally, I explored critical pedagogy through storytelling in post-secondary education as a way to move toward meeting the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Call to Action #12.

In Chapter 2, I engage in a review of the literature that explores Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy or Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing, foregrounding the voices of Indigenous academics as is appropriate when exploring Indigenous knowledges. I then explore contemporary and emerging efforts surrounding Reconciliation at select Canadian post-
secondary institutions. Finally, I explore relevant concepts within adult education, transformative learning, and critical pedagogy as the theoretical basis upon which I can base my analysis.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

In this chapter, I explore a select sample of literature engaging Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy, also known as Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing, to provide a foundation for the exploration of the research questions. In an effort to provide context for this research project, I also unpack documents from select post-secondary academics and Canadian post-secondary institutions that are moving toward meeting the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Finally, I explore critical pedagogy and transformative learning in the context of adult learning as the foundation of my theoretical approach.

As a first step, I begin with the purpose statement to frame this literature review. Next, I will examine international literature on the subject of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing by reflecting on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (2008) with a specific focus on Maori ways of being, knowing, and doing as exemplars in this work. Then move to a Canadian context, and finally, look at the regional context of the Blackfoot peoples using Bastien’s (2004) book Blackfoot Ways of Knowing: The Worldview of the Siksikaisitsapi. I draw on the broad themes of Spirit, Heart, Mind, and Body as articulated by Indigenous academics Archibald (2008) and George (2010) and use these themes to explore Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing. I then explore articles and documents from select academics and Canadian post-secondary institutions where work toward Reconciliation has begun by engaging with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action. I will provide an overview of Canadian post-secondary leadership on Indigenization and move to a deeper exploration of the Western Canadian regions’ post-secondary environments.
Finally, I explore relevant concepts within adult education, transformative learning, and critical pedagogy as the theoretical basis upon which I can base my analysis.

As a researcher exploring Indigenous knowledges, I chose to explore conceptions of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing from Indigenous perspectives, knowing that Indigenous scholars and knowledge-keepers are best positioned to share this knowledge. With this in mind, I have specifically chosen to engage with literature written by respected Indigenous scholars and knowledge keepers when exploring Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy. In order to prioritize these often lesser-known works that are essential within my own work, I foreground the voices of the Indigenous academics and provide a synthesis of the literature at the end of the section under the headings of Spirit, Heart, Mind, and Body.

Since the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has only recently arrived, with its official report released in 2015, I have chosen published articles and documents created in the last seven years to include in my review of Canadian post-secondary institutional actions moving toward Reconciliation. There is a limited availability of research to provide a broad overview of the field of Canadian post-secondary institutional involvement with Reconciliation or engagement with the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Finally, I have chosen to deliberately focus on the engagement and actions of regional Canadian post-secondary institutions situated in the Western Canadian region, as this is the region where I am working towards similar goals.

In order to explore the inclusion of Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy in the ECE curriculum, I look to Indigenous scholarship to frame the concepts of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing, as well as to explore Canadian post-secondary engagement with the Truth and Reconciliation’s Calls to Action. Therefore, my review of this literature is meant to deepen
understanding and provide context for the research study rather than identify any particular gap in the research. As the following review illustrates, the work itself is only now emerging.

**Purpose**

I explored the stories of experiences of non-Indigenous learners, oriented by critical pedagogy, to understand non-Indigenous adult learner perspectives in how Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing may be experienced in the ECE program at the college. This knowledge has helped to provide information about what may need to be added or changed in the college ECE curriculum in order to support the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Call to Action #12, which calls for the development of culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Indigenous families.

**Rationale for Topics**

In order to respond to Call to Action #12 and develop a culturally appropriate early childhood education program for Indigenous children and families that will benefit all learners, it was necessary to have an understanding of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing informed by a regional or local perspective. A step toward meeting the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in post-secondary education comes when educators respect and include these ways of being, knowing, and doing when developing pedagogical and epistemological systems and programming offered to adult learners. I note that the Métis voice is not included in this review because of the lack of academic resources available in this area.

In order to explore the research question of how non-Indigenous adult learners in the ECE program at the college experience Indigenous education or Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy, I first defined characteristics of Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy that are shared across the globe. I understand the importance of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and
doing as defined by Indigenous peoples; therefore, I explore this topic using scholarly works from Indigenous scholars wherever possible.

Since my study is a response to the Truth and Reconciliation *Calls to Action*, I situate my study within the landscape of Canadian post-secondary responses to Reconciliation as oriented by the *Calls to Action* from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. As my professional sphere and location of the research study is post-secondary education that specifically targets early childhood education, my research is grounded in a critical pedagogical approach that supports the exploration of non-Indigenous learners’ experiences of Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy. This approach provides a lens through which post-secondary institutions such as my own may view engagement with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Call to Action #12. In order to explore the college’s engagement with Reconciliation as background for this research study, it was necessary to briefly review a selection of Canadian post-secondary institutions who are currently engaging in the work of Reconciliation.

To support my theoretical approach within this research study, it is also essential to build a nest of understanding by utilizing relevant concepts within adult learning, transformative learning, and critical pedagogy.

**Indigenous Knowledges, or Indigenous Epistemology and Pedagogy**

In order to support the incorporation of Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy into post-secondary education, I explore Indigenous scholarship on ways of being, knowing, and doing. The following is an examination of Indigenous writings about Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy, also known as Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing. I have chosen to undertake a global perspective as a broad framing, utilizing the *United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (2008) as the formal recognition of these rights. I also draw
upon the seminal work of Linda Tuhiiwai Smith, a respected Maori researcher and academic, and Margaret Kovach, a Nêhiyaw scholar, as exemplars of Indigenizing ways.

In as many instances as possible, I locate the author’s communities within my writing. Identifying specific affiliations allows for further contextualization of community-specific knowledge. I do not wish to imply that there is a single Indigenous approach to epistemology or pedagogy; as I understand it from several Indigenous mentors, each community has their own specific traditions, beliefs, ways of being, and language. Yet as Battiste (2013), Kovach (2009), and Smith (2012) have pointed out, there are many shared beliefs amongst global Indigenous peoples. As a non-Indigenous scholar, I am thankful for the Indigenous scholars and allies who have come before me and supported my learning, and it is important that I acknowledge them in my writing, to ensure that the voices heard above others are theirs.

**International Writing on Indigenous Knowledges**

In 2008, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) (2008). Notable objectors in the recognition of First Peoples’ rights were Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States of America. In 2016, after a change in government, Canada revisited the declaration and officially endorsed UNDRIP by removing their formal objection to the declaration; notably, the province of Alberta under its current governing power is using UNDRIP as the framework for Reconciliation. As is the case in any political setting, these formal acknowledgements—where power resides at the locus of change—can disappear with the next election.

The UNDRIP document provides further evidence for a common way of being, knowing, and doing from an Indigenous perspective. The overall focus of the document is on the importance of language, tradition, culture, community, respect, environment, spirituality,
ceremony, relationship, and concern for future generations. In speaking to the recognition of
diverse Indigenous rights around the world, UNDRIP includes the following statement that
focuses in on the importance of spirituality and place to First Peoples around the globe:

> Indigenous people 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, Article
> 25, 2008, p. 10)

Notably, the declaration also emphasizes the diversity of Indigenous ways of being,
knowing, and doing around the world in its articulation of Article 15: “Indigenous peoples have
the right to the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations which
shall be appropriately reflected in education and public information” (United Nations, 2008, p.
7, emphasis added). The document illustrates recognition of the shared experience of colonialism
on Indigenous peoples, as well as the importance of educational systems that support specific
and diverse Indigenous knowledge traditions.

Smith (2012), a Maori scholar and educator who has forged the way to reclaiming
research from an Indigenous perspective, echoed the importance of relationships and connections
between individuals, families, the land, and water. She stressed living in community as well as
respect for culture, ceremony, language, and maintaining an Indigenous world-view as
paramount to reclamation and revitalization: “in Indigenous frameworks, relationships matter.
Respectful, reciprocal, genuine relationships lie at the heart of community life and community
development” (p. 125). Guided by the wisdom of Smith’s (2012) words, I have deliberately
sought the guidance of an Elder and knowledge-keeper from the Indigenous Centre throughout this project.

Both the internationally situated *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and the regionally-based account of Maori ways of being, knowing, and doing offered by Smith identify common elements of culture, values, relationship, connection, community, land/place, and spirit across diverse global Indigenous communities. These core values also reside within broad Canadian perspectives on Indigenous knowledges.

**Canadian Perspectives on Indigenous Knowledges**

When moving the discussion of Indigenous knowledges from an international perspective to a country the size of Canada, it is vitally important to recognize the diversity of Indigenous peoples on this land. Culture is tied to language, community, and land. In Canada, over 213,000 people speak an Indigenous language, with more than 60 primary Indigenous languages spoken across Canada (Statistics Canada, 2011a); however, because of colonial policies and the Indian Residential School system, many Indigenous peoples in Canada cannot speak their traditional language. Moreover, many of these languages are now considered at risk of extinction (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2015). Language is tied to culture, and with more than 60 Indigenous language groups identified across Canada, one must also recognize that these language groups are further differentiated across and within communities through regional dialects (Statistics Canada, 2011b). If language embodies the unique worldview of Indigenous peoples, as Blackfoot scholar, Bastien (2004) maintained, then what is important to point out here is that these languages and cultures are at extreme risk due to the negative effects of our colonial history (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2015). With the loss of languages comes the risk of the loss of cultures. Bringing together the threads of language, culture, values,
relationship, connection, community, land/place, and spirit represents a beginning for framing Indigenous knowledges.

By gathering Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing under the four headings of Spirit, Heart, Mind, and Body, I do not mean to imply that Indigenous culture is homogeneous. Rather, I seek to provide a framework for understanding Indigenous knowledges through the work of Indigenous scholars, knowledge-keepers, along with allied academics within a model inspired by Archibald (2008) and George (2010). There is great cultural diversity within and across Indigenous communities of Canada, yet there is evidence of shared beliefs around the importance of respectful relationship with spirituality, people, community, land, animals, water, ceremony, and language (Archibald, 2008; Bastien 2004; Battiste, 2013; Curwen-Doige, 2003; Gallop & Bastien, 2016; George, 2010; Kovach, 2009). As noted previously, learning through relationship and connection to community and respected Elders and knowledge keepers is emphasized as central to Indigenous knowledge traditions (Archibald, 2008; Belanger, 2014; Iseke, 2010; Kovach, 2009). When writing about ethics and research with Indigenous peoples, Ermine, Sinclair, and Jeffrey (2004) referred to community as “the system of relationships within Indigenous societies in which the nature of person-hood is identified. This system of relationships not only includes family, but also extends to comprise the relationships of human, ecological and spiritual origin” (p. 5). A Métis scholar from MacEwan University and former Canada Research Chair in Indigenous knowledges and research, Iseke (2010) further emphasized the importance of relationship in Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing in her use of the traditional phrase, “all my relations: this expression is an affirmation of the relationship we share with all of creation . . . with this connection comes the responsibility to take care of and respect
all creation” (p. 89). For me, this phrase underscores the importance of relationship throughout all aspects of our lives.

Blackfoot Perspective on Indigenous Knowledges

It is important when considering Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing to focus on and include local Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy. The city in which this study took place is situated upon the traditional lands of the Blackfoot people. The college is also located on the traditional territories of the Treaty 7 peoples and is further recognized as ancestral homelands for Métis peoples. Betty Bastien, a scholar and member of the Blackfoot Confederacy in the Treaty 7 area of Alberta, Canada, spoke of Siksika knowledge as comprised of tradition. This tradition gives the Siksikaitsitapi an understanding of the world, ways of teaching, ways of learning, language, and how all of this is mediated through, and founded upon, relationship.

In order to regain our identity and maintain our way of life we need to have good relations. We don’t leave out prayer in anything we do. This is our way. The Spirituality, it is just part of the way of life. Being Siksikaitsitapi means you have to take care of your mental, your spiritual, your emotional, and your physical. All these things. (Bastien, 2004, p. 85)

Bastien explored the reciprocal nature of teaching and learning and emphasized the spiritual connection in all ways of being, knowing, and doing. Through her work, Blackfoot knowledge is seen as living knowledge, connected to the universe through relationship. It is the responsibility of the community to teach and pass on this knowledge to the next generation. The sharing of Blackfoot knowledge through her book is representative of the principle of reciprocity, an important and valued Indigenous approach to teaching and learning, where knowledge is created and shared through the practice of relationship.
This acknowledgement of language as culture represents the philosophical system of the Blackfoot people and is, as evidenced by international documents such as UNDRIP, the basis for epistemological understandings within, and across, Indigenous groups around the world. Bastien speaks to the importance of interconnectedness amongst diverse and universal elements within a Blackfoot context: “Language reflects the meaning and purpose that humans ascribe to their existence. Language contains the assumptions and relationships of people. In other words, language links the self to the universe” (Bastien, 2004, p. 129). Blackfoot perspectives of ways of being, knowing, and doing are grouped around the ideas of culture, ceremony, values, language, relationship, and connection to the land. This knowledge is particularly important for early childhood educators to experience and gain an understanding of, particularly when they work in environments that support Indigenous children and families. I further argue that this information is foundational for all learners in the work to support Reconciliation.

A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Indigenous Worldviews

In order to provide a conceptual framework for understanding Indigenous knowledges, I use a framework originally developed by Archibald (2008) and George (2010). The common values and beliefs found among diverse groups of Indigenous peoples are gathered under the headings of Spirit, Mind, Heart, and Body, and provide a useful framework for understanding Indigenous knowledges. This common framework for understanding Indigenous knowledges is vitally important given the diverse Indigenous peoples residing on Treaty 7 territory. This framing also allows me to lay out the metaphorical basis for my work by the interweaving of Indigenous knowledges with the practice of relationship working towards a nesting of social justice for post-secondary education.
The concepts of Spirit, Heart, Mind, and Body may also be thought of as the lenses through which one would be, know, and do from an Indigenous epistemological and pedagogical standpoint (Archibald, 2008; George, 2010). Indigenous worldviews are circular and holistic and convey great respect for the interrelatedness of all things; importantly, children are positioned at the center of the community (Ball & Pence, 2006; Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2013; Belanger, 2014; Preston, 2016; Rowan, 2009; Smith, 2012; White & Ottmann, 2016). As future educators of Indigenous children, it is vitally important that early childhood educators understand and have experience with Indigenous worldviews. In a pre-contact world, Indigenous ways of teaching children were informal, yet highly effective, and included observation, interacting, and learning directly from adults and other knowledge-keepers within the community (Archibald, 2001; Ball & Pence, 2006; Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2015; Iseke, 2010). As noted by many Indigenous scholars, development is dependent upon multiple intersecting and overlapping influences made up of relationships between individuals, family, community, and culture (Archibald, 2001; Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2013; Curwen Doige, 2003; Iseke, 2010; Preston, 2016).

Indigenous peoples are diverse. There is no pan-Indigenous way of being, knowing, and doing; however, overarching commonalities may be found using the concepts of Spirit, Heart, Mind, and Body (Archibald, 2008; George, 2010). Making meaning, or learning, is supported when all of our capacities—spirit, heart, mind, and body—are involved (Anuik & Gillies, 2012). By situating my work within this model for understanding Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy, I aim to provide a framework for exploring the stories of experience shared by non-Indigenous learners in the ECE program at my college.
**Figure 1**: Spirit, Heart, Mind, Body (adapted from Archibald, 2008; George, 2010)

**Spirit: Culture and Ceremony.** When viewed from an Indigenous epistemological perspective, the larger system of cultural beliefs and ceremonies of a particular society can be framed as Spirit (Battiste, 2013; Bastien, 2004; Curwen Doige, 2003; Kinzel, 2016). An Indigenous professor at the University of New Brunswick who specializes in early childhood education, Curwen Doige (2003) defined Spirit as it relates to Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing, as that which: “refer(s) to the immaterial aspect of one’s personhood that connects with otherness, including for some a life force or immanence, especially the Creator, or God” (p. 144). Spirituality is a way of considering and connecting with all of creation and what guides our choices and decision-making (Battiste, 2013; Bastien, 2004; Curwen Doige, 2003). This understanding is paramount for considering how to integrate Indigenous perspectives into an early childhood learning setting.
Spirit is that which connects us to all else in our world, both material and immaterial. Spirit supports individuals, families, and communities as they live in the world around them. Many Indigenous people reside in multiple cultural contexts including urban settings and, for these individuals, Spirit is the connection through culture and ceremony amongst and between these worlds (Battiste, 2013; Bastien, 2004; Curwen Doige, 2003; Nguyen, 2011; Restoule, Mashford-Pringle, Chacaby, Smillie, & Brunette, 2013; Smith, 2012; Taylor, 2017; Tremblay, Gokiert, Georgis, Edwards, & Skrypnek; 2013).

Recognizing that there is further complexity within a post-contact world, Hatcher (2012), a non-Indigenous professor of Indigenous Studies at Cape Breton University, argued that Indigenous people have a unique challenge as they live in two frequently overlapping worlds: the dominant culture and their own Indigenous culture. Each of these cultures has their own contextual learning that requires an understanding of each specific culture. Sociocultural scholars Munroe, Orr, Toney, Meader, and Borden (2013) similarly demonstrated the necessity for understanding varied contextual paths for the social and cultural success of the individual. As these scholars point out, Spirit for Indigenous learners exists in the context of culture, including political and social aspects of their community and ceremony that connects the community members with one another. Yet within a post-secondary setting, these types of relational connections are frequently under-represented or missing entirely.

A growing group of scholars now recognizes that supporting the Spirit by embedding learning around local and regional Indigenous cultures builds respect for that culture (Anuik et al., 2010; Curwen Doige, 2003; Gallop & Bastien, 2016; Kinzel, 2016; Milne, Creedy, & West, 2016; Nguyen, 2011; Pidgeon, 2008, 2016; Taylor, 2017). This has implications for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners; scholars of both Indigenous education and sociocultural
theory believe that in order to support Indigenous learners, education must engage both the dominant and their own cultural context, supporting the culture and ceremony necessary to live in both worlds (Anuik & Gillies, 2012; Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2013; Hatcher, 2012; Munroe et al., 2013; Taylor, 2017). Understanding that Spirit from an Indigenous perspective is about culture and ceremony requires an intentional pedagogical approach. Supporting culture and ceremony by respecting and incorporating the lived experiences of culture and ceremony supports both Spirit, from an Indigenous perspective, and learner success from an institutional perspective (Boon & Lewthwaite, 2016).

**Heart: Relationship and language.** When viewed from an Indigenous epistemological perspective, the concept of Heart refers to being in relationship with others—heart is about the power held by communities working together (Anuik et al., 2010; Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2013; Gerlach, Browne, & Greenwood, 2017; Kinzel, 2016; Stairs & Bernhard, 2002). Scholars of Indigenous learning propose that in order to recognize the multiple contexts within which Indigenous people operate, it is necessary to understand that for Indigenous individuals, Indigenous knowledges are equally important, if not more important, than dominant culture knowledge to empower and nourish strong families and communities once again (Anuik et al., 2010; Gerlach, Browne, & Greenwood, 2017; Hatcher, 2012; Munroe et al., 2013; Pidgeon, 2008; 2016; Stairs & Bernhard, 2002; Taylor, 2017; Tremblay et. al., 2013).

A strong storytelling tradition exists in Indigenous cultures. Knowledge is transmitted orally and provides a way for Elders and families to guide community members (Archibald, 2008). The traditional holders of Indigenous knowledges are the Elders and respected family members of the community (Ball, 2009; Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2013; Gerlach, Browne, & Greenwood, 2017; Iseke, 2010; Kinzel, 2016). The importance of these respected Elders and
community members sharing knowledge with learners—future generations of leaders—cannot be underestimated (Anuik et al., 2010; Hatcher, 2012; Iseke, 2010; Munroe et al., 2013; Stairs & Bernhard, 2002; Taylor, 2017). Elders transmit information, stories, and cultural teachings across generations through storytelling and the demonstration of actions or ways of being in a particular context (Anuik et al., 2010; Archibald, 2008; Ball, 2000; Hatcher, 2012; Iseke, 2010; Kovach, 2009; Munroe et al., 2013; Stairs & Bernhard, 2002). In exploring the ways that Indigenous communities connect learning at a community-wide level, Anuik et al. (2010) demonstrated the importance for Indigenous learners to listen to the Elders, family, and community members as they operate “within a network of social relations where all are connected by mutual respect” (p. 67). These connections and relational understandings are the essence of Heart and speak to the importance of creating similar connections within a post-secondary setting.

From an Indigenous perspective, the concept of Heart relates to the emotional process of perception that leads to action and makes connections (Anuik et al., 2010; Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2013; George, 2010; Kinzel, 2016; Tremblay et. al., 2013). Indigenous knowledges are not singularly focused on individuals; instead, a collective orientation focuses on the relationship between individuals and the world around them. When all learners have the opportunity to engage in supportive relationships with faculty, Indigenous, and non-Indigenous peers, they have greater chances of success (Gallop & Bastien, 2016; Gerlach, Browne, & Greenwood, 2017; Milne et al., 2016; Pidgeon, 2008, 2016; Stairs & Bernhard, 2002). For learners to cultivate social awareness, it is necessary for them to understand who they are in their community. This knowledge helps them build and exercise the relationship skills necessary to be successful within their communities (Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2013; Gerlach, Browne, & Greenwood, 2017; Pidgeon, 2008; 2016; Restoule et al., 2013; Stairs & Bernhard, 2002; Tremblay et. al., 2013). To
support success, learners need to be able to operate in culturally safe spaces in which they have the ability and possibility to co-construct knowledge through relationships (Anuik & Gillies, 2012; Stairs & Bernhard, 2002; Tremblay et. al., 2013).

Scholars of Indigenous learning indicate that when individuals develop their connection to Heart, they develop social awareness and learn the relationship skills necessary to operate in their cultural worlds and to become leaders in their community (Anuik et al., 2010; Curwen Doige, 2003; Gerlach, Browne, & Greenwood, 2017; Kinzel, 2016; Timmons, 2013). In interconnected systems with a holistic perspective of learning, emotions give power to people and sustain the relationships which support them and which support their community (Anuik et al., 2010; Curwen Doige, 2003; Gallop & Bastien, 2016; Munroe et al., 2013). Anuik et al. (2010) and Curwen Doige (2003) suggested that embedding learning that includes Indigenous cultures helps to build a sense of belonging and cultural respect that in turn represents the work of the Heart. Notably, this type of approach supports Indigenous learners, as well as non-Indigenous learners in their understanding of and respect for Indigenous culture through deeper engagement with Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing. This approach also extends the goals of supporting future Indigenous leaders in their development of culturally relevant leadership and communication skills appropriate to their community through role modelling (Tremblay et. al., 2013). Heart, from an Indigenous perspective, is about the importance of valuing authentic and respectful relationships.

**Mind: Connection and values.** The concept of Mind, from an Indigenous epistemological perspective, represents individuals’ connection of their skills and knowledge to their values and experiences, thereby creating understanding about their thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs (Curwen Doige, 2003; Hart, 2010; Kinzel, 2016; Munroe et al., 2013). In other words,
people need to connect their learning in a holistic way in order to support and nurture a deepening of self-understanding. Individuals need to be fully connected to who they are in order to make informed choices about how they will move forward in their lives.

Indigenous scholars speak of the Mind as the arena that combines perceptions and observations with the connections one has experienced and think about how they relate to each other. Mind is where conscious decisions are made about how to act based on the experiences we have had, the connections that we feel, and the cultural arena in which we operate (Anuik et al., 2010; Gallop & Bastien, 2016; Hatcher, 2012; Kinzel, 2016; Munroe et al., 2013; Pidgeon, 2008; 2016; Restoule et al., 2013; Taylor, 2017). Mind guides us to make choices and decisions based on the interconnectedness of everything and the relationships that we have with all things (Anuik et al., 2010; Battiste, 2013; Bastien, 2004; Curwen Doige, 2003; Smith, 2012). Mind is a connection between “morals, values, and learning (which is) fundamental to Aboriginal identity,” in other words, essential tools for respectfully and effectively operating in the world (Curwen Doige, 2003, p. 146). Mind, from an Indigenous perspective, is about connecting our values to our way of being.

**Body: Land and place.** Body, from an Indigenous epistemological perspective, includes confidence and self-efficacy, an understanding of who one is and how one behaves, grounded in one’s culture, community, and place (or land) (Anuik et al., 2010; Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2013; Kinzel, 2016; Restoule et al., 2013). The need for individuals to know themselves underscores the value of “instill(ing) a sense of pride in learners’ heritage, language, kinship ties, and nation” (Anuik et al., 2010, p. 78). Enacting Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing are “acquired through a creative, participatory involvement with Mother Earth. There is an inherent
trust in the learner and an intimate relationship between the learner and the knowledge” (Hatcher, 2012, p. 346).

Indigenous people are connected to the land in relationship with their culture and ceremony. There are connections between Body as land and place, and Spirit as culture. Place-based knowing is an intimate connection with people and their land. The land is the connection to culture, and land is culture within an Indigenous understanding (Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2013; Kinzel, 2016; Restoule et al., 2013; Smith, 2012; Taylor, 2017). The complex interconnected relationships that Indigenous peoples have with all of the universe are connected to place, to the land. In Bastien’s (2004) words, “The Earth is sacred; we perform sacred acts to return our relationship to its sacred balance” (p. 220). Body, from an Indigenous perspective, is about land and place, and a person’s relationship to that space. Indigenous knowledges or Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing are about relationships and connections throughout our physical, mental, and spiritual selves and can be best understood using the overarching categories of Spirit, Heart, Mind, and Body.

In order to set the current stage for incorporating Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy into post-secondary education, I now explore the current offering of literature on Canadian post-secondary efforts towards meeting the *Calls to Action* of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This overview provides a foundation for understanding the current post-secondary context in which this research project is placed, and how the incorporation of Indigenous perspectives could impact learners of all backgrounds and support the goal of working toward Reconciliation.
Canadian Post-Secondary Engagement with Reconciliation

As the following section illustrates, the Responses to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s *Calls to Action* have been both formal and informal from a variety of post-secondary institutions, post-secondary governing bodies, and associations across Canada. Of note, many non-Indigenous post-secondary institutions have embarked upon strategies to support the *Calls to Action* in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s final report. The number of institutional responses to this national call to action is promising; however, at this particular point in time, these responses are also just underway and therefore in the early stages of implementation. As a result, there is limited research regarding their progress or effectiveness. The following review of the literature represents an overview of the guiding themes found in a selection of public documents and academic writings that focus on Canadian post-secondary responses to and responsibility to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s *Calls to Action*. For ease of classification and exploration of themes, I organized the responses from post-secondary institutions into thematic streams that were found to be consistent across the institutions.

Engagement with Reconciliation in Post-Secondary Education

The move toward Reconciliation emphasizes the importance of truth telling, healing, and partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and communities, rooted in respectful relationships and dialogue. All documents reference the need for non-Indigenous faculty, staff, and learners to be exposed to the history, culture, beliefs, and realities of lived experience of Indigenous peoples (Academica Forum, 2016; Association of Canadian Deans of Education, 2010; Barnard, 2015; MacDonald, 2016; Czyzewski, 2011; Colleges and Institutes Canada, 2014; Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, 2017; Ottmann, 2013; Poitras...
Pratt & Danyluk, 2017; Universities Canada, 2015). This historical understanding is a requirement to move toward Reconciliation, as addressing this current gap in knowledge may lead to greater understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders. While Reconciliation is a stated goal in many documents and articles, only a select few address how this process could, and should, unfold.

**Indigenization in Post-Secondary Education**

In an article published in *University Affairs*, MacDonald (2016) explained Indigenization through a quotation provided by Shauneen Pete, an associate professor of education and executive lead for Indigenization at the University of Regina: “recentring Indigenous worldviews as a starting point for transformation” (p. 1). The theme of Indigenization of the overall structure, operation, and curriculum of Canadian post-secondary institutions appeared in each document reviewed. Across and within a variety of public documents, Indigenization of the academy was variously defined to include: Indigenous governance structures; the revitalization of Indigenous languages; respectful, collaborative research; and the inclusion of Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy to support all learners (Academica Forum, 2016; Association of Canadian Deans of Education, 2010; Barnard, 2015; MacDonald, 2016; Czyzewski, 2011; Colleges and Institutes Canada, 2014; Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, 2017; Ottmann, 2013; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2017; Universities Canada, 2015).

Another overarching theme within these documents—the creation of an Indigenous advisory committee that includes internal and external Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders to guide the Indigenization process—was emphasized. The authors highlighted that Canadian post-secondary institutions are heavily influenced by Western epistemology and pedagogy, and that it will be a challenge to remove the barriers of oppression this system can
maintain (Academica Forum, 2016; ACDE, 2010; Barnard, 2015; MacDonald, 2016; Czyzewski, 2011; CICAN, 2014; Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, 2017; Ottmann, 2013; Universities Canada, 2015). As a result, it is imperative in the process of Indigenization that post-secondary institutions hire more Indigenous faculty and staff to help guide how this work unfolds, and to ensure it is respectful of Indigenous perspectives.

**Transformative Learning in Post-Secondary Education**

As Mezirow (2003) explained, transformative learning refers to experiences that change the overall perspective of the learner. Transformation may occur through changes in understanding of the self, impacting one’s belief systems, and ultimately an individual’s behaviour. Transformative learning is connected with critical pedagogy because critical reflection upon our own positioning and power, as well as the power structures that operate in the world, may be transformational in those situations where conscientization arises from praxis (Freire, 2000).

The concept of conscientization developed by Freire means a process of analysis, reflection, and action through the posing of questions—within a relationship of trust—that can lead to transformation in personal beliefs and ultimately work to stimulate social change (Freire, 2000). It is my intention that reflection by faculty and leadership upon the multiple stories of experience will support the development of curriculum resources to embed Indigenous knowledges in the early childhood curriculum. Asher (2009), a social justice educator working within adult education, believed that writing and engaging with stories about one’s life may represent a form of conscientization. By engaging with texts of pre-existing curriculum in the adult education classroom or the post-secondary environment, relationships may genuinely form, and the learners’ life literacies (life knowledges) become valued (Asher, 2009; Kovach, 2009;
Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007; Tett, 2013). In my research, non-Indigenous learners engaged with their own stories and life experiences with Indigenous knowledges; this type of reflective engagement will help support the development of curriculum resources informed by Indigenous knowledges by helping educators understand where learners are positioned within a critical pedagogical approach.

The theme of transformative learning for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders emphasized the foundation of challenging assumptions through truth-telling. As emphasized under the theme of Reconciliation, the idea of understanding and acknowledging the history, culture, beliefs, and lived reality of experience of Indigenous peoples is an affirmation that this truth-telling is a requirement in order for transformative, reconciliatory education to take place. Of note, this idea also extends to structural change, as the authors highlighted the importance of questioning of power structures and privilege in post-secondary education as a move toward conscientizaton and praxis leading to social justice (Academica Forum, 2016; ACDE, 2010; Barnard, 2015; Czyzewski, 2011; CICAN, 2014; Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, 2017; Nxumalo & Cedillo, 2017; Ottmann, 2013; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2017; Ritchie, 2015; Universities Canada, 2015).

The implications from the above international and federal reports, and academic articles, along with findings from commissions for Adult Education, are this: the development of Indigenous education should be in the hands of the Indigenous community; post-secondary institutions and places of institutionalized adult learning should explore their previously unexamined epistemological and pedagogical practices as a means to ending Eurocentrism in educational systems; Indigenous and non-Indigenous people need to co-construct their education together to support success in both dominant and other cultural contexts (Atleo, 2013; Smith,
A move toward using critical pedagogy and narrative inquiry in post-secondary education has the potential to support these lofty goals.

**Adult Learning**

The historical underpinnings of adult education are grounded within a social justice orientation and the critical exploration of education and learning as it has evolved throughout time (Groen & Kawalalik, 2014a; Jarvis, 2010; 2011; Merriam et al., 2007; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Adult educators engage in relationships and dialogue with adult learners that seek to deeply, and critically, explore often controversial subjects such as equity, privilege, and human rights (Groen & Kawalilak, 2014b; Merriam et al., 2007; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). The foundation of adult learning is firmly tethered to a critical engagement with the human condition, as well as the systems and structures that anchor society in a particular orientation, and, most notably, how these positionings might be challenged (Grace, 2013). This view of adult education is echoed by Silver (2013), an Indigenous academic who argued that short-term training aimed at upgrading skills is not what is needed to make widespread societal change, but rather the focus should be on engaging adult learners in dialogue that supports local community through exploration of social justice visions for the future. As an educator engaged in community-based education, Silver (2013) further articulated this vision in his deliberate connection of adult education to the work of decolonization.

Adult educators Groen and Kawalilak (2014a), both academics in the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary, outlined the following historical philosophical orientations in adult education: liberal, progressive, behaviourist, humanist, and radical/critical. These groupings signify the philosophical foundations with which adult educators may align themselves. A variety of adult educators attribute the origins of adult education with those
developed in adult literacy, community development, and social action to include those which have ultimately branched out to include vocational training (Groen & Kawalilak, 2014a; Jarvis, 2010, 2011; Merriam et al., 2007; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). While adult learning extends across multiple and diverse realms, I align my work with the radical/critical tradition of adult education in which educators and learners dialogue together to explore their lived experiences and to work together to challenge the systems of oppression in contemporary society.

According to scholars Janet Groen and Colleen Kawalilak (2014a), traditional theoretical approaches to adult learning encompass three main perspectives: correspondence, coherence, and complexity theories. Correspondence theories are those which view learning as a mechanical process involving individual change. Coherence theories involve a deeper engagement with the body, mind, self, and others as engagement with learning occurs. Finally, complexity theories recognize that there are multiple factors at play during learning; these can shift throughout learning, thereby changing again the landscape.

Representing the diversity of learners across the globe, adult learning theory also engages with multiple ways of learning. In order to situate my research within the world of adult learning, I will explore the four main models: andragogy, self-directed learning, experiential learning, and transformative learning, to identify the adult education approach that most closely corresponds to my own research intentions. Andragogy is the art and science of teaching adults. Citing Knowles (1980), Groen & Kawalilak (2014a) identified six assumptions about how adults learn: purpose, self-directed, have and use lived experiences, relevance, and motivation. As one particularly powerful mode of learning that is initiated by learners throughout their lives, self-directed learning involves four dimensions: personal autonomy, willingness to self-manage, control over how learning will occur, and individual pursuit of learning. Envisioned as a particular way into
self-directed learning, experiential learning focuses on the lived experiences of the adult learner and sees learning as the practice of engaging with these life experiences in a way that transforms the learner through the experience of knowing (Groen & Kawalilak, 2014a; Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Merriam et al., 2007). These types of transformative learning approaches will be further explored in the next section of this dissertation as a way to think about and envision how curriculum grounded in transformative outcomes can be fostered.

Adults’ experience of transformative learning through experiential learning may provide a place from which to build relationship, confidence, competency, and to challenge existing unequal power structures through a critical pedagogical approach. Experiences are contextual and socially constructed, and when adult learners are supported to use their own lived experiences to explore their personal narratives, the potential to gain power through this understanding is potent (Asher, 2009; Clark, 2010; Merriam et al., 2007; Silver, 2013; Tett, 2013). This strengths-based approach to learning includes and privileges life experience, ascribing potential power to the learner. Educators need to value the body of knowledge, life experience, and perspectives of each individual learner in order to bring the impact of transformative learning into the classroom. Beyond this, the act of engaging in social justice learning through the exploration of life stories and experiences is an educational methodology that supports Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing—a storytelling approach—where the respectful inclusion of this type of learning approach may instigate social change.

I am interested in research with an emphasis on an equitable relationship for the research team (researcher and participants) in the process of working toward social justice (Carson, 1990; Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). In examining how education can serve to stimulate positive social change, adult educator Choules (2011) maintained that social change education is experienced
and understood contextually. This means marginalized students and dominant culture students will likely have different views surrounding a situation of oppression. In other words, situations that oppress some learners will privilege other learners. She explicated five instructional techniques that are adapted to work with students from dominant social/cultural groups: ideology critique or conscientization (analysis, reflection, and transformative action through the posing of questions); positioning and authority of the educator as someone who is situated by their perspective but who encourages critical thought; andragogy, the role of student life experience in learning which supports exploration of how they are oppressed and how they are privileged; facilitated dialogue, where the instructor supports balanced power relations; and, finally, an acknowledgment that there are a range of ideological/political positions present in the classroom. Once again, there is strong support for a critical pedagogical approach to adult education that seeks positive social change.

In many instances, the current system of post-secondary education adopts a dogmatic approach to education wherein students are positioned to be compliant participants in the system; importantly, learners are not always prepared to engage in critical thought (Giroux, 2014; Gramsci, 1971; Groen & Kawalilak, 2014a, 2014b). It is my intention to support adult learners to engage in critical thought that can help propel and sustain positive social change. The theoretical traditions of transformative learning and critical pedagogy within adult education provide important insights into how my work can be shaped to move towards social justice education.

**Transformative Learning**

Transformative learning theory highlights the importance of disorienting dilemmas or experiences as a catalyst for challenging previously unexamined assumptions within learners’ thinking (Cranton, 2011, 2013; Mezirow, 2003; Taylor, 2008). This theory of impactful learning
encourages critical thinking on the part of the learner about their assumptions and beliefs, which can ultimately challenge and shift how they see the world around them. Seen as essential elements to transformative learning, disorienting dilemmas can move the learner to adopt a critical stance within the space of reflection, and ideally bring learners to adopt a paradigmatic shift in their previous thinking (Cranton, 2011, 2013; Taylor, 2008). The stages of transformative learning have been described as having 11 phases: a disorienting dilemma; a self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame; a critical assessment of assumptions; recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change; exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions; planning of a course of action; acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans; provisional trying of new roles; renegotiating relationships and negotiating new relationships; building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships; and, a reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s perspective (Groen & Kawalalik, 2014a; Kitchenham, 2008). With the recognition of the complexities involved in this type of learning, it is also important to consider how these elements may be incorporated into a pedagogical approach with social justice aims.

According to Mezirow (2003), transformative learning can also be thought of as learning that elaborates existing frames of reference, prompts learning new frames of reference, and transforms both points of view and habits of mind (as cited in Jarvis, 2010). Another adult educator, John Dirkx (2011), further explored transformative learning as a process that focuses in on one’s subjectivity and spirituality, with a greater emphasis on the emotional component of critical reflection (Groen & Kawalilak, 2016; Taylor, 2008). My own interest in transformative learning stems from the social-emancipatory view of education in which social change is at the
core of learning. This altruistic view of transformative learning regards people as constantly 
reflective subjects who act in order to transform the world to a just and equitable place (Cranton, 
2011, 2013; Mackinley & Barney, 2014; Moss, 2014; Taylor, 2008). Here the potential of 
transformative learning aligns with the social justice goals of critical pedagogy as articulated by 
Freire (1970; 1992). The question then becomes, how do we accomplish this type of learning?

One solution is found within narrative inquiry; this methodological approach aligns with 
that of transformative learning theory (Groen & Kawalilak, 2016). Using narrative inquiry as a 
methodological foundation for research enables learners (and researchers) to explore the 
connections between lived experience and the societal and cultural contexts in which we operate, 
giving learners (and researchers) the opportunity to critically explore these connections (Asher, 
2009; Dominicé, 2000; Groen & Kawalilak, 2016; Silver, 2013). Social justice educator Asher 
(2009) suggested that supporting students to use personal narrative to critically examine their life 
stories will support a move toward decolonization. She proposed “writing our own narratives of 
home that reflect both histories of colonization/oppression and efforts of resistance that engage 
both our similarities and our differences” (p. 4, italics in original) as a pedagogical strategy that 
supports social justice.

In much the same way, Clarke (2010) explored narrative learning as a form of adult 
learning closely tied to transformative learning. She believed we make sense of our lives by 
telling stories: recognition of these stories as culturally bound is implicitly understood. For 
Clarke, learning occurred at three levels: hearing stories, telling stories, and most poignantly for 
my research purpose, recognizing where we are positioned in these narratives. She focused her 
study on the level of narrative which has the most potential for individuals to critically analyze 
where they are situated. This potential hinges on a critical moment: “once I was aware of the
story I was in, the possibility of changing the plotline presented the opportunity for change” (p. 10). Her assertion that critically exploring one’s own narrative as one of the most important elements in transformational learning applies equally to Indigenous contexts, where critically reflective practices can be liberating and transformational (Silver, 2013).

As these authors attest, certain aspects of transformative learning theory are closely aligned with critical pedagogy; a shared emphasis on critical reflection of assumptions and beliefs is vital to shifting power relations (Cranton, 2011, 2013; Groen & Kawalilak, 2014a; Jarvis, 2010; Kitchenham, 2008; Mackinley & Barney, 2014). These theories differ in their respective emphasis on social justice orientations as the goal. While transformative learning may have social justice goals, critical pedagogy has social justice as a foundation. I turn to critical pedagogy to support equity and to attempt to transform the system from within (Glass & Newman, 2015; McLaren, 1999; Smith, 2012).

**Critical Pedagogy**

As one of the most recognized scholars of social change, Freire was both a socialist/critical theorist and a humanist; not too surprisingly then, he is often recognized as one of the primary founders of critical pedagogy (Findlay, 1994; Hall, 1998; Jarvis, 2010; McLaren, 1999). Freire explored social justice education in his work with marginalized populations in Latin America. He developed the pedagogy of the oppressed to combat the banking system of education, which sees educators and education systems holding power over the marginalized and imparting knowledge to them. As Freire (1970) stated, “education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositaries and the teacher is the depositor” (p. 72). This banking system of education does not change the situation of oppression, it only changes the perceptions of the oppressed to become more accepting of the oppression (Freire, 1970,
In his work of introducing literacy to Brazilian peasants, Freire “continually emphasized the importance of attaining critical consciousness through engaging the immediate concrete reality” (Findlay, 1994, p. 120). Of significant interest, Freire believed that relationship is nurtured and developed through narrative, and that authentic dialogue can foster revolution (Freire, 1970, 1973; Jarvis, 2010).

Growing out of his work with marginalized populations, Freire developed a theory which is entitled *pedagogy of the oppressed*. In critical pedagogy, teaching is viewed as a political act imbued with praxis, or action against oppression, as the ultimate goal. This goal is achieved through a process of conscientization or critical consciousness (Findlay, 1994; Freire, 1970, 1992; McLaren, 1999). In brief, Freire’s pedagogical innovation focuses on laying bare the sources of oppression; learners work towards achieving a common understanding of the systemic problems they encounter in everyday life. This awareness is followed by strategies and action to change these problematic structures (Findlay, 1994; Freire, 1970, 1973, 1985, 1992; McLaren, 1999).

Drawing on Freireian notions of critical consciousness and praxis, I am inspired to explore the idea of social justice education, or critical pedagogy, through narrative inquiry as that which could help combat the continued process of colonization by Eurocentric epistemology and pedagogy through our current North American post-secondary education systems (Asher, 2009; Choules, 2011; Findlay, 1994; Gaudiano & de Alba, 1994; Glass & Newman, 2015; Gramsci, 1971; Mackinley & Barney, 2014; Moss, 2014; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo, Kocher, Elliot & Sanchez, 2015; Tett, 2013). Social justice education works to change the structure of oppression with the goal of ending the oppression. A path forward through the dialogic process of co-

Freire (1970, 1992) believed that educators and students need to work outside of the colonial system in order to change the system and achieve liberation from oppression. I am working in a western Canadian context and within the post-secondary system. Keeping in mind these realities, it is important to note that critical pedagogy should also be particular to location. Gaudiano and de Alba (1994) articulated the importance of location and place when working with critical pedagogy:

To this extent there exists not one social system in general, but specific systems constructed by different groups inhabiting a totality of determinations and diverse relations, which must be understood in order to formulate a pedagogy of liberation. Consequently, one cannot speak of a pedagogy but must speak instead of pedagogies which respond to particular necessities, interests and conditions. Therefore, from both dominant and critical perspectives, the response of schooling to social demands must be particular and multiple. (p. 128)

It is also essential to note that social change education or social justice education taught in a Western European culture is going to look quite different than education taught through the particular cultural context within which Freire worked (Choules, 2011; Gaudiano & de Alba, 1994). In Latin American countries there is limited social support for marginalized peoples, while in North American countries there is a stronger social safety net, which greatly impacts the perception of oppression by both the marginalized and dominant groups. That said, there are many Indigenous groups who would argue that colonization is still very prevalent in our nation (Alfred, 2015). Thus, social change education is experienced and understood contextually—
marginalized students and dominant culture students will have different views of a situation of oppression. Situations that oppress some will privilege others (Choules, 2011; Gaudiano & de Alba, 1994; Moss, 2014). It is the role of the educator in these situations to ask critically reflective questions that engage learners to look at exactly how oppressive situations can privilege some and how privileged situations can oppress others (Asher, 2009; Choules, 2011; Dominicé, 2000; Findlay, 1994; Freire, 1970, 1973, 1985, 1992; Gaudiano & de Alba, 1994; Moss, 2014; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015; Smith, 2012).

I believe that marginalized groups are keenly aware of the ways in which they are oppressed, even if they do not fully understand the reasons behind their oppression (Asher, 2009; Choules, 2011; Gaudiano & de Alba, 1994; Smith, 2012). This belief convinced me that I needed to engage with an Indigenous Elder to help develop an interview guide, the process for the conversational interviews, and request their guidance for the study. This helped me to address some of my concerns about power inequities inherent in critical pedagogy yet I was also restricted to only collecting data from the student participants and not the Indigenous Elder.

In addition to the concepts of critical consciousness and praxis articulated by Freire in his approach to adult learning are his other ideas of cultural action through dialogue, humanism, and hope (Freire, 1970, 1973, 1985, 1992). Cultural action through dialogue is part of the process of conscientization, or critical consciousness, by which students and educators engage in genuine relationship and dialogue in order to critically analyze and reflect upon the social, cultural, and political aspects of their lived experiences. Reflection upon how these social, cultural, and political modes may be in contradiction and work in oppressive ways supports the development of critical consciousness (Freire, 1973, 1985). Participating in and reflecting upon this dialogue supports a move to the recognition of common humanity and the inherent rights and dignity for
all peoples (Freire, 1973, 1985). Taking part in reflection and dialogue about important social, political, and cultural modes in an individual’s life and in wider society helps individuals become more aware of oppression. This awareness and recognition of a shared humanity often leads to praxis or the desire to act and become part of the process of change (Freire, 1970, 1973, 1985).

Freire’s notion of hope is important to keep in mind in the work of Reconciliation (1992). True to his own pedagogy and aptly named, Freire revisited his earlier works and reflected on the importance of hope in critical pedagogy in *The Pedagogy of Hope*. What is particularly relevant for this research study and for future reconciliatory work in post-secondary education is Freire’s recognition that the work of critical pedagogy, through critical consciousness and praxis, requires hope—hope that social justice and the end of oppression is possible (Freire, 1992). The relationship between students and teachers is foundational to the idea of critical pedagogy and of hope. These relationships must be authentic and work toward critical exploration of the world around us (Freire, 1992).

In a slightly varied form of Freire’s original ideas, Asher (2009) believed that engaging with contradictory narratives about one’s life can be a form of conscientization. For instance, exploring contradicting narratives of common experiences can be brought into the adult learning classroom or the post-secondary environment. These explorations can serve as a foundation for the development of authentic relationships in the classroom. In these explorations, learners’ life literacies (life knowledges) are valued and brought into the frequently contradictory content of the pre-existing curriculum. Learners can then engage critically with the curriculum and social change can occur (Asher, 2009; Gaudiano & de Alba, 1994; Merriam et al., 2007; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015; Tett, 2013). Taking a co-construction approach to curriculum validates the life experiences and knowledge of both the students and the instructors. While the process
itself may be discouraged by those entrenched in hierarchical approaches to curriculum, this approach enables a leveling of power between the student and the educator. With this power sharing comes social change. I believe that gathering stories of experience from early childhood education learners will support the co-construction of a framework for decolonizing post-secondary institutions.

I am most interested in the empowerment experienced by students when recognizing their own stories (Asher, 2009; Bruner, 1991; Clark & Rossiter, 2008; Gaudiano & de Alba, 1994; Smith, 2012). It is in this form of narrative learning that Clarke and Rossiter (2008) placed the power of critical pedagogy to “examine the experience of schooling in a person’s life . . . [to] explore . . . personal and structural inequities in educational institutions” (p. 68). Narrative inquiry and critical pedagogy align with Indigenous methodologies through the practice of relationship and movement toward social justice (Kovach, 2009).

It is important in this work to note that Indigenous systems of learning and knowing are different from Western European systems of learning and knowing. For Indigenous peoples, Western European epistemological and pedagogical systems are a relatively recent development spread through the process of colonization (Battiste, 2013; Gaudiano & de Alba, 1994; Kinzel, 2016; Kovach, 2009; Merriam & Kim, 2008; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015; Smith, 2012). Choules (2011) underscored the need to critically examine our chosen theoretical framework when applying the framework to different cultures. In understanding that I am bringing together Indigenous and non-Indigenous traditions, it seems most appropriate to work with a theory that bridges traditions, such as critical pedagogy. I believe that using critical pedagogy to engage with the college structures can lead learners (and the college administration) to conscientization and praxis.
Summary

In this chapter, I outlined the path for my research study by exploring how Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy, or Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing, are experienced by the research participants, who comprised a sampling of non-Indigenous adult learners in the ECE program at the college.

To deepen understanding and provide context for the research, I explored Indigenous literature and engaged concepts of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing. I introduced Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy through the concepts of Spirit, Heart, Mind, and Body (Archibald, 2008; George, 2010) to help bring understanding to the concepts of Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy. These diverse ways of being, knowing, and doing may be viewed holistically through the framework of Spirit, Heart, Mind, and Body (Archibald, 2008; George, 2010). Spirit contains the themes of culture and ceremony. Heart includes the themes of interpersonal relationship and language. Mind contains the themes of connection and values. Body includes the themes of land and place. Any efforts to incorporate an Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy at a post-secondary institution will need to be contextually based and fluid, as epistemology and pedagogy are constantly evolving entities (Pidgeon, 2008; 2016).

Within this chapter I have also explored select articles and documents from the post-secondary sector to establish the landscape of Reconciliation for this demographic. To lay the theoretical foundation for this research study, I engaged with relevant topics within adult learning and moved on to explore transformative learning and critical pedagogy as educational paths toward social justice.

In Chapter 3, I describe the elements of research design that were used to guide the study and how these incorporated the theoretical frameworks introduced in this chapter.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN

Overview

In this study, I have employed the qualitative approach of narrative inquiry through storytelling, oriented by critical pedagogy, and supported by Indigenous methodology. I have chosen this methodology in order to understand non-Indigenous adult learner perspectives on how Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing may be experienced in the ECE program at the college. Exploration of these stories has helped to identify non-Indigenous learner understanding of Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy, and this knowledge is anticipated to inform the development of curriculum resources for the ECE curriculum to support the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Call to Action #12.

The Calls to Action issued by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission speak to the moral and ethical obligation that Canadian government and society must assume to reconcile Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. The following research study overview represents a step toward meeting Call to Action #12 under the heading of Education: “We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families” (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action, 2015, p. 2).

In this chapter, I explore an overview of the methodology used in this research study. I begin with an overview of the research design as informed by the overarching research question. I then explore the qualitative research paradigm, Indigenous methodology, and narrative inquiry or storytelling. Next, I explore the research setting, the context of the college and the ECE program, and describe the methods of participant selection. I describe and justify the data collection methods, which include interviews with non-Indigenous early childhood education
learners to gather their stories of experience of Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy, as well as the collection of institutional documents. I then describe and justify the choice of data analysis and synthesis methods. Finally, I outline ethical considerations as well as issues of trustworthiness within this study and provide an outline of the limitations and delimitations of this study.

**Storytelling**

I believe in the power of telling stories. My 25 years of experience in teaching has demonstrated that many people use story to construct meaning and to situate themselves, both of which are important steps on the road to social justice (Archibald, 2008; Bear, 2016; Clarke, 2010; Clarke & Rossiter, 2008, Dominicé, 2000; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012). Storytelling offers a powerful tool for learners and college leadership to instigate social change and transform lives. I am currently part of a system of education that perpetuates colonialism by continuing the use of hegemonic forms of Western European epistemology and pedagogy. Knowing this, I also believe it is the role of the dominant social/cultural group (the colonizers) to work toward decolonization and Reconciliation by taking an active role in this work and this is why I have chosen to include non-Indigenous participants in this study (Archibald, 2008; Battiste, 2013; Kovach, 2009; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2017). I have used storytelling to examine the social and institutional structures of which we are a part and to locate ourselves in these stories; in this way, I have chosen to “write my way” toward transformational social change (Asher, 2009; Clarke & Rossiter, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Merriam et al., 2007). As both Kovach (2009) and Archibald (2008) remind us, understanding comes out of critical reflection on our lived experiences.

After receiving approval from the Research Ethics Board at both the University of Calgary and the college, I followed proper protocols before speaking about my research project.
with an Anishinaabe Elder at the Indigenous Centre. The Director guided me in this process. Once I obtained the Elder’s guidance regarding the purpose of the research, I began recruiting research participants. I met regularly with staff and the Elder at the Indigenous Centre to request their support to further develop the project, to ensure that I honoured cultural protocols and to arrange for the Elder to lead an information session for the research participants about the meaning of Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy, or Indigenous knowledges, from her perspective. Because of the timing restrictions and focus of my study, I was unable to gain ethical and cultural permissions to collect data on this information session and what the Elder shared.

In order to recruit participants, I communicated by email with all second semester early childhood education learners at the college, as well as posted a news item in our learning management system to welcome anyone who might like to take part in this research project. I interviewed five learners about their experiences of Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy in the ECE program at the college. The interviews took place in January 2018, after three of the participants had completed the Indigenous history, identity, and culture course, and at a point in which two of the participants had completed four weeks of the 12 week course.

Prior to the individual interviews, I organized an Elder-led group information session to frame Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing from an Indigenous perspective. I felt this event was important to help students develop a common understanding of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing among the interview participants, so that they could better understand and respond in telling their stories of experience with Indigenous knowledge. All five members of the group participated in the information session in January prior to their individual interviews.
Upon completion of my study, I intend to bring the stories of the research project to the academic, early childhood education, Indigenous community, and wider college community. I have presented on this work in progress at two academic conferences over the past two years. I intend to further share the study by presenting the findings to the college executive and delivering presentations to the wider college community in the fall of 2018. I hope and expect that the college executive and the college community will continue to support and work toward Indigenizing efforts supported by the findings of this research study, and that this study will aid the development of resources for the ECE curriculum that respectfully incorporates Indigenous epistemological and pedagogical practices in a meaningful and purposeful manner. Of primary importance to me is that I am able to share this research widely with Indigenous and non-Indigenous early childhood educators and other who work in the field of human services. I believe that it is vitally important to continue this work toward Reconciliation and meeting the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. As with all work that values relationship and working with Indigenous community, it is important that I continue to seek guidance from Elders and knowledge keepers as I embark on knowledge mobilization.

**Research Questions**

In order to explore the inclusion of Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy in the ECE curriculum, the research study focuses on answering the following overarching research question: How do non-Indigenous adult learners in an early childhood education program at an urban post-secondary institution experience the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges within their program? The following sub-question follows from the primary research question: How can this knowledge inform the development of resources to support the inclusion of Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy in the early childhood education program?
Ontology and Epistemology

Ontology

Drawing upon critical socio-constructivism, I believe in the possibilities of story and personal agency to challenge existing power structures (Freire, 2000; Kincheloe, 2008). I believe in the existence of multiple realities, that reality has no absolute truth but has relative truth according to different experiences, perceptions, and relationships to power. Knowledge is socially and contextually situated and created through relationship in interaction with others, the environment, and the context of any situation. This viewpoint aligns with many Indigenous beliefs that speak to the importance of relationship and relational practice in all our interactions (Archibald, 2008; Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2013; Bishop, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Jones & Jenkins, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Little Bear, 2012; Smith, 2012). My ontology appears commensurate with Indigenous methodology as outlined by Nêhiyaw scholar Kovach (2009) “substantive consideration is given to Indigenous research frameworks as a relational approach within research theory and method that finds alignment with a range of Western qualitative methodologies” (p. 16).

Epistemology

Historically, research and knowledge practices are contextually situated and at the post-secondary level, knowledge practices represent power granted to the dominant group, who in this case are typically of Western European heritage (Archibald, 2008; Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2013; Kovach, 2009; Little Bear, 2012; National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2015; Smith, 2012). Glass and Newman (2015) and Smith (2012) argued that researchers need to be constantly critical of their own motives and actions to ward against epistemic injustice (knowledge injustice) that continues the process of colonization. With these words of wisdom at the forefront
of my thoughts, I explored the experiences of non-Indigenous learners in the ECE program at the college through a constantly reflective approach.

As a person who is just beginning to explore my own Métis identity, I felt uncomfortable approaching Indigenous research from a solely Western European framework; in coming to make sense of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing, I needed to also take up the work of Indigenous scholars and Indigenous methodology—both for the study and for my own learning. Understanding that mine was a complex positioning, I aligned socio-constructivist and critical pedagogical perspectives with Indigenous methodology as outlined by Kovach (2009).

The positioning of ally/Indigenous research has also been taken up by scholars Alison Jones and Kuni Jenkins (2008) in their Pakeha (white) and Maori researcher collaboration exploring stories of Aorearoa/New Zealand.

An educator and scholar, Kovach (2009) posits that Indigenous methodologies are a valid form of qualitative inquiry that align with an interpretive, relational approach to research wherein an integrated, holistic view of knowledge is honoured. Kovach frames Indigenous research methodologies as both resistance research and anti-oppressive research that requires critical reflexivity on the part of the researcher. This idea is also articulated by critically-aligned scholars Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2008) in a discussion comparing critical methodologies and Indigenous inquiry. It is therefore important that I continually reflect on my own relationship with power and representation as a non-Indigenous director in a position of power at my college. I believe an Indigenous methodological approach using storytelling is particularly relevant for my research, as it explores the experiences of non-Indigenous learners with Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing as a path toward Reconciliation. This relational, narrative, holistic methodological approach has “act(ed) as a nest” (Kovach, 2009, p. 42) to contain and support
this research study. Kovach’s work also seemingly parallels the work of Paulo Freire (2000), as both scholars emphasized the importance of a critical pedagogical approach in both teaching and research.

Gathering stories about Indigenous education in early childhood education at the college has helped identify learner understanding of Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy and may help support the development of curriculum resources for introducing Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing into the ECE program. Using critical pedagogy nested in Indigenous methodology to engage with the college curriculum can lead learners (and the college administration) to conscientization. I believe one of the most effective ways to reach this goal of conscientization is through working with stories, along with a critical approach.

**Theoretical Framework**

Critical pedagogy as a theoretical framework supports reflection and action, or praxis, which in turn holds the potential to lead to transformation of oppressive social or cultural structures (Freire, 2000). Freire’s work used dialogue about and critical reflection upon situations of power and oppression to work toward the elimination of dehumanizing oppression. In the instance of this research study, it was important to consider the power relationships in the college environment that may be explored through engaging with critical pedagogy. For individuals to move toward Reconciliation, we need to begin to explore and understand our own situations of power and privilege. I share Freire’s belief that people need inquiry and praxis (reflection plus action) to transform and liberate themselves from oppression, and to recognize situations that oppress others. Scholars such as Glass and Newman (2015) and Smith (2012) argued that the current system of education in Canada is oppressive; therefore, I turned to critical pedagogy to explore issues of equity and to ultimately inspire change within the system as we move toward
Reconciliation. My plan is to present this study to college leadership with the hope that they will support the inclusion of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing in the ECE program in a holistic, sustainable fashion.

Methodology

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is located in the space where lived experience intersects with factors of power, society, and culture (Archibald, 2008; Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2013; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Kovach, 2009; Little Bear, 2012; Smith, 2012). Our location as researchers within this tradition situates us in a moment in time that is socially, contextually, and power-laden as we engage Indigenous knowledges (Archibald, 2008; Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2013; Bear, 2016; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Kovach, 2009; Little Bear, 2012; Smith, 2012). We live a storied existence; the stories we tell ourselves and others represent our reality (Archibald, 2008; Bear, 2016; Kovach, 2009).

Narrative Inquiry and Storytelling

Narrative inquiry through storytelling is a qualitative methodology that supports understanding individual or collective experience (Archibald, 2008; Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2013; Bruner, 1991; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012). I drew from socio-constructivism where my belief that reality is relative and subject to interpretation met my objective of understanding the stories of experience from my participants. Narrative inquiry, understood through the act of storytelling and oriented by critical pedagogy as a theoretical framework, explores conscientization and praxis as the realization of inequitable power structures, involvement in those power structures, and a move toward social justice (Archibald,
Exploring the experiences of non-Indigenous adult learners and Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing required a blend of non-Indigenous and Indigenous methodologies. I begin this section of the chapter with a brief exploration of Western European scholars who have written about the narrative approach over several years, and then move on to explore Indigenous scholars’ interpretations of narrative inquiry or storytelling. I have purposefully ended this section with the foundational work of Indigenous academics upon which my work rests. I align my research with an Indigenous approach to research as oriented by Indigenous scholars Kovach (2009) and Smith (2012), and storytelling as outlined by Kovach (2009) and Archibald (2008), all of whom prioritize and emphasize the importance of relationship in Indigenous knowledges.

As narrative scholars, Clarke and Rossiter (2008) explained narrative learning as using stories to teach and to learn. They tie this methodological approach to three learning theories: constructivist learning wherein the learner constructs meaning and creates a sense of self; experiential learning wherein an individual’s experience is the focus; and critical pedagogy wherein learning through stories can be liberating and transformational. Other scholars concerned with story such as Merriam et al. (2007) divided narratives into four categories: cultural, family, individual, and organizational. There are many ways of learning through narrative: the hearing of stories, the telling of stories, the recognition of stories, and the use of stories to transmit culture (Archibald, 2008; Bear, 2016; Bruner, 1991; Clarke, 2010; Clarke & Rossiter, 2008; Kovach, 2009). Pierre Dominicé (2000), an educator from the University of Geneva, saw great potential in “the individual empowerment arising from educational biography, [and] the collaborative interpretation of learning and educational experiences that helps students
reflect more deeply on those experiences” (p. 3). I believe that these overarching Western European views of narrative inquiry are commensurate with an Indigenous storytelling approach through a focus on story or narrative as a way of understanding, sharing, and exploring our reality.

Narrative inquiry from an Indigenous storytelling perspective utilizes story as a way of understanding, explaining, and exploring the world and our place within it (Archibald, 2008; Battiste, 2013; Bear, 2016; Kovach, 2009). In Indigenous Storywork, Jo-ann Archibald (2008) underscored the importance of a principled approach to using storytelling for educational purposes, and includes the following concepts: respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy to explore how stories support us to reflect upon our place in the world. While Archibald spoke to using Indigenous stories through an Indigenous approach and context, I will be using her approach to examine the stories of non-Indigenous learners’ experiences of Indigenous perspectives because Indigenous knowledge traditions reside at the heart of this work.

As stated previously, my own use of storytelling in this research study aligns with a qualitative approach and use of narrative inquiry or story as explored by Margaret Kovach (2009). Kovach is a Nêhiyaw (Cree) scholar who used a Nêhiyaw methodology for her research. As a non-Cree researcher, I wanted to ensure that I did not appropriate this methodology to further my own colonial research agenda. Instead of appropriation, I used the guiding principles within the Indigenous methodology articulated by Kovach (2009): in line with Indigenous values, has decolonizing aims, has community accountability, the researcher is an ally and will do not harm, to nest this research within, rather than claiming a Nêhiyaw tribal-specific methodology.
From an Indigenous perspective, storytelling, or the act of telling one’s story, is a way of coming to know one’s own reality and experience (Archibald, 2008; Battiste, 2013; Bear, 2016; Kovach, 2009). I was interested in coming to understand the experiences of non-Indigenous adult learners as they explore their own engagement with Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy. Exploring this understanding through engaging with story as oriented by critical pedagogy and an Indigenous approach to storytelling was well suited to support this research study. Kovach indicated the alignment between story and critical pedagogy when she wrote, “stories reveal a set of relations comprising strong social purpose” (Kovach, 2009, p. 95). I was interested in searching for contextualized realities that interpret truth according to the experience of individuals and to use those stories to work toward social justice (Kovach, 2009). The idea of engaging with story to claim, and re-claim, identity and power is further articulated by Cree academic Tracy Bear (2016) when she expressed “if this is my body, where are my stories?” (p.27). In writing about the challenges of accessing her own family’s stories, Bear explored her own history with storytelling through a decolonizing approach.

I have approached this research through the blending of Indigenous and non-Indigenous methodologies as I believe this blended approach best represents my own history and understandings. I did this by exploring the stories through a relational, storytelling approach (Archibald, 2008; Goulet & Goulet, 2014; Kovach, 2009), applying elements of Western European methodology by using analysis through themes previously identified as important to Indigenous academics in a review of the literature. I then shared a re-storying as viewed through my own lens to tell the multiple stories of experience, thus honouring and maintaining individual voice through selected excerpts (Kovach, 2009). Kovach (2009) illustrated this use of story within Indigenous methodology clearly: “story as method elevates the research from an
extractive exercise serving the fragmentation of knowledge to a holistic endeavor that situates research firmly within the nest of relationship” (p. 99).

I focused my research on non-Indigenous learners experiencing Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing in early childhood education using their storytelling as a path toward liberation and transformation in the development of curriculum resources to support the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Call to Action #12. Each learner came from a specific cultural narrative that identified the social and cultural expectations of his/her group; in addition, each learner had his/her own family narrative of roles and expectations. Each had his/her own individual story of experience with post-secondary education. All of these complex and frequently disparate narratives worked together to form the story of the person. “Stories are who we are. They are both method and meaning. Stories spring forth from a holistic epistemology and are the relational glue in a socially interdependent knowledge system” (Kovach, 2009, p. 108). We make sense of our lives by telling stories; these stories are socially and culturally bound (Archibald, 2008; Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2013; Bear, 2016; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; King, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012).

Adult literacies, or life knowledges, provide a place from which people can work to build relationship, confidence, competency, and to challenge existing unequal power structures through a critical pedagogical approach (Freire, 2000). Literacies are contextual and socially constructed; when adult learners are supported to use their own life experience literacies to explore their personal narratives, they gain knowledge about themselves and acquire power to make change (Archibald, 2008; Asher, 2009; Battiste, 2013; Kovach, 2009; Tett, 2013). University of Edinburg academic, Lyn Tett (2013), connected literacy learning with conscientization when she identifies “literacy learning as [a process] enabling adults to learn, not
their place in society, but about their place in society so that they may collectively act to change it for the better” (p. 281). In this passage, we are reminded of the power of experiences that challenge our assumptions, values, and beliefs. This is where the power of storytelling and critical pedagogy lay.

**Research Setting and Context**

The college where I undertook the research is a large public community college in Western Canada, located in an urban setting with a population of over one million people. The early childhood education (ECE) program at the college has approximately 400 learners per semester in part-time and full-time studies. The ECE program graduates 100 early childhood educators annually. Students are predominantly female, and the average age of the learners is approximately 28 years old.

The ECE graduates from our college represent a large portion of the workforce in agencies that support children and families in the metropolitan region; these agencies include those that provide service to many Indigenous children and families. The college is working toward an Indigenization strategy to support the *Calls to Action* as they relate to post-secondary education in the Western region of Canada. This research will support the development of curriculum resources that address the Call to Action #12.

In a very recent move, the college has made the Indigenous history, identity, and culture course mandatory for the 2017 intake of the ECE program. This course is a 45-hour credit course covering the following topics: colonization and racism; Indian Residential Schools; the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; comparative and socioeconomic health and related issues; Indigenous rights, self-governance and self-determination; poverty, community, and economic viability; restorative justice; identity and the role of culture, language, tradition, spirituality, and
the land; historic treaties, treaty rights and modern land negotiations; and theories of assimilation, integration, and recognition.

The addition of the Indigenous history, identity, and culture course was made in part because of the importance of the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges and traditions in a program that graduates learners who will eventually work in child care centres and family support centres that serve a high population of Indigenous peoples.

Reconciliation Efforts at the College

The college is situated on the traditional territory of the Treaty 7 Nations and the ancestral homelands of the Métis Nation. The leadership at the college recognizes the relevance and importance of the *Calls to Action* from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and has embarked on a formal process of engagement with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s *Calls to Action* as they relate to post-secondary education, as discussed below.

**Engagement with Reconciliation.** The college has a long history of partnering with Indigenous communities from the Treaty 7 Region, and the Métis Nation, with a history rooted in respectful relationships and open dialogue. In response to requests from individual nations, the college has delivered customized community studies and health programming in community. My own experience has been with the delivery of the early childhood education diploma program in community, the development of an Indigenous education assistant certificate in partnership with community, a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council grant to work in partnership with community, and a recent proposal with ministry approval to deliver a child and youth care diploma with an Indigenous focus.

As of 2017, the college has mandated the Indigenous history, identity, and culture course into the early childhood education, social work, and addiction studies programs in order to
educate their students about the history, culture, beliefs, and lived realities of Indigenous peoples in Canada, with a particular focus on the Treaty 7 region and the Métis Nation. This mandatory course was originally developed for another community studies program and was re-written in 2015 by an Indigenous faculty member. This change in ECE curriculum resulted from leadership recognition of the importance of the *Calls to Action* from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its responsibility to work toward Reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in its own context.

**Indigenization.** The college has created an Indigenous advisory committee, comprised of deans, directors, Elders, alumni, and external expertise including Indigenous academics, to begin formulating an overall Indigenization strategy for the institution. The college has also commissioned a research firm to complete a study of Indigenization strategies across the country to help inform the college strategy. The leadership of the college has recognized the systemic nature of the prevalence of Western European epistemology and pedagogy in our institution and the need for systemic, rather than surface, change.

It has been my intention with this research project to explore the storied experiences of non-Indigenous early childhood education learners as their first encounters with Indigenous knowledges will provide me with an understanding of the depth of development the ECE curriculum may require to support Reconciliation. I believe that this narrative exploration, oriented by critical pedagogy, may provide a means to encourage conscientization and praxis in the wider college community through the identification of non-Indigenous learners’ understanding of Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy in the ECE program.
Participants

I interviewed five learners who are currently registered in the ECE program at the college. All participants identified as female and non-Indigenous. Because the majority of the ECE students are non-Indigenous and because I myself identify as non-Indigenous, I chose to focus this study on the experiences of non-Indigenous students. Four were Canadian citizens and one was a landed immigrant. All participants are of adult age. Three of the learners have completed the Indigenous history, identity, and culture course as part of the early childhood education certificate and diploma course requirements for graduation and two of the learners are currently registered in the course. All five participated in the Elder-led information session.

Data Collection Methods

In seeking to gain information about learners’ early experiences with Indigenous perspectives, I have collected a variety of data from both the research participants and the college. Along with the individual participant interviews, I also collected institutional information such as policy documents, meeting minutes, and demographics on our learners.

Process

I adhered to the requirements of the Research Ethics Board at both the University of Calgary and the college for formal ethics approval. Adherence to ethical requirements involved acquiring permission from both academic institutions, the non-Indigenous learner research participants. Although there was no data collected from the Elder or the information session she led, it was important to respect the principles of Indigenous research and to follow cultural protocols and gain the approval and support of the Elder who was involved with the project. Permissions were acquired formally, and involved the development of a trusting relationship
with all stakeholders, as well as following the cultural protocols outlined by the Director and Elder of the Indigenous Centre.

I have formed a strong relationship with the Director of the Indigenous Centre at the college, and I requested her guidance on this research project early on, particularly in reference to how I should approach the Elder with proper protocol. I met with the Elder from the Indigenous Centre to ask for her guidance prior to contacting research participant learners to ensure that I adhered to cultural sensitivities and moved forward with the exploration of Indigenous knowledges in a respectful way. The fact that I was in a position of power at the college, and was at the same time exploring the stories of experience of Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy necessitated extra steps. Importantly, I needed the support and guidance of the Elder and the Indigenous Centre throughout the duration of this project.

**Recruitment**

In order to recruit participants, I communicated with all second semester early childhood education learners at the college by email, and I posted a news item in our learning management system. I attended all first semester classes to provide information about the project through a brief presentation in an effort to recruit participants. Potential participants were encouraged to contact me through my academic email address if they were interested in participating. Five students reached out to me with their interest in participating.

**Conversational Interviews**

The research participant interviews were individual, conversational style, informal story sharing experiences, of approximately one-hour duration. I was granted permission by the research participants to audiotape the interviews for transcription and subsequent member checking. All participants decided to adopt pseudonyms and the collected data, both audiotapes
and transcribed interviews, was stored within a locked cabinet in a locked office within a secure
section of the college. All data collected from this study will be permanently destroyed after five
years in accordance with the research ethics board process requirements.

In order to explore the inclusion of Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy in the ECE curriculum, my research study concentrated on the following overarching research question:
How do non-Indigenous adult learners in an early childhood education program at an urban post-
secondary institution experience the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges within their program?
This primary research question has led to a following sub-question: How can this knowledge
inform the development of resources to support the inclusion of Indigenous epistemology and
pedagogy in the early childhood education program?

The interviews were a story sharing experience developed from the research question, as
I was interested in how non-Indigenous ECE learners story their experiences, if any, with
Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy at the college. The question of how these stories of
experience can inform the creation of curriculum resources supporting the inclusion of
Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing in the ECE program will be explored in the
analysis and future recommendations sections of this dissertation. Because I had brought an
Indigenous storytelling approach to these participant interviews, I did not have set interview
questions; instead I used a relational, storytelling approach with an interview guide (Archibald,
2008; Kovach, 2009). I began each interview by sharing information about my own subjectivity
within this project which included my desire to work toward Reconciliation. I then asked the
research participant to share her own story of experience as it pertained to the mandatory course
and the Elder-led information sessions.
In order to collect information that could help answer the research questions, the following questions served as a guide during the storytelling sessions:

**Guide for Participant Storytelling Interviews**

1. What brought you to this institution for the ECE program and why are you interested in this project?
2. Reflect on your understanding of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing as outlined by the Elder from the Indigenous Centre.
3. In what ways might this understanding and knowledge be important for you?
4. Tell me about your own personal experiences in the ECE program at this institution with Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing?

The five individual interviews were tape recorded and transcribed prior to thematic analysis and re-storying as described in the next section of this chapter.

**Analysis and Synthesis of Data**

Narrative inquiry is a methodology by which the researcher looks at the stories of individuals to extract meaningful information. I have approached this work by looking for the ways in which the storytellers make sense of and construct their realities (Archibald, 2008; Bruner, 1991; Creswell, 2015; Kovach, 2009). I have used Indigenous methodology as a nest in which to situate this research about how participants experienced early learning experiences with Indigenous knowledges (Kovach, 2009). Analysis within the context of this study means “observing patterns and behaviours and making sense of those observations which are highly contextualized and particular” (Kovach, 2009, p. 131). In this way, I was able to explore important concepts identified by Indigenous academics and community members in the work toward Reconciliation. By maintaining individual stories of experience and then presenting a
collective experience viewed through my own lens, I was respectful of the ways in which the participant stories were represented which is supportive of Indigenous methodologies and storytelling.

Analysis

**Findings.** Selected portions of the research participants’ stories comprise my findings. These stories represent the raw data from which I have worked to explore themes previously identified in the literature. I asked the research participants to confirm that I accurately transcribed their stories, and I also afforded them the opportunity to add anything they thought they may have missed during the time of the interview. This raw data is comprised of 24 pages and is secured in password-protected computer, housed in a locked office.

**Thematic analysis.** Qualitative research is interpretive, one in which the researcher uses personal assessment and brings their own perspectives into the interpretation (Cresswell, 2015). Given the relative importance of the concepts found in the literature review when working toward identifying Indigenous knowledges, I chose to explore the stories of experience of the research participants using the themes identified in advance through the literature review: Spirit, Heart, Mind, Body, Reconciliation, Indigenization, and Transformative Learning. I also left open the possibility that I might find different themes arising from the individual story experiences of each participant, since they were free to story their reality in their own unique ways (Kovach, 2009). As a final step in data gathering, I shared the thematic analysis with the research participants, the Elder, and the Director of the Indigenous Centre to ensure that I accurately represented their answers and to seek their feedback on the themes that I identified. There were
no revisions required by the participants, the Elder, or the Director and I was guided to continue the work.

Synthesis of Story Data

Interpreting and re-storying. The participant stories revolved around the personal experiences of the learners as they participated in classes, programs, and free time in the ECE program at the college. After transcribing their stories, I brought the individual stories of experience to the participant group and asked that they read the interpretation, to ensure that I have told their stories accurately and shared their own story of experience. I also brought these five stories of experience to the Elder and Director involved in the project to ensure that the stories support working in a “good way” with the Indigenous community at the college, as we work toward the development of curriculum resources for the ECE program (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Lather, 1986 a,b). Finally, to the extent possible, I have connected the themes and research participant stories to weave together a collective story of experience that honours each individual’s story (Archibald, 2008; Creswell, 2015; Kovach, 2009; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). It is important to note that in choosing to use Indigenous methodology and storytelling, I have consciously chosen to use each participant’s story in a way that keeps the story intact (in its collective form) as this focus is holistic and is an important element of Indigenous methodology and Indigenous storytelling (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009).

Ethical Considerations

The history of research with, or rather on, Indigenous peoples has not been a positive experience for most Indigenous people (Archibald, 2008; Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2013; Kovach, 2009; Little Bear, 2012; Smith, 2012). It has primarily been a history of outsider researchers
coming into communities and taking knowledge for purposes which have not been supportive of Indigenous communities or peoples. Conversely, outsider research has frequently been used to create policies and processes that damage Indigenous peoples and communities (Archibald, 2008; Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2013; Kovach, 2009; Little Bear, 2012; Smith, 2012). While I did not work with Indigenous learners in this study, I explored how Indigenous knowledges were received by non-Indigenous learners, and I engaged with Indigenous knowledge-keepers. With this type of involvement with Indigenous knowledge traditions, I needed to ensure that I respected and honoured the necessary cultural protocols, as well as heeded the guidance of the Indigenous Centre and the Elder involved in this project. It was my intention to focus my research on how non-Indigenous peoples at the college can effectively work toward Reconciliation as outlined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action #12. I have taken an issue identified by the broader Canadian Indigenous community through the Truth and Reconciliation Committee and focused my efforts on improving the ECE programming at my college through the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives. Ultimately, I wish to work toward Reconciliation at our institution by working collaboratively with others.

The ethical considerations of working with human subjects are of paramount consideration; these ethical considerations are magnified when working with Indigenous knowledge traditions and knowledge keepers who have a negative history with research and researchers (Archibald, 2008; Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2013; Kovach, 2009; Little Bear, 2012; Smith, 2012).

The purpose of this research was to identify learner understanding or experience with Indigenous knowledges in the ECE program. The recommendations drawn from the research will be used to determine how to embed an understanding of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and
doing into the early childhood education curriculum throughout the program by building upon the curriculum of the Indigenous history, identity, and culture course. Understanding the power differential in my college role, I needed to maintain a professional and trusting working relationship with the course instructor(s) in order to provide context for the project and to reassure the course instructor(s) that the focus of my work was on curriculum development of the ECE program overall rather than any evaluation of their course. I also included explicit text in the consent form that the research project was designed to serve my doctoral degree work.

The research participants and I needed to form trusting relationships with each other in order for this research project to move forward. I minimized any harm that may come to research participants and Elders through their involvement in this project by ensuring participant anonymity in this study. I was also cognizant that I must be gentle with how I represented the participants in the study as they are young learners, new to Indigenous knowledges and research. I met with the Elder and Indigenous Centre Director several times to share the research design and to ensure that they both had the opportunity to seek clarification and make suggestions for changes. I also arranged check-ins with the participants and the Elder at each stage of the project to ensure that I was following proper protocols and expectations of participants and Indigenous knowledge-keepers (Archibald, 2008; Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2013; Creswell, 2015; Kovach, 2009; Lather, 1986a,b; Little Bear, 2012; Smith, 2012). While this was an important aspect of my study, their guidance was limited to oversight to ensure that I was following cultural protocols. I took extra steps to ensure that the stories of the participants were clearly presented in the research findings, and that they were presented respectfully (Archibald, 2008; Battiste, 2013; Creswell, 2015; Kovach, 2009).
Trustworthiness

Validity is a term that has typically been used in quantitative methodology to denote that
the research is trusted and researches what it has intended to research. This concept arose out of
quantitative, positivist traditions where a verifiable truth is deemed possible, and that belief is
buttressed by the idea of research activities best positioned as objective and unbiased (Lather,
1986 a,b). In the study, I approached the concept of validity from a cultural perspective and have
chosen to use the term trustworthiness over that of validity (Creswell, 2015; Kovach, 2009;
Lather, 1986 a; Smith, 2012). Cultural validity is that which is accepted and supported by
community as being trustworthy and good for the community. By interpreting credibility through
the lens of cultural validity, which seeks validation from community, I can claim that I have done
work in a “good way” where its process and product are valued by the community involved. The
Elder involved in this project found the project to be culturally congruent (trustworthy) and of
value to the Indigenous college community as well as the early childhood education
community’s move toward Reconciliation (Archibald, 2008; Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2013;
Creswell, 2015; Kovach, 2009; Little Bear, 2012; Smith, 2012). Additionally, the research
participants confirmed that I expressed their stories from their perspective.

The project has transferability for the wider research community because it is supported
by the research participants and the Elder who confirmed its credibility, and these beginning
efforts demonstrate a positive step toward Reconciliation within our post-secondary educational
Because this project is specific to a particular place and time, it does not have generalizability to
a wider population or locations.
In an effort to maximize the potential for doing work in a “good way” in my research project, I strove to be transparent about my research goals, form long-term relationships with the Indigenous college community, in an effort to inform the development of curriculum resources toward Reconciliation within our institution (Archibald, 2008; Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2013; Kovach, 2009; Little Bear, 2012; Smith, 2012). Ultimately, because of the importance of place-based knowledge, I believe it is vital that Indigenous knowledge traditions and research involving Indigenous knowledges in this project be validated by local Indigenous communities.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

**Limitations**

My belief is that knowledge is socially constructed and contextually situated. I also believe that using narrative inquiry or storytelling along with critical pedagogy involves questioning of the term validity, and to whom such questions apply. My research on how Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy is experienced by non-Indigenous learners presents ethical questions such as the following: What does it mean for a non-Indigenous person to be doing this research, and how can non-Indigenous people ethically speak to Indigenous topics given they lack lived experience? These questions speak to deliberate choices made and also to limitations as I will not be able to gather data that speaks to any Indigenous students’ experiences of Indigenous knowledges in the ECE program. This is also representative of the small number of Indigenous students in the ECE program. Similarly, I must continually ask myself if my study was, and is, ethically situated. I believe that I was open and transparent with my research practices throughout this research process. Due to timelines of this research project and consideration of the necessary protocols around research working with Indigenous community members, I did not have REB permission to document and share the personal communications.
that I had with the Elder and the Director of the Indigenous Centre. This is a significant limitation as this guidance was an integral and valued component of this project. This research has also been limited by a lack of generalizability, as it represents the stories of experience of five adult learners in a particular time, place, and space. My own reflexivity in regard to the interpretation and re-storying of the stories of experience of the adult learners is a limitation.

Despite the fact that I have brought the re-storied work back to both the learner participants and the Elder, I realize that because of my privileged position, I interpreted this work primarily through my own subjectivity and lens. There is also the possibility that the participants responded to my questions according to their perception of my own desire to work toward Reconciliation that I had articulated at the outset of the interviews. The timing of when participants were interviewed for this study is also of note. The ECE program at the college is four semesters long. I chose to interview learners in their second semester because the only formal coursework including Indigenous knowledges in contained in the first semester and this has impacted the study because I do not know if they will experience Indigenous knowledges at other future points in time during their program. Finally, this study is restricted by the small participant group size, as well as the strict requirements of anonymity placed upon the doctoral and dissertation process through the research ethics standards set by the University of Calgary.

**Delimitations**

I have focused on a specific aspect of Reconciliation by seeking ways to incorporate Indigenous knowledges in the ECE program, as a means of meeting Call to Action #12 from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I have also focused my research on the experience of non-Indigenous learners with a regionally specific version of Indigenous epistemology (Anishnaabe Elder) and pedagogy in the ECE program at the college and have not explored the
experiences of other cultural, epistemological, or pedagogical ways. I have also chosen to not explore the experiences of Indigenous ECE students in our program but instead focus on the experiences of non-Indigenous students and further explore possibilities of their role in Reconciliation. The research did not assess the particular forms of Indigenous history, identity, and culture course material included in our program, nor the course instructor(s) but may have implications for curricular development moving forward.

**Summary**

Narrative inquiry through storytelling is a qualitative methodology I implemented in this research study in an effort to blend Western European and Indigenous methodologies (Kovach, 2009). The recent efforts toward Reconciliation at the college where I work indicated that the institution is ready to support the inclusion of Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy in the ECE curriculum. By deciding to utilize the college where I am employed as the research setting for my study and to interview non-Indigenous early childhood education learners regarding their stories of experience with Indigenous ways of being and knowing, I have been able to identify aspects of non-Indigenous learner knowledge regarding Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy. This knowledge will help inform curriculum resources to support the inclusion of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing throughout the ECE curriculum, as a move toward meeting the Truth and Reconciliation (2015) Call to Action #12. I believe the insights gained through this study will strengthen the overall program offering.

In the next chapter (Chapter 4), I offer the participant stories of experience working with Indigenous knowledge traditions at my college as the findings from my study along with my analysis of these stories. I also present my interpretation of the collective story of these experiences within the next chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Overview

In this chapter, I present findings derived from conversational interviews exploring non-Indigenous student early learning experiences with Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy. This methodology allowed me to understand non-Indigenous adult learner perspectives about how Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing were experienced in the early childhood education (ECE) program at the college. Exploration of these stories helped to identify non-Indigenous learners’ understanding of Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy, and this knowledge will inform the development of future resources for the ECE curriculum to support the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Call to Action #12, which calls for the development of culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Indigenous families. This curriculum development will enhance the teaching of Indigenous knowledges in the ECE program. As the majority of students in the ECE program at this college are non-Indigenous, the learning stories of non-Indigenous students are meant to support the development of curriculum resources enhancing non-Indigenous understanding of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing and work toward Reconciliation.

I gathered the stories of non-Indigenous learners as a method of rich qualitative data collection that, as a secondary outcome, moves the participants toward conscientization through praxis (Archibald, 2008; Freire, 2000; Kovach, 2009). In Chapter 5, I will explore this work through the lens of critical pedagogy within an Indigenous storytelling approach that views story as a holistic method of understanding the world (Archibald 2008; Kovach, 2009). Critical pedagogy as a theoretical framework supports reflection and action (praxis) that may lead to transformation of oppressive social or cultural structures; this social justice focus is an integral
part of Indigenous methodology and is foundational to the goals sought within this research study (Kovach, 2009). It is my intent to highlight the praxis experienced by the participants as a positive by-product of beginning to experience Indigenous knowledges. By exploring the non-Indigenous learners’ stories of experience with Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing, my aim is to support the development of curriculum resources representing potentially transformative resources that work toward social justice.

I interviewed five learners who, at the time of the study, were registered in the ECE program at the college. The five participants were all in the second semester of the ECE diploma program and all attended college full time. Four of these interviews were conducted in person and one was conducted through email exchange. Because of the relational aspects of the conversation interview, the interview conducted through an email exchange was much different in tone as it took the form of a textual exchange yet this interview represented the strong conviction of the participant in working toward Reconciliation. Despite the difference in context, the email interview was retained as part of the study due to the participant’s strong desire to be included in the study. The participants were all non-Indigenous and were either Canadian citizens, landed immigrants, or refugees of adult age. Three of the learners interviewed for this study had completed the mandated Indigenous history, identity, and culture course as part of the early childhood education certificate and diploma course requirements for graduation; two took the course in the semester during which I conducted the research. The difference in understanding of Indigenous knowledges between those having completed the mandated Indigenous history, identity, and culture course and those who were part way through the course was noted as a potential factor affecting this study. However, I did not note a significant difference in responses or in themes identified from the participants who had and had not
completed the course. The pseudonyms chosen by the participants at their request were Lexa, Willow, Theresa, Tammy, and Mariella.

Each student attended the Elder-led information session exploring Indigenous knowledge traditions, or ways of being, knowing, and doing, from an Anishinaabe perspective. After the information session, four students participated in individual conversational interviews which were audio-recorded and transcribed. Each student verified that the transcription was an accurate representation of the interview. One of the students was unable to attend face-to-face interviews due to scheduling challenges but participated in an email exchange during which the same interview guide was used. These conversational interviews formed the qualitative data. The research participant interviews were individual, conversational style, informal story sharing experiences of approximately 60 minutes in duration and held in a private meeting room at the college.

I was interested in how non-Indigenous ECE learners story their experiences with Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy at the college. Because I explored experiences with Indigenous knowledges, I brought an Indigenous storytelling approach to these participant interviews, maintaining the essence of each individual’s story by keeping their stories separate. I did not have a set of structured interview questions and instead used a relational, storytelling approach with an interview guide (Archibald, 2008; Brinkman & Kvale, 2015; Kovach, 2009). I began each interview by sharing information about my own subjectivity within this project, as this supports the relational practice that is foundational in Indigenous methodology (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015; Kovach, 2009). I then asked the research participants to share their own stories of experience as they pertained to the mandatory course, Elder-led information sessions, and the ECE program overall.
In order to support the inclusion of information that answered the research question, the following questions served as a guide during the storytelling sessions:

1. What brought you to this institution for the ECE program, and why are you interested in this research project?

2. Reflect on your understanding of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing as outlined by the Elder from the Indigenous Centre, and in what ways might this understanding and knowledge be important for you?

3. Tell me about your own personal experiences in the ECE program at the college with Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing?

4. What would you like to see included in the ECE program with regard to Indigenous knowledges?

Narrative inquiry is a methodology by which the researcher examines the stories of individuals to derive greater meaning or understanding of a phenomenon (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). I approached this work by looking for the ways in which the storytellers made sense of and constructed their realities, with a specific focus on their early learning experiences with Indigenous knowledges (Archibald, 2008; Bruner, 1991; Creswell, 2015; Kovach, 2009). I used the term analysis to mean “observing patterns and behaviours and making sense of those observations which are highly contextualized and particular” (Kovach, 2009, p. 131).

The findings from the qualitative data and an explanation of the procedures followed to collect and organize the data detailed within this chapter. Given the importance of the themes identified in the review of the literature, I explored the stories of experience of the research participants, using the themes identified in advance: Indigenous knowledges (Spirit, Heart, Mind, Body), Reconciliation, Indigenization, and Transformative Learning. I also deliberately left open
the possibility of emergent themes. I offer a description of key qualitative findings through an exploration of identified themes from individual student conversational interviews.

**Story Gathering**

The perspectives and experiences of five students were explored through individual conversational interviews. It is important to note that these perspectives represented initial experiences with Indigenous knowledges and therefore represented the student participants’ early learning. The non-Indigenous student participants demonstrated a desire to work toward Reconciliation through their participation in this research project, and because of this strong desire and their lack of experience with Indigenous knowledges or research, I felt it was important to be gentle with them with regard to their views and opinions. I fear that being too harsh may turn these students away from the difficult work of Reconciliation. Many of the views did not demonstrate a breadth and depth of understanding of Indigenous knowledges; rather, they highlighted the history of colonial assumptions and perceptions regarding Indigenous peoples and Indigenous knowledges.

The researcher transcribed the audio-taped interviews and sent the transcripts to the research participants for verification. Once the transcripts were verified as accurate representations of the conversations, the researcher analyzed the data manually to explore themes identified in the literature review: Indigenous knowledges (Spirit, Heart, Mind, Body), Reconciliation, Indigenization, Transformative Learning, and any emergent themes. In keeping with a storytelling approach, I first present the participant’s individual stories of experience. Then, the themes found across the separate interviews are collectively explored. Finally, I summarize the qualitative findings through my own collective, re-storied rendering.
Student Interviews and Stories of Experience

The stories of Lexa, Willow, Theresa, Tammy, and Mariella (pseudonyms) provided an in-depth understanding of early learning experiences with Indigenous knowledges in the ECE program at the college. Each of the five participants indicated a strong desire to both participate in the research project and to work toward improving relationships between Indigenous and settler peoples. This section summarizes each student’s experience as portrayed through the conversation-style interview.

Lexa

Other than the information session led by the Elder, I haven’t had any personal experiences with how an Aboriginal Elder would transfer her stories and knowledge to children. I haven’t had that experience personally, but I would LOVE that experience.

(Lexa, personal communication, January 19, 2018)

Lexa was 18 at the time of the interview. She was in the second semester of her four-semester ECE diploma program. She had completed the mandatory course on Indigenous history, identity, and culture in her previous semester, and she attended the Elder-led information session in the week prior to her interview. Lexa was an eager participant and launched excitedly into conversation. She leaned forward and used her hands expressively for most of the conversation. She had lived her entire life in this city. Lexa entered the ECE program after volunteering in a centre for children with disabilities. It was during this volunteer opportunity that she found she enjoyed working with children. What follows represents what she shared with me during our conversation about her experiences with Indigenous knowledges in the ECE program.

When asked to share her interest in this research project, Lexa noted that she had previous learning opportunities about Indigenous history in her high school social studies
classes. She spoke about several Indigenous friends in high school who shared some of their cultural ways with her and how these experiences motivated her to find out more on her own and subsequently to participate in this research project. Because of this previous life experience, Lexa became interested in Indigenous history and especially interested in ceremony during her time in high school. She held a particular interest in the topic of Indigenous worldviews and how these worldviews differ from her own. Lexa expressed a desire to give feedback about the ECE program and her experiences so that the college may improve the courses with respect to the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges. She also disclosed that she was “learning new things and different points of view” at the college.

When reflecting on the Elder-led information session, Lexa stated how deeply grateful she was to the Elder for sharing her stories, stating perhaps somewhat pre-emptively “I learned everything from her!” What Lexa understood from the Elder’s stories of her Indian Residential School experience was that despite attempts to eradicate her culture, the Elder had managed to retain many of her cultural traditions. In recognition of this, Lexa conveyed a deep respect for the Elder and also conveyed a desire to learn more from her. When reflecting further on the stories of Indian Residential School and speaking of a disciplined lifestyle, Lexa stated: “not everything about residential schools that Aboriginal people took away was negative; it wasn’t always negative.” The statement illustrates a lack of depth and breadth of understanding of the impact of Indian Residential Schools on generations of Indigenous children and families, as evidenced through the realities of intergenerational trauma.

When speaking of an understanding or the experience of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing gained during the information session and why this might be important to her, Lexa spoke about the legacy of intergenerational trauma and how important it was to learn
about history and knowledge from an Indigenous person’s perspective. This was an unexpected statement given her previous assertion that she believed not all about Indian Residential School was negative. From Lexa’s perspective, there was a difference in who teaches this subject: “In high school, the teacher was White and in the history, identity, and culture course, the teacher is Aboriginal. You get different points of view from it, right?” In this instance, Lexa identified the importance of learning about Indigenous history from an Indigenous perspective. Lexa felt it was important to have this knowledge so that she may support Indigenous children and families through her work as an early childhood educator.

When asked about any other experiences with Indigenous knowledges in her ECE program, Lexa could not name any outside of the mandatory Indigenous history, identity, and culture course. She stated that she would like to learn more about how to support Indigenous children and families impacted by colonial policies and the resultant intergenerational trauma. Demonstrating a deficit-based approach to Reconciliation, Lexa stated, “I want to better understand that [trauma] so that I can integrate my own beliefs and feelings to try to help improve the barrier between Whites and Aboriginal peoples.” She reiterated a strong desire to help all children because of her view that children have the potential to influence the future.

As the interview progressed, Lexa became more thoughtful, taking time before responding. She became animated again when she shared suggestions for incorporating Indigenous knowledges into the ECE program. She immediately expressed her view that non-Indigenous peoples needed to “address the issues” facing Indigenous peoples. She did not articulate how this should occur, nor did she reference any loss of privilege or power that she or other non-Indigenous peoples may experience once the issues are brought to light. Notable within this thought is that Lexa saw the role of non-Indigenous peoples as the ones who will fix
or “address the issues” facing Indigenous peoples. She further shared her belief that college leadership should incorporate Indigenous knowledges into all areas of the college and programming because “then you get to know it and become familiar with it and you want to know it on your own.” She referenced a desire to see Indigenous storytelling used as a means of knowledge transfer of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing in ECE courses. Lexa shared that each ECE course should incorporate Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing as part of the regular curriculum in order to provide early childhood educators with the knowledge and tools to support Indigenous children and families.

**Willow**

It is important, you don’t want to be like the residential schools and be like, we only do things this way and you can only speak this way and only do work this way. That is isolating the child from their background and their beliefs and the things they have been taught growing up. (Willow, personal communication, January 22, 2018)

Willow was 22 at the time of the interview. Like Lexa, she was in the second semester of her four-semester ECE diploma program. She had completed the mandatory course on Indigenous history, identity, and culture in the fall of 2017, and she also attended the Elder-led information session. Willow was a reflective participant and paused prior to speaking. She was thoughtful throughout the conversation. Willow grew up in this city. She took time off after high school graduation and entered the ECE program after hearing about it from a friend who attended a different program at the college. She knew that she wanted a career working with and helping children.

Willow appeared very interested in this research project for several reasons. She
referenced the fact that she learned about Indian Residential Schools in her high school years but that, according to her, “it wasn’t a huge deal.” As a result, she was quite puzzled when she registered for the ECE program and saw that the Indigenous history, identity, and culture course was a mandatory part of the program. She remarked quite candidly: “When I saw this was actually a class that was part of my program I was thinking it was kind of weird; I didn’t see how it was relevant. But then I was in the class and it was eye opening.”

When reflecting on her experience of the Elder-led information session, Willow shared that she enjoyed listening to the Elder’s stories and that these stories changed her way of thinking about Indigenous peoples and their history since colonization:

I thought everything she said was amazing, and it was kind of like eye-opening because I have never actually heard anyone speak about being in residential school. You just hear about it from your textbook or your teachers, but the Elder’s parents’ experiences of having their children taken [were different] . . .

It is notable in the above quote that Willow spoke about Indigenous history as if it was not a shared historical experience created together by non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples along with the actions of government, church, and individuals, but instead a siloed history of Indigenous peoples alone. Willow was particularly impressed with the resiliency demonstrated by the Elder and her family. When speaking about the impact of the information session and stories shared by the Elder, Willow stated, “hearing about that (experience) in class when we did projects . . . you really see that there’s been a lot of trauma and a lot of hurt and there still is and it still continues on, it is eye opening.”

With respect to what she learned during the information session and why this might be important to her, Willow was shocked at the different life that the Elder had experienced as a
child prior to residential school. She noted the difference: “Yeah, that was a very different life. I cannot imagine it. I think her parents taught her actual important survival things like how to be independent, how to do things.” She expressed how important it is as an early childhood educator to understand and incorporate Indigenous knowledges, because children “are going to have different backgrounds, right? They are all going to have different things that they do at home or their parents have taught them, so yes, it is important.”

When asked about any other exposure to the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges in her ECE program, Willow shared that most of her learning had come from the Indigenous history, identity, and culture class, and that she had not experienced any other content or information related to Indigenous ways of being, knowing, or doing in other classes. When summarizing her thoughts about her experiences outside of the college she stated, “I try not to be a judgmental person; I think it is easy for people to be like oh, natives or like whatever, they are just drunk, but you really don’t know what people go through in their life.”

Continuing her reflective approach in sharing her suggestions for incorporating Indigenous knowledges into the ECE program, Willow noted: “All children are important. No one child is more important than any other. (Indigenous knowledge) is relevant and I didn’t really see that at first. I didn’t really get how it was relevant at first. But it is relevant.” In this passage, Willow expressed a desire to gain understanding of current lived experiences for Indigenous peoples, because this understanding is important to ensure that she supports all children—not because this learning is important, because we occupy Indigenous lands, or because Indigenous knowledges may be supportive for all children. She also stated she would like to know more about Indigenous cultures and ways of being, knowing, and doing. Importantly, Willow expressed concern for the ways in which the past plays out in contemporary
life: “we know a lot about what has happened in the past, and people still carry a lot of pain with them. What is being done to help heal the pain?”

Theresa

Before knowing, my question was, why are (Indigenous) people like this? After knowing I ask, why do people treat them like this? I came here as a refugee and Canada took me with open arms. They have this humanity in them, and my question is so why not with those people that are living in this country? These are the things I want to understand. (Theresa, personal communication, January 24, 2018)

My third student participant was Theresa who was 46 at the time of the interview. She was in the second semester of her four-semester ECE diploma program. She had completed the mandatory course on Indigenous history, identity, and culture and, as with the other participants, she attended the Elder-led information session. Theresa was a passionate participant. She was very emotional about the topic, and frequently took a moment to gather herself before continuing to speak. Theresa grew up in Pakistan and came to Canada as a refugee in 2016. She had trained in both business and education and was a teacher in her home country. She searched unsuccessfully for work after her arrival and eventually decided she needed to return to school to gain Canadian credentials. She knew she wanted to continue her career in teaching children and decided that ECE training would enable her to open her own early education centre. What she shared during our conversation about her experiences with Indigenous knowledges in the ECE program follows.

When asked to share her interest for participating in this research project, Theresa reflected upon her experiences with Indigenous peoples since her arrival in Canada in 2016. She
shared that her experiences had not been positive ones, witnessing multiple instances of drunk and disorderly behaviour on the downtown streets that seemed to align with stereotypes she heard from others. She explained: “I just put that in that [makes a motion of placing something aside] you know how you categorize [or stereotype] to understand? So, you start categorizing. You want to understand, and you want to label it and put it aside.” She emphasized the change in her perspective after learning a bit about Indigenous history. Thinking back to her own introduction to Indigenous learning, Theresa recalled: “Every time I think of all those things that happened to them, I cry.” She was visibly upset and held back tears at this point. “It was a very hard time and tough for me to go through the learning.” She was angry about the treatment of Indigenous children and wondered why nothing was being done by the Canadian government.

When reflecting on the Elder-led information session, Theresa shared that it was a very moving experience for her. She was particularly affected by the blessing and smudge ceremony:

I wish that I could just do this prayer and have this feeling inside that I see everything clear today [moves hands across her eyes]: I see good things today, I hear good things [touches her ears], I say good things [touches her mouth], I have good thoughts for others [touches her head]. With this [type of ceremony], I would be happy.

Importantly, Theresa also articulated that she spoke a number of languages, and that she felt being able to speak one’s own language of birth was very important.

When articulating her understanding and experience of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing gleaned from the information session and why this might be important to her, Theresa recounted that she experienced a lot of new learning. She reflected on her own understanding of ceremony and related it to what she perceived as similar to her own cultural
traditions: “This ceremony is about the group, about ceremony, and it gives meaning to life and
to people.” She stated that she had learned from the Elder that people still have the knowledge
and ceremony, and that they are continuing to pass on this knowledge to their children.
Illustrating bi-cultural understanding, she recalled: “Like her sons who are living in the city but
with their own ethnicity and culture and thinking. They are doing it both ways.” When speaking
about the importance of Indigenous knowledges in the early childhood classroom, she articulated
an understanding of negative assumptions and biases in adults when she said the following:

Why is it important; what is early child care? A child and a family, a child and the
parents. The best way to introduce a culture is from the beginning. This is the
main place where you can start. Because right now if we are teaching things to
people my age, if they do not have empathy or they have fixed their ideology and
beliefs, then this is not going to happen . . . It won’t happen; people have to be
ready.

When asked about her experiences with Indigenous knowledges in the ECE program, she
reflected briefly and then shared that other than being in class with several Indigenous students,
she had not experienced any Indigenous ways of being, knowing, or doing in her other ECE
courses. She added that she became friends with the Indigenous students and asked them about
things about which she was curious or concerned. These self-initiated interactions constituted her
own pursuit of learning rather than institutionally-led programming.

Theresa suggested incorporating Indigenous knowledges into the ECE program. She
suggested the addition of content in every course that would help instructors and students explore
and connect Indigenous knowledges relevant to the topic being studied. She emphasized the
importance of this knowledge when she stated, “because that is learning, because religion, and
ethics, and beliefs are a part of you. This is what makes you.” Significantly, Theresa felt it was a national responsibility to undertake this type of work:

The silence from people and from the government has made it more difficult to understand . . . I think there should be more positive stories of Indigenous people. Not only for those people who are not knowing [settlers and immigrants] but for Indigenous people also. To be lifted up.

Tammy

The Elder emphasized that their stories and their songs came from a very authentic place. It wasn’t fictional, it had a purpose. There is a lesson behind it that they are teaching, the songs and the stories they aren’t just made up.

Everything is so valuable. (Tammy, personal communication, January 22, 2018)

In her mid-twenties at the time of the interview, Tammy was in the second semester of her four-semester ECE diploma program. She was registered in the mandatory course on Indigenous history, identity, and culture, with one-third of the course completed at the time of the interview. She attended the Elder-led information session with the other participants. Tammy was a quiet and reflective participant who paused prior to speaking. She sat very still during the interview and maintained eye contact throughout the conversation. Tammy grew up in the city and attended a college program which allowed her to begin a career as a graphic designer. Over time, she became discouraged with the isolation of her job and returned to school to train in early childhood education. What she shared with me during our conversation about her experiences with Indigenous knowledges in the ECE program and the Elder-led information session follows.

When asked to share why she was interested in participating in this research project, Tammy outlined her desire to have experiences that would broaden her horizons. She was also
humble in her positioning: “I don’t have a ton of knowledge about this, and that was what drew me in. I like hearing stories.” She noted her participation was also influenced by the fact she would be able to attend the information session led by the Elder.

When reflecting on her understanding of the Elder-led information session, Tammy repeatedly referenced the number of stories that the Elder told. She was deeply affected by the way that the Elder took her back to her experiences of Indian Residential School through what she described as “vivid storytelling.” In describing this unique storytelling experience, Tammy revealed: “[The Elder] just took herself back there and remembered every detail of it. I really liked the way she would close her eyes and hold her Heart and feel that she was there at the time.” She was equally impressed with the Elder’s stories of experience prior to attending Indian Residential School and the obvious love the storyteller held for her parents and grandparents. Conversely, she was shocked by the hurtful stories of the Indian Residential School and “the way [the children] were treated, because we don’t treat children like that. The Elder talked like it was normal and that was very sad.”

Tammy again referenced the stories when she reflected on her understanding of Indigenous knowledges as shared in the information session. She recalled the stories told by the Elder during the time with her family on the trap-line prior to attending Indian Residential School. Tammy experienced the stories as a learning that revealed “all the hard work that went into daily life . . . and the love that was in the family.” She expressed her view that it was important to remember that when working with children, “how we treat them is going to affect them. Remembering that what I am doing might not seem big to me, but it is someone else’s whole world.”
When asked about her experiences with Indigenous knowledges in the rest of her ECE program, Tammy shared that prior to her participation in this project, she did not know that the Indigenous centre existed at the college. She referenced the diversity of the student body, but identified that she had very little experience with Indigenous students in the ECE program or at the college. She spoke of a class in which people from different backgrounds shared what they played with as children. Of interest was: “Mud, we all played with mud as children.” She shared that this was an important moment when she realized the possibility for both similar and diverse play experiences of children from different cultures. She expressed how important she felt it was to include the diverse perspectives and experiences of the ECE students; however, she did not refer specifically to including Indigenous experiences with this statement. Tammy could not identify any specific Indigenous knowledges in any of her other ECE courses.

Tammy became even more quiet and less sure of herself when she shared suggestions for incorporating Indigenous knowledges into the ECE program. Tammy expressed that she learned best by doing rather than being told. She suggested field trips to learn about sites of significance through a firsthand experience. She also expressed a strong desire to have positive interactions with Indigenous people through more stories of successful Indigenous peoples countering stereotypes: “so many times we see Indigenous people now, they are on the streets, downtown. They are caught up in the bad, but that isn’t 100 percent true. You can’t label people, and we are very quick to judge.”

Mariella

I believe the more you know and understand about a culture, the more you can find ways to include it in your day-to-day experiences, so by learning and understanding more of the Indigenous people and their values/beliefs, the more I
can try and provide that at any centre I work at. (Mariella, personal communication, February 4, 2018)

Mariella, 27 at the time of the interview, was in the second semester of her four-semester ECE diploma program. Like Tammy, she was one-third of the way through the mandatory course on Indigenous history, identity, and culture, and she had attended the Elder-led information session. Mariella was unable to attend the interview in person due to scheduling conflicts; however, she felt quite passionate about the topic, so she asked to participate in the interview by email. Mariella grew up in Eastern Canada and relocated to this city for the college ECE program. What she shared with me during our email exchange about her experiences with Indigenous knowledges in the ECE program and this research study follows.

When asked why she decided to participate in this research project, Mariella shared that she was interested in learning about her new community, as she came originally from a different part of Canada. She was new to the territory that the college sat upon and “had very little knowledge about Aboriginal people and their culture as a whole, so I thought it would be a good way to possibly learn and educate myself on the Aboriginal community from this area.”

When thinking about the Elder-led information session, Mariella expressed that she felt very grateful to be able to listen to the stories and the teachings that the Elder shared. She was deeply impacted, and shocked, by the stories of the Indian Residential School. “I found it a bit hard to listen to her talking about the residential schooling and the types of things she had to endure, but it was very eye-opening.” Mariella shared that the experience of learning about Indian Residential School had changed her thinking about Indigenous people because it challenged her previous understanding and pushed her to reflect on her own assumptions about Indigenous peoples.
When sharing her thoughts about her own understanding of Indigenous knowledges from the information session, Mariella referenced a desire to support all children, but did not specifically articulate a need to support Indigenous children. She felt that as an early childhood educator she needed to ensure she was supporting diversity and able to provide culturally appropriate supports and experiences for all of the children in her care. “I believe this will be important for my work, because when working with children and families of all backgrounds and cultures, it is crucial to provide a sense of comfort and safeness to them.”

When sharing her experiences with Indigenous knowledges in the ECE program, Mariella stated bluntly that she had not experienced any Indigenous knowledges in her ECE courses:

Apart from the Elder meeting and my Indigenous history, identity, and culture class, I have not had any real experiences regarding Indigenous ways with my ECE program. To be honest, I didn’t even know there was an Indigenous Centre located in the Campus.

Mariella was similarly frank when she shared her suggestions for incorporating Indigenous knowledges into the ECE program. She again expressed that she had limited experience with Indigenous knowledges and that this was truly limited to the Elder-led information session and the Indigenous history, identity, and culture course. She spoke of the reinforcement of preconceived stereotypes through what she had observed herself downtown as she travelled to the college for her classes. In recognizing her limitations of knowledge, she also shared a desire to know and to understand more about Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing throughout her ECE program, and she was thankful for the learning opportunities she had experienced thus far.
Analysis of Participants’ Stories

Given the importance of the themes identified in the literature when considering Indigenous knowledges, I decided that these themes provided a fitting framework upon which analysis of the interviews could be based. These themes were as follows: Transformative Learning, Reconciliation, and Indigenous knowledges. Notably, the theme of Indigenization identified in the literature review was not found in the analysis of the interview transcripts. This first analysis of stories was followed by another reflective analysis which presented no new emergent themes relevant to the guiding research question. A discussion of each of these identified themes allows for an in-depth exploration of the students’ stories, providing a better understanding of their experiences with Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing in the ECE program.

In total, five student participants in the ECE program shared their stories of early learning experiences with Indigenous knowledges and traditions in the ECE program in the college. These students clearly articulated their desire to learn more about Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing, and they tied the need for this knowledge to enhancing their skills as future early childhood educators. Their stories of experience generated three major themes: Transformative Learning, Reconciliation, and Indigenous knowledges, which were found in the literature review. All three themes are discussed and exemplified in the next section as a method of reflecting upon and analyzing the participant’s stories of experience. It is important to note that there were no significant differences in the themes arising from the interviews with the participants who had completed the mandatory course on Indigenous history, identity, and culture, and those who had only completed four weeks of the course. All participants focused the majority of their story on the Elder-led information session. The findings represent my analysis of the distilled responses of the participants as they answered the following overarching research question: how do non-
Indigenous adult learners in an early childhood education program at an urban post-secondary institution experience the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges within their program? Building from these thematic materials, another process of re-storying these elements through my own lens developed into a collective story, or nest. It is important to note that when using Indigenous methodology and storytelling, stories should be kept intact as they represent relationship between the storyteller and the listener (Archibald, 2008). Like Kovach (2009), I have used story and thematic analysis to “ensure that the story is available for interpretive analysis by others” (p. 132).

**Theme 1: Transformative Learning**

Using the metaphor of the nest, transformative learning provides the foundation, the sticks and the twigs that form the nest’s initial foundation of learning. All participants indicated they had experienced eye-opening learning, which I call initial steps towards transformative learning through participation in the Indigenous history, identity, and culture course, the information session led by the Elder, and participation in the research project.

When speaking about their experiences with Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing while in the ECE program and this research study, all participants spoke of having their views and assumptions challenged and changed, implying that transformative learning occurred. Transformative learning may occur through changes in understanding of the self, one’s belief systems, and one’s behaviour (Mezirow, 2003). Each participant spoke about a desire to support the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges in the ECE program as a move toward social justice and equity. Willow, Tammy, and Mariella used the term “eye-opening” when discussing their experiences learning about the Indian Residential Schools. All participants spoke of the impact that colonization has had on Indigenous children and families, and all expressed a need to take
that history into consideration as they work with young children and their families. All participants spoke about the Indian Residential School experience and the resulting intergenerational trauma that impacts many Indigenous people today. The participants shared their views that these traumatic experiences have not been adequately addressed at a national level. Theresa and Lexa spoke quite passionately about their feeling of responsibility to work toward changing this situation. Notably, none of the participants spoke of an understanding of their own power and privilege, and how this positioning may need to be examined and challenged when moving toward social justice or equity. All participants spoke about the lack of Indigenous content in the ECE program outside of the Indigenous history, identity, and culture course. They shared that Indigenous knowledges were necessary, given the reality they would move into the field to work in settings with Indigenous children and families. All participants spoke of having biases and assumptions challenged throughout their participation in this research project (Elder-led information session, Indigenous history, identity, and culture course, and the interview).

Theme 2: Reconciliation

The theme of Reconciliation represents the next stage of building the nest of learning, in which binding agents such as commitment, truth telling, and relationship hold the nest together. In this way, all participants indicated a desire to work toward better relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples as a result of their new learning and understanding.

The participants appeared to speak of Reconciliation in referencing the importance of understanding the truth about the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples in Canada and working toward healing the trauma caused by these experiences, sharing a desire for friendship and understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. All participants spoke of the
need for greater exposure for non-Indigenous learners to the history, culture, beliefs, and realities of lived experience of Indigenous peoples. Theresa was very passionate in her assertion that something needed to be done to agitate and educate non-Indigenous peoples, leading them to understanding. She shared how she felt education and understanding of Indigenous peoples, histories, and issues, was important to bring to early childhood education in order to educate children before they grow up and have internalized societal stereotypes. All participants expressed a desire to know more about the positive stories of Indigenous peoples to counter the negative stereotyping they encountered in the media and on the streets. Lexa and Willow spoke specifically of a desire to improve the relationship between Indigenous peoples and settler/immigrant/refugee peoples, indicating they also wanted to support the Indigenous community around them, particularly the children.

Theme 3: Indigenous Knowledges (Spirit/Heart/Mind/Body)

The theme of Indigenous knowledges forms the feathers lining the nest, each feather necessary and unique to location and community. All participants spoke of a desire to gain a deeper understanding of Indigenous knowledges as detailed in the four categories outlined below. Missing from these accounts was a depth of understanding of Indigenous knowledges or cultural protocols required when working within Indigenous knowledges.

Spirit (as Culture and Ceremony). In speaking about the system of cultural beliefs and ceremonies of Indigenous people, I saw evidence for the importance of including Spirit. When viewed from an Indigenous epistemological perspective, the larger system of cultural beliefs and ceremonies of a particular society can be framed as Spirit (Battiste, 2013; Bastien, 2004; Curwen Doige, 2003). In sharing their stories of experience, participants frequently referenced the concept of Spirit, albeit in differing terms. For instance, participants used language speaking
about ceremony and smudging. All participants were positively affected by the blessing and smudge that began the Elder-led information session. Illustrating some understanding of Indigenous protocols and ceremony, Lexa shared that she would like to see a greater sharing of non-sacred ceremonies to support non-Indigenous understanding of Indigenous culture. Tammy shared that she was unaware that Elders were chosen by their community and that they weren’t just older people. Willow spoke of how moved she was by the story of how the Elder grew up on the trap line and what life was like for her family and other families in the community prior to colonial interventions such as Indian Residential School (IRS). All of the participants spoke of the importance of supporting children who came from Indigenous backgrounds, because cultures are an important component of children’s emerging identity and therefore need to be recognized. Theresa shared that she found value in sharing Indigenous cultures with all children in her effort to work toward Reconciliation. Mariella, Willow, Tammy, and Theresa spoke of a desire to understand the cultures of Indigenous children, families, and communities in a modern-day context.

*Heart* (as Relationship and Language). Heart refers to being in relationship with others and about communication related to language (Anuik et al., 2010; Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2013). When sharing their stories of experience, the participants referenced the concept of Heart in their thoughts on the importance of relationships and traditional language. All participants spoke of the importance of stories and storytelling. Lexa shared that she felt she learned the most when listening to stories rather than reading a textbook. Lexa also referenced the connection between storytelling and transferring knowledge when she reflected on her experience of listening to the Elder’s stories. All participants spoke of the importance of supporting children in culturally appropriate ways as contributing to their ability as ECE professionals to be in relationship with
the children and families. Theresa spoke to an understanding that stories and songs told in the traditional language are teaching and knowledge sharing experiences for Indigenous peoples.

Mind (as Connection and Values). Mind represents individuals’ connection of their skills and knowledge to their values and experiences (Curwen Doige, 2003; Hart, 2010; Munroe et al., 2013). When sharing their stories of experience, the participants referenced the concept of Mind when they reflected on the importance of young children needing to have a connection to their community and cultural values in order to be whole. All participants spoke of the impact of the Elder’s story of life on the trap line prior to Indian Residential School. Participants shared how they were struck by the obvious love and care that the family members had for each other prior to the colonial intervention of Indian residential schooling. Tammy spoke of the connection to the Elder’s own family, values, and culture that the Elder demonstrated during her storytelling. Theresa was affected by an understanding from the Elder that people who have this knowledge are passing along their values and teaching. She shared further that learning was made up of ethics and beliefs. Mariella spoke of the importance of understanding the values and beliefs of the children in her care. Lexa spoke of the importance of understanding the values of Indigenous people and to be able to incorporate this understanding into early childhood education teaching and practice. In their several stories, none of the participants referenced how much more they needed to know or that their single experience represented knowledge shared from a particular individual with specific cultural knowledge at a particular location and time.

Body (as Land and Place). Body represents an understanding of who one is and how one behaves, grounded in one’s culture, community, and place (or land) (Anuik et al., 2010; Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2013; Restoule et al., 2013). When sharing their stories of experience with Indigenous knowledges, the participants referenced the concept of Body through their thoughts.
on the need of young children to have an awareness and understanding of their culture and community. All participants spoke of the Elder’s understanding of her connection to her culture and community. All participants spoke of the importance of children and families seeing their culture represented and being connected to this culture as a requirement for the full development of a child. Mariella spoke of a strong desire to understand more about the people of the Treaty 7 territory upon which she lives. Lexa referenced an interest in understanding an Indigenous perspective of nature and the land. Willow spoke of her understanding of the importance of the connection to land after hearing the Elder share her stories of childhood.

This collection of thematic materials as expressed by the participants represented the foundational elements of the educational nest containing the sticks and twigs of transformative learning through critical pedagogy, the mud and string of truth-telling and relationship that binds, and the feathers of spirit, heart, mind, and body that line the nest. All of these materials are needed to form the nest as we move toward the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This nest cradles and supports the important and challenging work of Reconciliation.

**Synthesis**

**The Collective Story of Experience—An Eye-Opening Start**

This story represents my interpretation of the participants’ collective story of experience and should be viewed through that subjective lens. As the stories above illustrate, the participants started a journey of transformative learning, part of the process of critical consciousness (Freire, 1970, 1973, 1985; Mezirow, 2003), when they began learning about Indigenous history in the post-contact era through their participation in the Indigenous history, identity, and culture course, the Elder-led information session, and reflection through the conversational interviews. Through
engaging in authentic dialogue with the Elder during the information session, the Indigenous history, identity, and culture instructor, and with me during the conversational interviews, the participants reflected on their own lived experiences, values, and beliefs; this stimulated a recognition of unjust power structures and a desire to move toward social justice (Freire, 1970, 1973, 1985). This process, through reflection and the action of participating in all facets of the research project, brought the participants to the realization of inequitable power structures between Indigenous and settler/immigrant/refugee populations encountered in their lived experiences. Now it is my responsibility to support and challenge them as they continue this journey of transformative learning through the practice of critical pedagogy.

The process of beginning transformative learning through praxis and conscientization moved learners to want to explore the concept of Reconciliation. Although they did not use the term Reconciliation, the participants articulated concepts that referenced the importance of truth-telling, healing, and partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and communities rooted in respectful relationships and dialogue. The participants recognized their influence when working with children, family, and community through their roles as early childhood educators. They articulated a desire to see a change in the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada, and they saw this possibility being advanced through their professional roles. Early childhood educators have the opportunity to begin positive relational practice founded upon respect as we move toward Reconciliation and the path to social justice. It is vital that instructors of early childhood education understand the power of critical pedagogy to change the systems of oppression in Canada.

The recognition of the lived realities of Indigenous peoples and the realization that they wanted to work toward Reconciliation spurred the participants to reflect on the importance of
Indigenous knowledges in the lives of Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and families and in their own practice as early childhood educators. This reflection and understanding is necessary to support connection and relationship. Participants expressed a desire to have a deeper understanding of and exposure to Indigenous cultures, ceremonies, languages, values, and beliefs. While this is not an indication of critical consciousness or praxis, it does indicate that the foundations of an authentic dialogue have started. These foundations are necessary in order to move purposefully down the path of humanization toward social justice (Friere, 1973, 1985).

The student participants did not articulate or explore their own roles or the roles of other settler/immigrant/refugee students in doing the difficult work that moves toward Reconciliation (Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2017; Regan, 2010). This is not altogether surprising given that the initial experiences they have had as part of their ECE curriculum and this research project represent only the beginning of their learning, and they have not been encouraged to explore their own positionality and responsibility in the difficult work of Reconciliation. It is obvious from the views expressed by the participants that more work is needed to develop individual and systemic change that will work toward Reconciliation and the inclusion of Indigenous pedagogy and epistemology in the ECE program at this college. It is also important to note that it is not possible for a single curriculum or framework to be inclusive of all Indigenous cultures (Bjartviet & Kinzel, 2018; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2017; Regan, 2010). Rather, the goal is to work toward a system and framework that moves away from Western European epistemology and pedagogy to that of a regionally relevant model as the foundation for all teaching and learning in the college ECE program (Battiste, 2013; Bastien, 2004; Curwen Doige, 2003; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Taylor, 2017; Tremblay, Gokiert, Georgis, Edwards, & Skrypnek; 2013).
From this collective story where a nest has been built using essential thematic materials, the next step is to fill the nest with possibility. In a metaphorical sense, possibility is contained within insights (or findings) that are quite fragile but filled with great potential that needs the ongoing attention of those who care. The following section sets out the findings that emerged from the thematic gathering and the building of a learning nest.

**Finding 1: Promise of Transformative Learning within Early Social Justice Learning**

In considering how students might be prompted to explore their own subjectivity and positionality in relation to Reconciliation, an analysis of themes found that the participants began to reflect on their own lack of knowing, which could signal a move toward social justice. Through reflection and their subsequent actions of participating in the Indigenous coursework, the Elder-led information session, and the research project, these students demonstrated an early encounter with conscientization or critical consciousness by referencing how their own assumptions and beliefs about Indigenous peoples were challenged. Through this process, I also saw evidence of how students were beginning to recognize inequitable power structures between Indigenous and settler/immigrant/refugee populations as encountered in their lived experiences; however, I saw no evidence that the students had considered their own roles in contributing to these inequitable power structures.

By referring to their experiences as “eye-opening” or how the events changed their perceptions of the situation, the students indicated a change in their attitudes or perceptions of Indigenous peoples. Noteworthy in the conversations was a lack of depth in student understanding and this, I would argue, is indicative of an early learning experience rather than any other limitation. The students spoke of their desire to be exposed to more opportunities for engaging with and learning from Indigenous peoples, but there was no indication in any of the
interviews that the participants were aware that they themselves were implicated in this work or that the ECE program would need to be transformed to make space for this learning. Embodying observations made by scholars Sensoy and DiAngelo (2011) around the ways in which those in positions of privilege view matters of obligation, the students relied on the idea that it was the responsibility of the government, not themselves, to make wider social change. The participants shared that they believed the addition of Indigenous knowledges into the ECE program would support Indigenous and non-Indigenous children, families, and communities. The most hopeful element found across the stories was the participants’ recognition and acknowledgement that the situation for many Indigenous peoples is unjust and inequitable.

In recognizing that the stories shared by the participants were instances of early transformative learning for each student storyteller, I look to Mezirow’s (2003) work in transformative learning that refers to experiences that change the perspective of the learner as changes in understanding of the self, one’s belief systems, and one’s behaviour. As I see it, this view of transformative learning aligns with Indigenous methodology and Indigenous storytelling by bringing the understanding beyond the self to include others, in forms both human and non-human, with which one is in relationship (Archibald, 2008; Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2013; Kovach, 2009). In this relational space, learners start to see that they are in relationship with others, they begin to recognize shared humanity, and through this recognition, they also begin to transform their perspectives (Freire, 1973, 1985). It is this relational practice that is truly transformative when working toward social justice from an Indigenous perspective. In many ways, learning occurs within relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Kovach, 2009). In order to move toward Reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, it is important to explore our understanding of self in relation to others—to see clearly our own power and
positioning in relation to each other and to the political and social structures that define us. Within the transformative learning space of this study, the participants started an early reflection upon Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships. This new understanding represents only the beginning of the journey and, while promising, points to a need for a more developed and targeted approach to transformative learning and critical pedagogy in the current curriculum.

In looking at how transformative learning is closely tied to critical pedagogy, and in the throes of becoming aware of social injustices and working toward changing the circumstances surrounding injustices, we are reminded that this learning is best realized within relationships. This recognition and desire for change is transformational. As the participants and I engaged in conversations exploring the interview questions, the participants encountered a process of self-analysis and reflection. At the beginning of each interview session, I articulated my own positioning as a change-maker and my desire to work toward Reconciliation by bringing in Indigenous perspectives into the ECE curriculum. It is important to note that stating my desire for Reconciliation likely influenced the participants in some way. I believe that my initial positioning may have inspired the participants to examine the social structures in which they participate and articulate a desire for change. As the participants, prompted by our conversations, engaged with ideas and concepts that challenged their values and beliefs, their subsequent reflections brought them to a place of questioning and in many cases, sparked a desire to move toward social justice (Asher, 2009; Kovach, 2009; Merriam et al., 2007; Tett, 2013). Yet while the participants were able to recognize the existence of unequal power and positioning between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, I do not believe they were far enough along on their learning journeys to reflect on their own positioning and power within the context of Indigenous-settler-immigrant-refugee relations. As a result, they had limited understanding of their own
positions of power and privilege in society, which ultimately affect their roles as future early childhood educators. Additionally, the participants did not see their roles in Reconciliation as working to change the social or educational structures in which they participate; this onus rested elsewhere.

It is very important to note that these initial experiences with transformative learning were potential indicators of future praxis and conscientization. Albeit in most instances, the participants’ statements and thoughts reflected the earliest stages of learning about social justice and a desire for change, they were not yet able to consider the full landscape of what this could mean to them on a personal level. As early learners, the threads of the conversations demonstrated deeply engrained and stereotypical assumptions about Indigenous peoples/knowledges and a lack of depth of understanding or analysis about their own implications in colonialism. With further learning, the hope is that they will come to recognize that this is the location from which to begin the important work of Reconciliation.

**Finding Two: Understanding Reconciliation as Accepting the Truths of Canada**

During the conversational interviews, the participants spoke to the importance of learning the full realities of the history of Canada and its colonial history. Their admissions of “not knowing” these truths represent first steps within Reconciliation. Of particular importance was the recognition by all participants of not feeling they had been taught the reality of Canadian history—despite some having studied this topic in high school. These students, a few of whom were recent high school graduates, felt that this history had been brought up in class but not adequately represented. The students spoke at length about the importance of understanding historical trauma when supporting Indigenous and non-Indigenous children, indicating that the concept of intergenerational trauma was new for them. While a trauma-informed approach is the
focus of much of the brain science research and an emphasis in current practices in the fields of early childhood education and health (Palix Foundation, 2018; Shonkoff & Garner, 2011), this trauma-informed positioning also presents a very real risk that a deficit approach to teaching Indigenous peoples may be adopted.

There was a sense amongst participants that this understanding of the shared history of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples was important to be able to move forward as a nation in a positive way. One of the participants was very eloquent in her argument that this understanding was important to share with children prior to values and beliefs becoming fixed in adulthood. This view underscores the challenge of moving toward Reconciliation with a population of citizens who may be unwilling to be open to other truths. This is especially important, because Canada is composed of many who may not understand the past history and the current reality of colonization, and who are unprepared or unwilling to explore their own position and power within this system (Regan, 2010).

The participants spoke of a desire, both personally and as citizens (or future citizens) of Canada, to have respectful relationships and dialogue with Indigenous peoples. Underscoring their limited knowledge of the history of colonization of Canada was the fact that participants did not reference any other colonial actions and policies that have negatively impacted the First Peoples. This underlines a lack of full awareness of the many other colonial policies and actions such as the banning of cultural ceremonies like the Sun Dance that further negated or suppressed Indigenous knowledges and peoples (Bastien, 2004). Still, understanding the trauma of the Indian Residential School experience is a basic requirement for moving toward Reconciliation, as addressing this gap in student knowledge may lead to greater understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners (Ottmann, 2013; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2017).
Furthermore, it is important to understand that while not all Indigenous peoples attended Indian Residential Schools, negative outcomes still result from past and present policies and actions that continue to create trauma for Indigenous peoples outside of the residential school setting.

Of particular interest, the participant conversations indicated a lack of depth and understanding of their own responsibilities in working toward Reconciliation. The undercurrent of the conversations was that Indigenous peoples needed to move forward and heal, and that settlers/immigrants/refugees have a responsibility to learn about the history of Indigenous peoples. This responsibility, however, did not extend to their own responsibilities. Only through a deep exploration and understanding of their own responsibilities in working toward Reconciliation will non-Indigenous early childhood educators be able to appropriately and adequately support Indigenous children and families.

Finding Three: The Need to Personally Experience Indigenous Knowledges

In sharing their stories of experience with the project’s events, participants repeatedly referenced notions of culture and ceremony. By speaking about the system of cultural beliefs and ceremonies of Indigenous people, I assumed they were speaking of Spirit which, according to Battiste (2013), Bastien (2004), and Curwen Doige (2003), encompasses culture and ceremony. They expressed a desire to know more about and understand the culture and ceremony of Indigenous families so that they could support the children in their care. This recognition demonstrates the students’ understanding of the importance of children seeing their own ways of being, knowing, and doing represented in the childcare program in which they are involved. Importantly, this also illustrates that the students recognized that without their own understanding of Indigenous knowledges, they would be unable to adequately support the Indigenous children in their care. Childcare settings include Indigenous and non-Indigenous
children; every culture has its own contextual learning that requires an understanding of the specific culture. While this represents a complex set of skills, it is also important to remember that this skillset is necessary for early childhood educators to attain in order to support Indigenous children, or for that matter, children from any non-dominant culture. This understanding of culture needs to be reciprocal between non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples—for too long, educators have prioritized one (Western European) way of being, knowing, and doing (Hatcher, 2012) over all others. As future early childhood educators, participants viewed this reciprocal understanding as necessary to support the social-emotional wellbeing of the children in their care (Munroe et al., 2013).

The participants, while indicating that they would like more exposure to Indigenous culture and ceremony in the ECE program, did not acknowledge this experience as unique. The risk of adopting a piece-meal, or content-driven, approach to including Indigenous knowledges in a system that is neither pedagogically nor epistemologically aligned with Indigenous ways is a real risk (Bjartviet & Kinzel, 2018; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2017). To this end, the participants indicated no understanding of the complexity of knowledge, the protocols required, or the appropriateness of including ceremony in the curriculum. Coming to understand and support Indigenous knowledges in the ECE program will require deeper exploration and development of systemic changes to the program as well as praxis on the part of the program participants.

As another component of Indigenous knowledge, Heart refers to being in relationship with others and about communication, which is related to language. As relationships and relational practice are at the centre of Indigenous methodology, Heart is one of the foundational elements within which this work is nested. The participants spoke frequently about the importance of relationship in supporting the social-emotional wellbeing and care of children.
Although they did not reference relationship as being especially important in supporting Indigenous children, they did recognize healthy relationships as important in supporting all children. This idea is once again indicative of a lack of understanding of the centrality of relationship in Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy as a way out of a colonial past. There was no mention that the Elder who led the information session was from a community outside of Treaty 7 which indicates a lack of understanding of place-based knowledge. In a promising move, participants indicated an understanding of the importance of Elders in transmitting cultural knowledge within Indigenous communities.

In keeping with a relational approach, the participants articulated the importance of family in maintaining social networks of support (Archibald, 2008; Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2013). This is particularly important when considering the development of an ECE curriculum that works to meet Call to Action #12. It will be necessary to be in relationship with Indigenous community and Indigenous knowledge keepers in order to develop culturally appropriate curriculum for Indigenous children and families. Given the challenging past and current realities of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, developing authentic relationships may be a challenge. Notably, as scholars Anuik and Gillies (2012) and Tremblay et al. (2013) have also argued, participants articulated an understanding that children need to be able to operate in culturally safe spaces where they can safely co-construct knowledge through relationships. This entails the creation of early childhood education settings that are open and welcoming for Indigenous families, staffed by educators who have begun a journey of critical consciousness. This extends the curriculum outward into community.

During our conversations, the participants referred to the importance of communication, which is captured within the concept of Heart. While one participant referenced the importance
of first languages to cultural understanding, the English-speaking participants did not identify the importance of revitalizing First Peoples’ languages as important. This finding underscores a lack of participant exposure to and understanding of the importance of traditional languages as crucial to cultural restoration and revitalization. This finding also highlights the challenges inherent when working with individuals who are operating within their own dominant culture—who view the English language, and its associated cultural traditions, as normal, neutral, and value free (Battiste, 2013; Kerr, 2014; Kincheloe, 2008; Kovach, 2008; Pidgeon, 2008, 2016).

The participants articulated a desire to ensure that in their practice as early childhood educators they would support the relationship between themselves and the children, the children with other children, and the children with their families; however, it is important to note that the participants had a much stronger grasp of the importance of relationship in human wellbeing than they did the importance of First Peoples’ languages as a way of supporting cultural traditions.

The participants seemed to come to an intuitive understanding that embedding learning in Indigenous cultures supports both Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and families. For instance, they articulated a connection between their own understanding of the importance of relationship, as articulated by Bronfenbrenner (1977) in the bio-ecological model of human development, as being in alignment with their understanding of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing. When I reflect on my own understanding of Indigenous knowledges with the understanding of relational practice, this foundation or nest of relationships is supportive of all cultures and peoples because it reflects a holistic relational approach through which we act and are acted upon by those in our environment. As we move forward together toward Reconciliation, relationships and relational practice form the foundation of this journey.
In conversation, the participants spoke of the importance of children’s skills, values, and life experiences being represented and supported in the child care setting (Curwen Doige 2003; Hart 2010). All participants spoke of the Elder’s stories as sharing a deep lived connection with her traditional values and an understanding of community and family. The participants spoke of the importance of storytelling in both their understanding of Indigenous knowledges as well as their own preferences for learning. In referencing the Elder’s storytelling, the participants appeared to understand that the telling of stories was a way of passing on culture and values while maintaining a connection to cultural values and beliefs. The research participants recognized this act of storytelling as a method of knowledge transmission and an example of living culture. All participants shared their desire to support this understanding of values and connection with the children in their care.

When sharing their stories of experience, the participants referenced ideas about self-awareness similar to scholars Curwen Doige (2003), Hart (2010), and Munroe et al. (2013). Participants demonstrated an understanding that they themselves needed to connect their skills and knowledge to their values and experiences, and this level of self-awareness would also be necessary for children in their care. Like Anuik et al. (2010), Bastien, (2004), Battiste, (2013) and Curwen Doige (2003), they articulated the need for the children in their care to be able to see themselves and their values represented in the early childhood education classroom and that this sense of connection and understanding would support the children toward positive self-development. In recognizing this need, the participants demonstrated the importance of their own need for an understanding of Indigenous knowledges to be able to support the children in their care. The participants repeatedly articulated that they did not have the opportunity to fully develop a depth of understanding of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing in the
current articulation of the ECE program. Given that the Indigenous history, identity, and culture course is now a mandatory part of the ECE program, it is apparent that while this course is a good start, more work is needed within the ECE program to support greater understanding of Indigenous knowledges.

The concept of Body can be described as representing an understanding of who one is and how one behaves, grounded in one’s culture, community, and place (or land). All participants shared their understanding of the concept of Body when they referenced the importance of children feeling comfortable in themselves as it relates to their culture and experiences with their family. One participant connected her understanding of the stories shared by the Elder with a desire to know more about the Indigenous peoples of the territory upon which the college is located. This is an important insight, as it is an indication that the participant has recognized that the college is situated on Indigenous lands and the students are beginning to understand that the college occupies a space that was once held by the original occupants.

Another participant indicated her understanding that land/place is part of culture and that culture is specific to location. This is also an indication of the beginning of the non-Indigenous student’s reflection upon the importance of place for Indigenous peoples. Given the current state of relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, recognition of contested space and that land is part of culture are important concepts to further explore when moving toward Reconciliation. This finding also has implications for curriculum development, will need to be place-based. The participants articulated a surface understanding that Indigenous peoples are connected to the land in relationship with their history, culture, and ceremony. They referenced their own understanding of Indigenous connections between land, place, and culture that hinted at those articulated by Indigenous scholars (Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2013; Restoule et al., 2013;
Smith, 2012). Participants spoke frequently about the relationship Indigenous peoples have with land, animals, and nature as being different than their own non-Indigenous relationships to land, animals, and nature. The participants related this to a deeper connection and relationship between Indigenous peoples and animals and other aspects of the natural world. This understanding of relationship between human and non-human may indicate the ECE students’ initial reflections upon the differences in the practice of relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

The participants’ notion that these concepts and specific Indigenous knowledges can be placed into individual courses throughout the ECE program is found throughout the Spirit/Heart/Mind/Body narrative thread. This reflects a lack of understanding of the holistic nature of Indigenous knowledges when assuming that this type of embeddedness would support children, families, and communities from a variety of backgrounds. That said, there was also a lack of understanding that infusing or adding in Indigenous content into a Eurocentric framework is problematic. While adding culturally appropriate content may seem to be a simple way to begin the process of Indigenization, it does not begin to approach the systemic challenges in our current frameworks nor address the complexities of attempting to undertake this task (Bjartveit & Kinzel, 2018; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2017). This problematic approach is well-articulated by Ashton (2015), who wrote:

Curricular practices that espouse to embed, add-on, or infuse Indigenous pedagogical principles to already established settler frameworks are extremely problematic. Ethical, ontological, epistemological, and cosmological differences make such inclusions analogous to acts of colonization. (p. 92)
In order to move toward Reconciliation, we need to recognize that the very foundations of our current practice are steeped in Eurocentric ideology, and that to truly move toward Reconciliation and to approach Indigenization, we need epistemic change in which we are able to critically question our systems and structures alongside necessary pedagogical changes.

**Summary of Interpretation**

A multi-staged analysis process of qualitative data revealed telling insights from the five participants related to the research question: how do non-Indigenous ECE learners story their experiences with Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy at the college? As a starting point, the following themes were shared after interpretation of the data: the participants experienced the beginning of transformative learning; the participants articulated the need for Canada to work toward Reconciliation as a nation but did not demonstrate an understanding of this work as individuals; and the participants desired more exposure to Indigenous knowledges and required a deeper understanding of these knowledges. Indigenization as systemic and structural change was missing from the qualitative data indicating a lack of understanding of or to exposure to the depth of this concept. Participants instead articulated a piece-meal approach that suggested embedding cultural ceremonies and practices into the regular (dominant) curriculum framework.

The collective story that represents a synthesis of the identified themes illustrates a lack of depth of understanding of transformative learning, Reconciliation, Indigenous knowledges, with no mention of the complexities of how Indigenization can be truly realized (or if it should). A subsequent analysis of the material within the identified themes led to the development of three key findings to support the building of an educational nest to support the journey toward Reconciliation: 1) the promise of transformative learning within social justice learning; 2)
understanding Reconciliation as accepting the truths of Canada; and 3) the need to personally experience Indigenous knowledges.

These early learning experiences explored through participation in the Indigenous history, identity, and culture course, as well as the Elder-led information session, represent the only experiences with Indigenous knowledges identified in the ECE program by the participants. This knowledge, along with the assumptions about Indigenous peoples and knowledge demonstrated in the interviews, indicates that there is more material to be brought forward into our curriculum to build a substantial nest of learning grounded in social justice that could help realize the goals of Reconciliation.

**Limitations**

The findings from this study represent the experiences of five early childhood education students at a particular time and place. These findings are also indicative of emergent learning for the participants. I acknowledge that I have travelled in relationship with these participants and have made the choice to be mild with their words and world-views in this research. This choice has affected the selection of words and phrases shared in this study. I found that the student participants focused most on the Elder-led information session when discussion their experiences of Indigenous knowledges in the ECE curriculum. This was not the intent of the information session and has spurred two thoughts: that the study may have had different findings had I not included an Elder-led information session in the research design, and that the resulting focus on the Elder-led information session by the participants clearly indicated the importance of experiencing Indigenous knowledges firsthand through storytelling. I do not believe that the findings of this study are generalizable to a broader population that may operate outside of the circumstances of the participants involved in this project, although it does provide insights that
may support similar work at other post-secondary institutions and in the field of early childhood education. Nor do I believe that the particular aspects of Indigenous knowledges articulated in this geographical location can transfer to all locations and all Indigenous knowledges. This would require each community to articulate and identify the feathers needed for their particular nest; however, I do believe that these storied experiences can support the development of curriculum resources that honour Indigenous pedagogy and epistemologies and will help build the nest that will support the ECE program at my college. I acknowledge that while I have used member-checking to bring the stories of experience back to the participants, the Anishinaabe Elder, and the Indigenous Centre, I have largely interpreted these stories through my own subjective lens.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I gathered material from thematic groupings and then brought these ideas together into a collective story that revealed a set of findings drawn from five individual conversational interviews. These interviews provided qualitative data to explore non-Indigenous students’ experiences with Indigenous knowledges in the ECE program at the college. Thematic analysis indicated three main themes coming from the storied experiences: Transformative Learning, Reconciliation, and Indigenous knowledges. Reflection on these themes has helped me identify the elements needed to contribute to building a relational and pedagogical nest for the ECE program. This nest will support the development of curriculum resources and may set the early childhood education department on a path of critical consciousness.

Chapter 5 explores recommendations for practice and future research for those who will live in this educational nest.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

My motivation to embark on the journey of this doctoral degree is related to my first post-secondary teaching experience working with a cohort of First Nation students in an ECE diploma program. The Indigenous community with which I worked identified that the ECE curriculum at our post-secondary was entirely Eurocentric in focus. The learning that I experienced working with, and in, community has changed who I am as a person, a leader, and an educator as I came to recognize the truths of their observation. As I am now the chair of the ECE program at my institution, I have the support of the institutional leadership to explore ways in which we might work toward Reconciliation by Indigenizing our ECE curriculum.

The specific purpose of this qualitative research study was to gain an understanding of the stories of experience of non-Indigenous ECE students with Indigenous knowledges. Exploration of these stories in Chapter 4 helped to identify non-Indigenous learners’ early understandings of Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy and highlighted three themes that were found in all conversational interviews. From the themes of Indigenous knowledges (Spirit, Heart, Mind, Body), Reconciliation, and Transformative Learning, I constructed a single re-storied account of what students reported. Of note, the exploration of the participant conversations indicated that this early learning experience held potential for students to understand the importance of including Indigenous perspectives in their future professional roles; however, the program will have to carefully consider and design curriculum that can help students identify and explore their own positionality in this learning. This will require the integration of critical perspectives that focus on the social justice aspect of this work.
In this chapter, I further discuss key interpretations from the qualitative findings and the actions of the local post-secondary institutions. Finally, I summarize the interpretations and discuss implications and recommendations for use in future curriculum development and research. The resulting conclusions will inform recommendations for the development of resources for the ECE curriculum to support the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Call to Action #12, which calls for the development of culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Indigenous families. By using narrative inquiry or storytelling viewed through the lens of critical pedagogy, I have taken the themes and findings and have begun to build a nest to help support those engaged in Reconciliation.

**Summary of Key Findings**

Throughout the collective story of experience, a lack of deep understanding of Indigenous knowledges became obvious, and no participants mentioned the complexities of Indigenization; however, some evidence exists suggesting the presence of initial threads of transformative learning that could lead to reconciliation. Analysis of the student interviews led to the identification of several key findings, as follows: 1) the promise of transformative learning may be found in the students’ initial reflections enroute to reconciliation, 2) understanding reconciliation as an acceptance of the truths and realities of Canadian history, and 3) the necessity of experiencing Indigenous knowledges. Through the metaphor of building a nest, I see the promise of transformative learning as the foundation, or the sticks and twigs of this nest. The work of Reconciliation provides the string and the mud that, although messy, with perseverance can bind this nest together. Finally, Indigenous knowledges, or Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing, represent the contextual feathers that line this nest and provide a place of comfort.
Discussion

To further discuss the research findings, it is important to understand the post-secondary environment within which the students operate. Exploration of these themes through critical pedagogy supports further discussion and understanding of the research findings, and how this may inform our programming moving forward.

In 2015, presidents of various Western Canadian region post-secondary education institutions gathered to discuss the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s final report and *Calls to Action*. Those in attendance decided to form a regional post-secondary Truth and Reconciliation Task Team, with membership from six post-secondary institutions. I was appointed as our institution’s representative to this task team by college leadership. The mandate of the task team is to work together to meet the post-secondary related *Calls to Action* from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I believe this is a fitting place from which to further explore the research findings as my professional role aligns with my academic objectives.

The Promise of Transformative Learning through Initial Reflections on Social Justice

Transformative learning related to social justice and acknowledgement of existing power structures and ongoing privilege may be found in varying degrees across institutions. One college is the only institutional member of the task team to make Indigenous awareness training a mandatory component of their faculty and staff training. Two different institutions are currently working toward a mandate of conscientization and praxis for their learners through the inclusion of the Indigenous history, identity, and culture course, and courses similar to that of the Indigenous Education course (originally meant for education students) in other programs, including the addition of graduate level programming responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Bow Valley College, 2017a; University of Calgary, 2017). The actions of these
institutions indicate to me that the Western Canadian region post-secondary institutions are genuinely moving toward Reconciliation. Similarly, my own institution has indicated its readiness to explore Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy in programming and operations. The question remains, however, how do we accomplish this work in a “good way”?

Through my exploration of transformative learning theory, I found certain aspects of this theory closely aligned with critical pedagogy; a shared emphasis on critical reflection of assumptions and beliefs is crucial for challenging perspectives and, in the case of critical pedagogy, for challenging oppression (Cranton, 2011, 2013; Groen & Kawalilak, 2014a; Jarvis, 2010; Kitchenham, 2008; Mackinley & Barney, 2014). While transformative learning may have social justice goals, critical pedagogy has social justice as a foundation (Glass & Newman, 2015; McLaren, 1999; Smith, 2012). The engagement of both the participants and the local post-secondary institutions with initial transformative learning experiences demonstrates the potential for beginning a path of critical consciousness. I believe that it is necessary to engage in a focused and targeted adoption of critical pedagogy in the ECE classroom, as well as the larger post-secondary institution, in order to move toward better relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. The foundation of transformative learning and critical pedagogy will form the framework for the nest needed to support the work of Reconciliation.

Understanding Reconciliation as the Truths and Realities of Canadian History

The goal of Reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada may be found in the strategies of each specific task team institution. All of the task team post-secondary institutions have engaged with Elders, knowledge keepers, and Indigenous external and internal community members to begin the work of Reconciliation (personal communication, February 3, 2017). I believe that this may represent evidence of the beginning of dialogue.
centered on the social, cultural, and political systems that are responsible for oppression (Freire, 1970, 1973). This engagement and authentic dialogue with Indigenous communities will support the development of critical consciousness required to move the college community toward humanization and praxis (Freire, 1973, 1985).

While most task team institutions emphasized the need to educate faculty and staff about the history, culture, and lived reality of Indigenous peoples in Canada, not all have made this education mandatory and, even when mandated, the scope of the curricular focus varies widely. One institution introduced education for Bachelor of Education learners in the form of a mandatory Indigenous Education course that runs for eight weeks in total in 2013 (University of Calgary, 2017). Another institution has a mandatory eight-hour Indigenous awareness course that is required for all faculty and staff (personal communication, February 3, 2017). Since 2016, my institution has introduced the Indigenous history, identity, and culture course as mandatory for all learners graduating from the Addiction Studies, Social Work, and ECE programs (Bow Valley College, 2017). Another post-secondary institution has held yearly National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation National Education Roundtables to gather and address teacher education in this area (St. Mary’s University, 2016). The move to embed mandatory Indigenous history and education course work may be viewed as local leadership’s recognition that part of the responsibility of non-Indigenous structures in working toward Reconciliation is to begin the practice of truth telling. In these Indigenous history and education courses, participants are exposed to ideas that may challenge their values and beliefs; such challenges may serve to begin the development of critical consciousness (Freire, 1973, 1985, 2000).

The move toward Reconciliation emphasizes the importance of truth telling, healing, and partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and communities rooted in
respectful relationships and dialogue. The local institutional engagement with truth telling for some programs may represent a conscious and targeted effort to move toward Reconciliation as articulated by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. These actions demonstrate the possibility of the inclusion of critical pedagogy. The “eye-opening” truth experienced by the students as a result of listening to the Elder and taking the Indigenous course has the potential to start them on a journey of transformative learning. Through making such truth-telling courses mandatory for specific programs, I see efforts to begin the dialogue necessary to develop critical consciousness and begin to develop the idea of humanization (Freire, 1973, 1985). Additionally, I see a pedagogy of hope in these actions (Freire, 1992). If the college leadership did not truly believe that these actions would lead to a better, more just, and more hopeful post-secondary environment, they would not expend the time and resources. Purposeful engagement with critical pedagogy and the pedagogy of hope are necessary in our post-secondary environments. The truth telling and emphasis on respectful relationships and dialogue found in Reconciliation are the string and mud, the dirty and tangly bits that hold our nest of critical pedagogy and hope together.

**The Necessity of Including Indigenous Knowledges**

Indigenous knowledges or Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing are about relationships and connections throughout our physical, mental, and spiritual selves (Bastien, 2004; Battiste, 2013). I have placed Indigenous knowledges into the larger scope of Indigenization, as engagement with Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing can be found in discussion of Indigenization. Indigenization of the post-secondary education has been defined to include Indigenous governance structures; the revitalization of Indigenous languages; respectful, collaborative research; and the inclusion of Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy to
support all learners (Academica Forum, 2016; ACDE, 2010; Barnard, 2015; MacDonald, 2016; Czyzewski, 2011; Colleges and Institutes Canada, 2014; Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, 2017; Louie, Poitras Pratt, Hanson, & Ottmann, 2017; Ottmann, 2013; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2017; Universities Canada, 2015).

To varying degrees, the theme of Indigenization and the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges may be found in the practice of each specific task team institution. Five of the institutions have created formal Indigenization advisory committees to support their efforts toward Reconciliation and Indigenization (personal communication, February 3, 2017). The progress of these committees lies at various points along a continuum, depending on when and how they began the process. It is not the intent of this study to assess the depth of understanding of Indigenization at the local post-secondary level; however, hope is found in the formation of this task team, and the number of institutions involved in the work of Reconciliation. As Freire (1970, 1973, 1985) so eloquently pointed out, dialogue is a crucial component of critical pedagogy, and the desired outcome of moving to critical consciousness prompts actions that support social justice. At my own institution, I have seen evidence of critical and authentic dialogue about the systems and structures that are implicated in the practices of colonialism. My experience has been that these conversations take place in the hallways and on the margins of larger institutional meetings; however, these authentic conversations are taking place, and I believe this is due in part to the increased institutional conversations around Indigenization and what that may entail. I believe that this is evidence that faculty and staff at my college are moving toward critical consciousness.

The potential of these dialogues, so critical to social change, are made even more possible with the hiring of Indigenous faculty and staff. One of the post-secondary institutions has
documented efforts to increase capacity by hiring Indigenous faculty for positions that are not specifically Indigenous in content or application. They have also increased the number of Indigenous faculty members substantially over the past decade. Two of the institutions have hired Indigenous faculty and content experts to work with Indigenous-specific content (personal communication, February 3, 2017). I believe these actions demonstrate evidence of critical consciousness and a movement toward praxis on the part of institutional leadership (Freire, 1970, 193, 1985). They have recognized the value of lived experience to inform how curricula is developed and taught. There is a crucial need for faculty to take a critical stance in teaching and curriculum development for the practice of critical pedagogy to be successful. The support of institutional leadership, through the allocation of time and resources toward engaging with Indigenous community members to develop curriculum, also demonstrates that leadership has hope that the institutions can work toward Reconciliation.

One post-secondary Indigenous Strategy is notable in its recognition of the need for parallel structures in the process of strategy development and execution. In this unique formulation, the Indigenous governance and committee models are parallel, and equal to, Western European governance and committee models (personal communication, February 3, 2017). The recognition of knowledge traditions as equally valued promises authentic dialogue and the development of critical consciousness that questions or troubles the dominant narrative and system and recognizes the importance of multiple ways of knowing (Anuik et al., 2010; Curwen Doige, 2003; Freire, 1970, 1973, 1985; Gallop & Bastien, 2016; Milne, Creedy, & West, 2016; Nguyen, 2011; Pidgeon, 2008, 2016; Taylor, 2017).

All members of the task team recognized the importance of institutional moves toward including Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy on the path to Indigenization and
Reconciliation; however, the development and inclusion of Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy into all courses, programs, and overall institutional structure has not yet occurred. In some cases, the Indigenization strategy committees of the institutions are developing such plans. Most of the work to date in this area has occurred in individual course and program level curriculum development and has not engaged with wider institutional structures (personal communication, February 3, 2017). While this can seem like a slow process, it takes time to develop relationships that can ultimately engage in authentic dialogue (Anuik et al., 2010; Taylor 2017; Curwen Doige, 2003; Freire, 1970, 1973, 1985; Gallop & Bastien, 2016; Kinzel, 2016; Milne, Creedy, & West, 2016; Nguyen, 2011; Pidgeon, 2008, 2016; Taylor, 2017). The fact that during a time of fiscal restraint and budget cuts, these local post-secondary institutions are expending time and resources on engaging Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in the work of Reconciliation is hopeful indeed.

**Indigenization Requires Structural and Systemic Change**

The theme of Indigenization of the overall structure, operation, and curriculum of the college or the ECE program was not mentioned by the participants. This is not completely surprising given that the concept of Indigenization has been introduced only minimally to members of our campus community. Participants referenced a desire to have Indigenous cultural understanding and Indigenous ceremony included in the ECE program as a means to support Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and because of their own interest in the subject matter. The participants did not connect this to a more systemic approach to changing the epistemology and pedagogy of the ECE program or the overall structure of the college to make space for Indigenous knowledges. This early-learning stage of Indigenization does not consider the systemic and societal oppression inherent in dominant pedagogy and epistemology, nor does it
explore the concept of decolonization which comes before Indigenization (Ashton, 2015; Battiste, 2013; Bjartvet & Kinzel, 2018; Kerr, 2014; Kincheloe, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Pidgeon, 2008, 2016). None of the participants referenced the idea of Indigenization as reframing the structure and operation of the ECE program in their conversational interviews and referred solely to changing the curriculum by infusing Indigenous content. This notable gap in understanding the concept of Indigenization needs to be addressed holistically by the college through the exploration of structural and systemic change, in addition to including Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing into the ECE curriculum to work toward meeting Call to Action #12.

Indigenous knowledges or Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing are the final component in the building of our educational nest. We need the solid framework of sticks and twigs (critical pedagogy), the sticky, messy bits of mud and string (truth telling and relationship), and the beautiful and unique feathers (Indigenous knowledges) as we work toward Reconciliation. This nest will be challenging to build but it will be worth the effort as it holds hope for our future.

**Critical Consciousness and Dialogue**

I believe that the documented efforts of the local post-secondary institutions and the findings from this research study with respect to Reconciliation, Indigenization, and transformative learning represent a conscious and targeted effort to move toward Reconciliation as articulated by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. These actions demonstrate the potential for the inclusion of critical pedagogy as a method of instruction to work toward social justice (Freire, 1970, 1973, 1985). In keeping with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations, I maintain that our role as post-secondary instructors is to respectfully consider and include Indigenous perspectives and viewpoints because of the historical
relationship that Indigenous peoples have to the land upon which the college is located. Understanding and acknowledging the history, culture, beliefs, and lived reality of Indigenous peoples is a requirement in order for transformative education to take place in this post-secondary context.

On the path toward Reconciliation, I believe the college has a responsibility to continue to work in the realm of critical pedagogy and to expand their efforts to engage the college community in truth telling and exploration that will result in authentic and critical dialogue (Freire, 1970, 1973, 1985). I believe that the college is working to follow this path and that we need to ensure that all of the stakeholders are engaged in authentic dialogue that challenges our social, cultural, and political beliefs, values, and lived realities. This means that I will be engaging with Indigenous Elders, community members, and organizations to help support the realization of the recommendations outlined below. We cannot move toward Reconciliation without the input and guidance of Indigenous community otherwise we risk continuing colonization. We must be on this path together. Engaging all of the stakeholders in the practice of critical pedagogy supports the nest of hope into which Indigenous knowledges can be meaningfully embedded in the college curriculum.

My own work toward Reconciliation at the college is supported by leadership and many of my peers. Some of the initiatives with which I have been involved provide strong indications that Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing are supported. This is evidenced in the submission of a successful proposal to deliver an Indigenous-focused Child and Youth Care diploma program. As we reside in Treaty 7 territory and that of the Métis Nation (Region 3), I will be looking to engage with Elders, community members, leadership, and agencies from these groups as I work toward meeting the recommendations from this research study. Additionally, I
have been supported in my work as a co-applicant and lead researcher on a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council grant working in partnership with Indigenous community, with all resources developed from the project belonging to the community. I have also been granted permission to embark on the research project that is the foundation of this dissertation. All this is evidence that my institution values Reconciliation. These opportunities demonstrate that the leadership is coming to understand the difficult work that Reconciliation will entail. Through the full support of college leadership with this project, I see evidence of their support for critical pedagogy offers a means through which to work toward institutional critical consciousness and praxis. Above all, I see hope. This hope brings me to the following recommendations in support of the educational nest.

**Recommendations**

As we move forward to build an educational nest, we need to keep in mind the important themes identified through this study. Purposeful engagement in transformative learning or critical pedagogy is necessary as the foundation of this nest. Purposeful engagement in truth telling and respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples forms the mud and string that holds this nest together. The inclusion of Indigenous knowledges or Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing at the college will fill the nest with feathers to support us on our journey to Reconciliation. These themes provide direction for recommendations as we move toward Reconciliation and offer guidance in the development of curriculum resources for the early childhood education program and the wider college community. I have outlined the recommendations for the ECE program and the college together because I believe that these recommendations are necessary throughout the college as we build the educational nest that provides support on the journey toward Reconciliation.
Realizing the Full Potential of the Early Childhood Education Program at the College

1. In order to support engagement with Indigenous communities and the inclusion of lived experience with Indigenous knowledges in college programming, the college will need to hire more Indigenous faculty and staff that includes representation from local community members.

2. Create a course on Reconciliation that uses critical pedagogy, and its concepts, as a foundational teaching approach to combat the history of colonial education and foster truth-telling and dialogue.

3. To support the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the college community should make the course on Reconciliation mandatory for all faculty and staff.

4. Engage with community and knowledge keepers in all stages of curriculum work to ensure a collective approach of being in relationship with community and bringing together the threads of language, culture, values, relationship, connection, community, land/place, and spirit.

5. To ensure that the work of Reconciliation continues, embed these recommendations in the college structure through policies and programming so that the work of Reconciliation continues in the face of a change in college, provincial, or federal leadership.

I believe these recommendations will support students in the ECE program at this college in their work as early childhood educators with Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and families. I believe these recommendations hold promise for supporting our college community overall. If done in a “good way”, guided by and in collaboration with Indigenous community, I believe these recommendations will also work toward meeting the Truth and Reconciliation
Commission’s Call to Action #12 regarding the development of culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Indigenous families. These recommendations can be embedded within the education nest that supports those on the path of Reconciliation.

**Reflections on Future Research**

This work presents opportunities for future research and exploration as educators, and other concerned citizens, respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s *Calls to Action* as supported by the Government of Canada and the academic world. Students may be interested in exploring Reconciliation or the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges in their own practices as early childhood educators and by developing their own responses to the *Calls to Action*. Faculty may want to explore how to embed a critical pedagogical approach into their own teaching practice as a move forward toward social justice and reconciliation. In turning to this work, future researchers should be mindful of following the guidance of Indigenous Elders and community members. Students, faculty, leadership, and academics may want to engage in dialogue each other about the social, cultural, and political systems that are responsible for oppression.

Through discussions with the Elder, the director of the Indigenous Centre and other community members, I have learned a great deal about the importance of relational practice, community, and taking the time to ensure that I am developing good relationships and working alongside of and in support of community. I have learned a great deal about the importance of following the guidance of Elders and knowledge keepers in my work. My own future research will ensure that I include and privilege the voices of those from community who guide me in this work. In all of these instances, it is vital that research be done in relationship with Indigenous community.
Summary

In this final chapter, I have explored the themes identified through analysis of the participant interviews utilizing the lens of critical pedagogy. This exploration has indicated that although we have begun to explore the path toward Reconciliation, we have a long way to go and a lot of work to do. I have shared recommendations that will support the college and the ECE program as we work to meet the *Calls to Action* of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This work will not be easy and it will take an exploration of our own power and positionality as we move forward. These recommendations are: 1) Hire more Indigenous faculty and staff that include representation from local community members to support engagement with the community and the inclusion of lived experience with Indigenous knowledges in college programming; 2) Create a course on Reconciliation that uses critical pedagogy, and its concepts, as a foundational teaching approach to combat the history of colonial education and foster truth telling and dialogue; 3) Make the course on Reconciliation mandatory for all faculty and staff to support the *Calls to Action* of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; 4) Support the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges in college programming by engaging with community and knowledge keepers in all stages of work to ensure a collective approach to curriculum by being in relationship with community and bringing together the threads of language, culture, values, relationship, connection, community, land/place, and spirit; and 5) Embed these recommendations in the college structure through policies and programming so that the work of Reconciliation continues in the face of a change in college, provincial, or federal leadership to ensure that the work of Reconciliation continues.

It is my intention to share this research project with the academic and early childhood education community at upcoming academic conferences as well as the college leadership and community through knowledge mobilization sessions that are regularly scheduled. I will also
share this study in my various board and leadership roles, using this as an opportunity to present research that supports the above recommendations. It is my expectation that the recommendations above will be supported at my institution. Most importantly, I will seek out the guidance of Elders and knowledge keepers for recommendations of who, where, and how this research should be shared with community.

The development of this research project and the experience of travelling in relationship with the participants, the Anishinaabe Elder, and the Director of the Indigenous Centre on this journey has changed who I am and how I see the world. I would like to emphasize the importance of the development of authentic relationships with the Elder and the Director of the Indigenous Centre who have helped support me and guide me on this research path. Through the work of this project, I am on a journey to discover who I am based on my own story and experiences, and I am also learning how to support the work of Reconciliation that is my responsibility. I am learning to work in relationship with community, and, just as importantly, I am learning to be Métis.

It is vitally important to recognize the acceptance of and appetite for the difficult work of Reconciliation that my college has shown. The institutional leadership has consistently demonstrated their openness and willingness to listen and to explore how we may ethically travel this difficult path. The institutional support that I have received helps to make this work possible. I believe this demonstrates the college’s understanding of the heavy lifting required to truly walk a path of Reconciliation and to build an educational nest that supports both a program and an institution.

The background of colonialism in Canada has worked to negate Indigenous knowledges. Working toward building an educational nest that has critical pedagogy as the framework of
sticks and twigs, engagement with truth telling and authentic relationships as the mud and strings that bind it together, and feathering this nest with Indigenous knowledges is necessary to provide a foundation to support Reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

I am committed to working toward Reconciliation through the *Calls to Action* of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in my both my personal and professional practice. I call on those reading this work to join me.
References


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