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# Walking Alongside: Poetic Inquiry into Allies of Indigenous Peoples in Canada

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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Walking Alongside: Poetic Inquiry into Allies of Indigenous Peoples in Canada

by

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A THESIS

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## **Abstract**

This qualitative arts-based study made use of poetic inquiry to analyze and represent the stories of non-Indigenous people recognized as allies of Indigenous peoples in Canada. I adopted a theoretical foundation in critical realism, focusing on the role of agency in the emergent realities of the participants' ally work (Archer, 2002). I grounded the study in literatures that drew from multiple Indigenous perspectives on teaching, learning and knowledge; social justice education and awareness; and postcolonial theory and decolonization. Thematically, the areas of ally experience that interested me most were their actions, emotions, and how they related to others in the spaces they occupied. Using the ally interview transcripts as raw data, I created found poems that reflected those themes. Constructing the poems while engaging in analysis led me to attempt to decolonize language and names. Hence, I made use of a disruptive strategy to bring attention to the extent to which language reflects colonization. In the final chapter of the dissertation, I outlined implications for adult education theory and practice as suggested by the study. In addition, I made suggestions for actions that allies-in-the-making may take up and directions for future study.

## Acknowledgements

I have been privileged to live, work, and write on this land. I was born in, and currently reside and work in Treaty 2 Territory. It is the original homeland of Dakota (some of whose lands are unceded territory within Treaty 2), Anishinabek (some of whom are adherents to Treaty 4), Cree, Oji-Cree, Dene, and Métis nations. The river I work closest to is the Assiniboine River, and I reside very close to the Little Saskatchewan River. Wasagaming (a Cree word meaning “clear water”) is the site of a national park just to the north of where I live. We all share the land with deer, elk, moose, coyotes, bears, managed herds of bison, and numerous other species of animals and plants. I am truly grateful to be present on this land. I would also like to acknowledge the lands upon which the University of Calgary is situated, traditional territories of the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta which includes the Blackfoot Confederacy comprising the Siksiká, Piikáni, and Káínai First Nations, the Tsúut’ínà First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda, including the Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley First Nations. The City of Calgary is also home to Métis Nation of Alberta, Region III.

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## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to the allies who shared their stories with me, and to the good work that they do. I hope that the dissertation honours your truth and that you continue to grow and seek the equitable path alongside the Indigenous peoples who are rightfully and resiliently leading the way.

Brandy

Craig

Diane

Joanne

Katherine

Kelly

Kelsey

Leanne

Lyndon

Mitchell

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Nations are the imagined products of the narratives and cultural pedagogies they encourage. Whether or not Canada is a nation is debateable because, on the one hand, it may seem as though there is a collective identity some Canadians claim that goes beyond citizenship within the country's geopolitical boundaries. On the other hand, Canada lacks some of the key traits of nationhood: a population with shared ancestry, history, language, and culture ("Nation," n.d.). The geopolitical area called Canada is a multicultural and multiracial product of colonization that is rooted in the exploitation of Original Peoples and their resources. Government and cultural institutions reflect primarily British and, to a lesser extent, French colonial influence of early settlers. Next door to what is arguably the world's most influential superpower, the United States, Canadians seem preoccupied with defining themselves as the antithesis to the US: a kinder, more tolerant, if smaller population. Speaking generally, Canadians adopt a self-congratulatory attitude with respect to human rights and laud the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982) as evidence of a truly evolved and egalitarian society. It is perhaps this sense of pride and self-righteousness that has been the greatest deterrent to Canadians' seeing the truth of the past and acknowledging the legacy of injustices that, through the continuation of colonial policies, practices, and attitudes, have devastated the Original Peoples of the land that comprises the Canadian state. To be sure, many empires have in the past and currently continue to colonize and exploit other nations. There is a theme of superiority that underpins imperialist projects, an insidious smugness that may partially explain why decolonization is universally difficult. Yet despite destructive policies and practices, Indigenous peoples have resisted the colonial mandate, survived systemic racism, and are thriving through reclaiming and sustaining languages, cultural practices, worldviews, and

authority over traditional territories and the resources on and beneath them. This dissertation delves into the lived experiences of people who are non-Indigenous but have been identified by Indigenous people as allies. I am interested in how their formal and informal learning experiences have led them to engage in work that is aimed at dismantling the colonial systems that have oppressed and continue to create barriers for Indigenous people in Canada. I believe that it is important to understand how allies enact their support of Indigenous causes, and how they react emotionally and socially to being engaged allies. By understanding more about the ally experience, educators may become better facilitators of learning that encourages, supports, and critiques allyship in many areas of social justice. Using poetic inquiry as an approach to analysis, I will present the findings of the study, which will be of interest to adult educators with broad interests in social justice and decolonization, or in more focused work with non-Indigenous Canadians who aspire to be allies.

Inspired by the work of Patrick (2016), I have chosen to infuse the dissertation with poems constructed of words from within the text of this dissertation and from the data, *found poems*. The sections of the dissertation devoted to analysis of the data and findings are much more reliant on poetic inquiry, but it seemed appropriate to find and present poetic resonance throughout the writing, including the chapters leading up to the analysis and findings. I have, therefore, constructed found poems using words and phrases chosen from the text of chapters 1, 2, and 3 that resonate with the chapters' major themes. These poems appear at the ends of sections as offset text in Calibri font. In proceeding with this introduction, I begin by briefly explaining the complex history of relations between Indigenous and settler peoples in this country. The fraught shared history informs the current calls for reconciliation and the need for non-Indigenous people to be engaged in the work that decolonization demands.

## **Relations Between Indigenous Peoples and Settlers in Canada**

The injustices that have occurred to the First Peoples of Canada have been reiterated to Canadians, this time in the form of what the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC, 2015c) described as “cultural genocide” (p. 1). Some settler-identifying Canadians have taken up the work of beginning to decolonize the relationships between settler and Indigenous Canadians and seek redefined connections through addressing the past wrongs and working to rebuild relationships. Though these may seem early days for settler-Canadians, the colonial legacy is deeply rooted, spanning generations. There are many reasons why individual settlers and settler-descended people may choose to engage in reconciliation. They may be reacting to shame or guilt, out of moral obligation, for spiritual or religious reasons, for legal or mandated agendas, or for reasons rooted in social justice. Some non-Indigenous people, operating from a position of privilege, choose not to engage in reconciliation or decolonizing work. They may feel it is time to move on, that racism is over, that racism is justified, that the events of the past are not their fault, or that enough has already been done to address injustice. It is interesting to me that people who have widely divergent views on reconciliation can emerge from similar cultural contexts. Why, then, do some adults choose the work that comes with alliance? It is a hopeful sign that many non-Indigenous Canadians are waking up to the systemic racism that has left deep and damaging effects on Indigenous peoples, but there is still a staggering amount of work to do on the part of settler-descended Canadians in truth-telling, unlearning colonialism, righting past wrongs, and forging equitable relationships.

Anyone who is not identified (either by law or heritage) as descended from the Original Peoples of Turtle Island<sup>1</sup> is a settler or descended from settlers, regardless of how they came to be on this land. The history of contact and the interactions between settlers and Indigenous peoples in Canada is well-documented, though biased and complex. The initial colonizers were explorers who came to Canada to look for and exploit resources, mostly furs. Increased colonization brought more settlers, mostly from the British Isles and France, often to take advantage of the jobs offered, primarily in eastern Canada, or for the promise of *free land* to farm or ranch in the west (Library and Archives Canada, 2006). Saul (2008) suggested that corporations and individuals strove to leverage their power in the emerging colony by establishing social, political, and economic ties with Indigenous peoples. Men sought marriages with Indigenous brides to secure the advantages these relationships offered (Saul, 2008). The women, however, referred to by the men as “country wives” were often treated in the same way as other forms of economic exchange (Lynne, 1998, p. 2). They were frequently used for their local knowledge, for sex, and to take on gendered labour in the new colony, where white women were initially prohibited (Lynne, 1998). Once immigration was opened to white women, these Indigenous women and families were often discarded by the men who once depended on them.

In the land that later came to be called “Canada” by the colonizers, Great Britain eventually established political and economic dominance over their French rivals. The colonists then turned their attention to the Indigenous peoples, who were clearly *not* British subjects, and framed their efforts to erase the population as addressing “the Indian problem” (McDougall,

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<sup>1</sup> The term “Turtle Island” has emerged as a “Pan-Indian concept,” according to Bruchac (2003, p. 64). In other words, the story of how North America came to be has been presented similarly by many tribal groups. The idea of the North American landmass originating on the back of a turtle is a creation story that is widely recognized and shared by intertribal groups.

2008). The emerging colonial government's response to the remaining Indigenous population, those not decimated by smallpox and other disease, was to begin to enter into numbered treaty agreements with leaders of many of the Indigenous nations. The treaties, however, were approached differently by the two sides of negotiators:

From the perspective of Canadian officials, treaty making was a means to facilitate settlement of the West and the assimilation of Indigenous peoples into Euro-Canadian society. Indigenous peoples sought to protect their traditional lands and livelihoods while securing assistance in transitioning to a new way of life. Treaties 1 and 2 encapsulate these divergent aims, leaving a legacy of unresolved issues due to the different understandings of their Indigenous and Euro-Canadian participants. (Albers, 2015, para. 1)

Although negotiated on a sovereign-to-sovereign basis, the agreements were used by colonial governments to consolidate Indigenous peoples on reserve lands, a strategy justified by promises to provide for specific supports, including education (Carr-Stewart, 2001).

To be clear, the processes of treaty-making, whereby the Crown and Indigenous people negotiate terms of ownership and control of lands and resources, are not merely historic. Ongoing negotiations call for all stakeholders acting in good faith. When agreements or the enactment of them are seen by Indigenous peoples as unsatisfactory or shrinking, the resulting process often plays out in the courts, owing to the colonial grounding of treaty-making in the *British North America Act*, brought into force in 1867 and patriated to Canada as the *Constitution Act* in 1982. Section 35 affirms Aboriginal rights in the *Constitution Act*, meaning that any rights that were in effect at the time of enshrinement (1982), and any that were to be negotiated through modern treaty-making processes are in force. In other words, the *Constitution* protects the



existence of Aboriginal rights, but does not spell out these rights, nor does it reinstate rights that existed in the past that had been extinguished prior to 1982. Specific claims or title, if disputed, must continue to be negotiated between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian government (First Nations and Indigenous Studies, 2009).

The Supreme Court of Canada has reiterated the “honour of the Crown” in its decisions:

The government’s duty to consult with Indigenous peoples and accommodate their interests is grounded in the principle of the honour of the Crown, which must be understood generously. While the asserted but unproven Indigenous rights and title are insufficiently specific for the honour of the Crown to mandate that the Crown act as a fiduciary, the Crown, acting honourably, cannot cavalierly run roughshod over Indigenous interests where claims affecting these interests are being seriously pursued in the process of treaty negotiation and proof. The duty to consult and accommodate is part of a process of fair dealing and reconciliation that begins with the assertion of sovereignty and continues beyond formal claims resolution. The foundation of the duty in the Crown’s honour and the goal of reconciliation suggest that the duty arises when the Crown has knowledge, real or constructive, of the potential existence of the Indigenous right or title and contemplates conduct that might adversely affect it. Consultation and accommodation before final claims resolution preserve the Indigenous interest and are an essential corollary to the honourable process of reconciliation that s. 35 of the

*Constitution Act, 1982*, demands. (*Haida Nation v. British Columbia*, 2004, para 3)

A troubling feature of the assertion of the “honour of the Crown” is the assumption that an Indigenous nation, in this case the Haida, must prove its title. For this reason, some Indigenous peoples are rejecting the term “land claim” and replacing it with “Indigenous Title,” as the

outdated land claim terminology suggests that the claim must be proven rather than assumed (Younging, 2018, p. 57). Though the Crown is expected to act with honour, it seems that the burden of proving claims and taking them to court rests with the Indigenous peoples. Furthermore, the colonial system of courts and litigation pits Indigenous peoples and the Canadian federal or the relevant provincial government in constant states of conflict, with a focus on one side winning and one side losing. The system seems too ill-conceived and historically uninformed to foster reconciliation efforts.

The treaties put education systems into place for Indigenous children, but instead of providing students with culturally-appropriate knowledge, the schools were part of a larger effort to “kill the Indian in the child” (TRC, 2015a). Indian Residential Schools and Industrial Schools run by Christian-based authorities were explicitly designed to erase the culture and language of the children by removing them from their parents and communities. Beyond being forced to attend these schools, staff subjected Indigenous children to physical, psychological, and sexual abuses that have had lasting intergenerational effects leading to the over-representation of Indigenous populations in prisons, addictions, poverty, and the child welfare system (McDougall, 2008). There have been some acknowledgements of unjust treatment of Indigenous peoples in Canada’s past, like the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People* (Government of Canada, 1996). However, little changed for Indigenous people as a result of these reports. Most non-Indigenous Canadians seemed content to see the injustices as the federal government’s problem, rather than engaging on an individual level in social justice action for Indigenous peoples. The legacy of these problems was the subject of the official apology by the Government of Canada (2008) and the TRC (2015c). Canada has entered a period that Epp (2008) characterized in this way: “Aboriginal peoples, their traditions, and especially their status

and rights are the subject of unprecedented attention, if not understanding” (p. 124). It is into this politically ambiguous yet cautiously optimistic time that allies are beginning to seek opportunities to enact meaningful change in the relationships between themselves and Indigenous peoples.

waking up  
beginning to decolonize  
seek redefined connections  
these are early days

why choose this work?

truth-telling    unlearning  
colonialism  
righting past wrongs  
forging equitable relationships

constant states of conflict  
the system seems ill-conceived  
treaties made promises  
the honour of the crown?  
lasting intergenerational effects

finally resonated  
to engage in meaningful work  
bring about change

### **Allies and Indigenous Peoples: A Brief Introduction**

Allies are people who identify with and contribute to the emancipation of groups of oppressed persons, though the allies themselves are not subjected to that oppression (Bishop, 2002). Wherever oppressed people seek greater equality, there also tend to be those people who have been granted greater privileges who will see to align themselves with those who are disadvantaged. These are allies-in-the-making. To be clear, the definition of who can be called an ally and how allies conduct themselves is troubled. Conversation about allies can take place in grassroots locations such as activist movements, blogs, newspaper articles, schools, and

workplaces as well as in academia; however, the importance of understanding how allies emerge and act is a topic that some academics have taken up. True allies, some suggest, do not act out of self-interest (Bishop, 2002; Gehl, n.d.); they intentionally work in the background, taking direction and leadership from the oppressed persons.

The individual alliances in which I am most interested are seeking to address the oppressive situation that exists within my own country. I understand that the First Nations and Inuit people have inhabited the lands we now reside on, since time immemorial, in what is now referred to as Canada. In Manitoba, where I have long resided, there is also a distinct lineage embodied by the Métis who are descendants of First Nations and European heritage, and who carry a unique political and cultural history of their own. I also understand that in Canada the constitutionally recognized Indigenous groups—First Nations, Métis, Inuit (FNMI)—and those who do not fall neatly into these categories, such as Non-Status peoples, have been and continue to be subjected to institutionalized oppression that spans multiple generations dating back to the time of contact with European settlers. Alliance scholarship is one way to address past and contemporary injustices and identify and act upon the roles and responsibilities of non-Indigenous Canadians in reconciliation. In my practice as a Writing Skills Specialist at Brandon University in Manitoba, I meet, socialize with, work with, educate, and learn from people who identify as First Nations, Métis, Inuit, or Non-Status every day. As a non-Indigenous person identified and identifying as an ally, I draw substantively on scholarship emanating from the settler population, which aligns with the positioning of me and the participants in this study and can help us use our skills and commitments to understand how allies can best contribute to the work of decolonization and perhaps even reconciliation.

The relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples since the time of contact has been, and continues to be, complicated and problematic. *The Indian Act* of 1876 established the legal relationships between the Canadian state and “cradle-to-grave” lives of Indigenous people (Morden, 2016, p. 113). Ultimately, the *Indian Act* and the numbered treaties are two separate colonial entities, each with its own set of effects on the Indigenous peoples. Referring to people living under the *Indian Act*, and its subsequent revisions, Brizinski (1989) claimed that the legislation has “enforced their dependency” despite resistance on the part of the bands (p. 173). What some may view as a form of dependency is bound in the *Act*’s tangled web of rights and restrictions. Arguably, the *Act* has persisted in part because it does offer bands protection in terms of freedom from taxation on reserves, along with provision of education, and housing. Indigenous leaders realize that dismantling the *Act* with nothing to replace it would jeopardize these inherent rights, which stand as meagre compensation for what has been lost in the processes of colonization. This complicated situation means that Indigenous people are both resisting the federal government’s colonial oversight of Indigenous governance, membership, and resources, while fighting to protect their rights to essential services.

Relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples seem marked by conflict at multiple levels. Along with racially driven social issues, there are conflicts between governmental and political organizations, corporate and environmental groups. By working to decolonize relationships and systems, perhaps the conflict between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians can be reduced. The effects of colonization, however, run deeply. Healing will take time. The intergenerational traumas marked by the Indian Residential Schools and the Riel Resistance of 1885 continue to cast shadows over the survivors and their families (Boyer, 2008; TRC, 2015c). Negotiations and treaty-making are ongoing processes between Indigenous

and federal government bodies, wherein some issues involving matters like Indigenous Title and self-governance are resolved through direct negotiation, and may progress to court, while other matters are initiated and settled in court (Government of Canada, 2018). For now, the process of resolving contentious issues seems reliant on conflict more often than collaboration or consensus-building.

Even so, some recent developments have arguably opened space for more open dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. The Idle No More movement, begun in late 2012, has issued a rallying cry to Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians alike, with specific implications for the development of allies (Idle No More, n.d.). Arguably, the movement appears to have had sustainable positive effect on some relationships. Speaking at the fifth anniversary of the Idle No More movement, Bear Clan Patrol director and member of Peguis First Nation, James Favel, was reported as stating, ““We’re seeing the Winnipeg police become more of an ally, we’re seeing benefits coming from our city, and we’re working closely with the mayor. ... Indigenous rights are being respected more than in the past”” (Macintosh, 2017, para. 13). Kyra Wilson, a University of Manitoba student and First Nations member spoke to the power of Idle No More to bring together people through shared interests, like climate change (Macintosh, 2017). Another participant at the anniversary event commented that the topic of reconciliation had become much more commonplace. Although the participants seemed heartened by the progress made in five years, they also expressed frustration how much more slowly bureaucratic systems were making changes (Macintosh, 2017).

Other grassroots movements are making a difference and drawing in allies. The murder of Tina Fontaine, an Indigenous youth whose body was recovered from the Red River, made headlines across Canada and spurred the creation of a grassroots Indigenous-led

movement called “Drag the Red,” dedicated to searching for missing Indigenous people (see Drag the Red! Facebook group <https://www.facebook.com/groups/556842211083726/about/>). One of the co-founders of the movement, Bernadette Smith (public lecture, Brandon University, 2016, March 11), stated that Drag the Red has attracted volunteers and donors from all over Winnipeg and Manitoba, and that many of those are non-Indigenous.

At present, it appears that allies acting individually and together in grassroots movements are helping to change relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. These individual actions are recognized by some Indigenous people as having a positive effect, opening space for me to study how the allies enact and sustain their identity. It is my hope the study that I conducted and discuss in this dissertation will contribute, in a small way, to conversations about reconciling relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. To that end, I invited Indigenous people to refer allies to the study. I investigated the lived experiences of non-Indigenous people recognized by Indigenous peoples as allies in a variety of sectors: educational, spiritual, activist, research, and healthcare. I am interested in how allies have learned to enact their identity, respond emotionally and socially to their ally experiences, and how they reflect upon the rewards and challenges of allyship. After interviewing the participant allies, I engaged in poetic inquiry, a process in which I crafted found poems from the interview transcripts. These poems provide an arts-based pathway into the data to facilitate analysis and presentation to the research audience. The details of the chosen methodology and the findings follow in separate chapters later in this dissertation. Before proceeding further, though, and to set the stage for further discussion, I want to explain the terminology that applies to my topic and the terminological choices that I made.

## Language

Indigenous peoples in Canada have made significant progress in reclaiming traditional languages, including how they choose to be addressed as individuals, groups or communities, and place names. It is my intention to honour this work by using terminology preferred by the Indigenous person or group to whom I am referring. I recognize that any words used to group entire Nations together tend to homogenize and unfairly represent them. These generic names do not honour the incredible diversity of history, traditions, or knowledge possessed by the multitude of peoples who are long-time occupants in the land now known as Canada. For the purposes of this dissertation, it is useful for me to explain the terminology that I employed. I have chosen to use the word “Indigenous” to identify First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and Non-Status peoples in a general way. I am using the form of the word Métis, with the acute accent on the “é”, as this is the form Younging (2018) characterized as the more inclusive, explaining that the unaccented form is sometimes used by the people who have partial Anglophone heritage. Wherever possible, I use the name preferred by the Indigenous person or people about whom I am speaking and to acknowledge his, her or their location. I also choose to dignify the term Non-Status with capitalization, in recognition that there are ongoing legal disputes over loss of status, and the predominantly women and children who are affected (Gehl, n.d.). I also recognize that the word Non-Status does not adequately address the reality that there are other people who are excluded from being officially recognized under the *Indian Act*. The word “Aboriginal” is also in wide use; however, some people have expressed discomfort with this term (Vowel, 2016) and its close tie to the *Constitution Act* (1982), a document that represents colonization (Thunderbird, n.d.). Within Section 35 of the *Constitution Act*, who is “Aboriginal” in Canada is defined as First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. I acknowledge the limitations of my choices. In making



those choices, I referred to available resources, including the Indigenous Foundations (n.d.) program within the University of British Columbia, *Elements of Indigenous Style* (Younging, 2018), and the book *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis & Inuit Issues in Canada* (Vowel, 2016), all of which take up a more comprehensive explanation of how Indigenous peoples have resisted colonization through reclaiming languages and names.

### **Conception of the Study**

The Indigenous population in Canada is young, growing, and largely situated in western Canada (Statistics Canada, 2011). The location of this study, Manitoba, is the Canadian province with the highest percentage of identified Indigenous peoples, although I recognize that self-identification plays a role in how the official census-takers report numbers. Only the three territories have higher Indigenous populations by percentage (Statistics Canada, 2011). Winnipeg is the urban centre with the highest off-reserve population of any Canadian city (Statistics Canada, 2011). In Manitoba, there seems to be some political rhetoric, if not political will, devoted to the need for increased support of Indigenous students seeking post-secondary education (Higher Education Strategy Associates, 2017.).

Brandon University, where I work, houses an Indigenous Peoples' Centre (IPC), the Program for the Education of Native Teachers (PENT), the Centre for Aboriginal and Rural Education Studies (BUCARES), a Native Studies Department, the Department of Visual and Aboriginal Arts, and publishes the *Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, an internationally recognized periodical. Clearly, there is an important focus on serving the Indigenous population at Brandon University, and on providing venues to research and discuss issues that affect people of Indigenous ancestry. Though there is a strong presence of Indigenous peoples in my life at present, this was not true in my earlier years.

As a descendant of settlers (my background is primarily English), I became interested in how I would connect with people of Indigenous ancestry daily in my work. I have a background in transcultural and transracial education that stems from my previous work as an international adoptions caseworker. Briefly, the transcultural and transracial education in which I was involved drew from the field of social work and focused on teaching potential adoptive parents' awareness and skills so that they would be equipped to raise children who came from a culture or race that was not the parents' (Vonk, 2001). Often, but not always, one or more of the parents were white, and the child(ren) being adopted were not white. These parents, white ones particularly, had navigated the world through a lens of privilege, and were now contemplating adding children to their family who would be encountering racism. One important concept that adoption caseworkers often impressed upon potential adoptive parents is that transracial and/or transcultural families must populate the family's social environment with a degree of intentionality. We encouraged the parents to build community networks that were diverse so that when their child arrived, he or she would see that the parents had a variety of friends, colleagues, doctors, dentists, and other professionals who reflected the diverse reality of the new family unit.

I recognize that families are influential in our early upbringing. My parents had always been vocal about the need to engage with people from all backgrounds and raised my siblings and me to respect and honour all cultures. However, I did not often encounter people of visible minorities or differing socioeconomic backgrounds. The idea of equality was more conceptual than actual practice in my early years. My father was a member of the Royal Canadian Air Force and, as a result, the population our family tended to associate with was young, mostly White, primarily working class, and mobile. There were very few older, non-White, impoverished, or rich people in our neighbourhood. Most of the families that we knew tended to look like ours:

White, with a working father, stay-at-home mother, and between two and four children. I now realize that the transient nature of military life does have its advantages and disadvantages for the children raised in that environment. One disadvantage is that friendships are often fleeting. We would make friends with neighbourhood children only to have the relationship uprooted by a father's posting to a new location. The upside to this community structure is that, as a child, I tended to be very accepting of playmates as they came along. In short, we played with and befriended whomever happened to be there. We had no time to be particularly judgmental about friends. Cliques tended to come and go quickly, as the composition gelled, dissolved, and reformed according to the movements of the families. The best part was that no one ever felt like the *new kid*, because there were always several newcomers at any given time. The social dance of trying to infiltrate a certain group, which happens sometimes in long-established communities, was considerably lessened in this constant state of flux.

This willingness to accept and welcome others was part of my childhood, and remains, I believe, part of my identity as an adult. I have seen this part of my identity strengthen in my past work in international adoptions and in my current work as a Writing Skills Specialist. What I learned from transcultural and transracial education in the adoption world has served me well in my more recent work at Brandon University. It is with intentionality that I cultivate diverse relationships in my day-to-day activities. These experiences, along with the makeup of the Brandon University community, have led to my interest in studying the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians. I am a settler-descended Canadian (and Manitoban), and I am invested in the importance of building and maintaining alliances with First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and Non-Status peoples. I live in a diverse community, and the university community where I work has a rich representation of people from all backgrounds, including

Canadians of Euroheritage, First Nations, Métis, Inuit, Non-Status peoples, and international students. University life, I believe, is richer for the diversity of the campus. I also believe that universities and other institutions can become sites of social justice through the teaching and learning of decolonizing practices or, alternatively, they can choose to extend and affirm colonial practices. It is my intention to learn more about how educators can encourage learning that leads to decolonization.

With trepidation, I consider myself to be on the journey to becoming an ally, but I would also qualify that identity as a recent development and understand that I am still learning how to best support Indigenous peoples and other allies as we decolonize relationships. Indigenous students and colleagues have shown faith in my intentions and gifts and have asked me to engage in activities of mutual concern. As I reflect upon the collection of experiences that have led to my deep interest and desire to research alliances, I realize that more has influenced my identity and my research decision than just my childhood and my occupations. Up until I attended university, I had only a superficial understanding of the current and historical challenges and successes of the Indigenous peoples of Canada. Both my undergraduate degree and my master's degree included the study of many works of literature created by and about Indigenous people. In my thesis work, I studied *No Great Mischief* by Alistair McLeod and *The Diviners* by Margaret Laurence. In each of the novels there was a Métis figure who occupied the liminal space between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures. This figure proved to be interesting in that he (the character was male in both novels) was a bridge between cultures, yet disadvantaged, as he was never truly accepted by either culture. Although not the major focus of my research, my study of the Métis figure in these pieces of literature has led me to more questions about identity and how

people construct themselves within society. Métis characters are interesting frontrunners, representing the complex effects of contact between settlers and Indigenous peoples.

When I began my Doctor of Education studies in 2013, I was new to educational research and working full-time in a post-secondary setting. The language of educational theory was new and exhilarating, if a little daunting. Unlike some of my cohort, I had not firmly decided upon a topic for my research. Slowly, however, the threads of a study began to knit themselves together. One major catalyst was Atleo's (2013) chapter on the "zone of Aboriginal education" in which she discussed the environments where learning takes place. She made it clear that any dialogical space was useful, and extended that definition to hockey arenas, coffee shops, and the like. As a person who resides and socializes in rural spaces, Atleo's mention of these ordinary spaces really spoke to me and how I live my everyday life. This piece helped to crystallize my topic around the idea of studying the formal and informal learning that mobilizes the onset of an ally identity in non-Indigenous people in Canada. I chose to study the ally positioning of the non-Indigenous person for several reasons. I would, first, position myself as an emerging ally. I am preparing myself to take on the work of decolonization, so it makes sense for me to study work that I hope to become a part of through my deliberate focus within this research study.

It has never been my intention to study the role of Indigenous people in reconciliation or decolonization. I have learned that there is a clear and justified mistrust of non-Indigenous researchers who engage in research typically on, or with, Indigenous people (Smith, 1999). To enter an ethical research relationship with any Indigenous group requires forming relationships over time and accepting shared authority and control over the research results (First Nations Information Governance Committee, 2007; Mi'kmaw Ethics Watch, n.d.; Government of Canada, 1996). These requirements protect the interests of First Peoples who agree to engage

with research and are respectful of the people who have been unfairly treated by unscrupulous or unprincipled researchers in the past. I realize that to earn the respect and trust needed to enter into research partnerships with Indigenous peoples, I must take this process very seriously and with much humility. In the future, I hope to enter into relationships with Indigenous people that will result in mutually beneficial and productive findings from whatever research we may decide to embark upon. I am aware of the history of the *mosquito*: one who only comes to the research to get something that benefits oneself and who, upon achieving their interests, then departs (Cochrane et al., 2008). This doctoral research is a step towards building respectful relationships, but I acknowledge that I am not yet, nor may I ever be, in a position to ask to partner with Indigenous people in a research setting. To respectfully build relationships toward the possibility of future collaboration is something to which I aspire.

Canada is in a complex stage of seeking Truth and Reconciliation. With the publication of the *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (TRC, 2015c), there has come a list of 94 Calls to Action that affect the historical, current, and future relationships among all peoples in Canada. As I see it, the responsibility for how we choose to move forward and reconcile as both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples should not rest solely on the shoulders of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous people did not create the conditions of colonization, so it is not their responsibility to dismantle its damaging processes and consequences. Non-Indigenous people must find ways to support and engage in fostering a new relationship with Indigenous peoples—one that is based in justice, equality, and mutual respect.

Through the courses I have taken and conversations with my cohort group and advisor, and with time to reflect, the topic of my research has solidified and made itself clear to me.

Although the topic is clear, the question of who allies are has become less clear and more troubled.

*euroheritage trepidation*

*canada manitoba brandon university*

*faith in my intentions and gifts  
works of literature*

*liminal space*

*threads of a study  
knit themselves  
together*

## **Study Purpose**

I undertook this study to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of those who choose to engage in the struggle for an equitable redefining of Canadian society by becoming an ally to or with Indigenous people who have populated these lands millennia before the time of European contact. Settlers and settler-descended people form most of the population of Canada, and the history of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada is troubled. Only recently have non-Indigenous Canadians widely begun to learn about the generations of abuses, intolerance, and injustices that have strained relationships between peoples. Socially and politically, as in other situations where oppression exists, the population is cloaked in a pedagogy of ignorance that maintains the normative myths upon which oppression is based (Anwaruddin, 2015). Furthermore, some survivors of colonial abuses may have chosen not to tell their stories to their families or communities, meaning that some of the details about past traumas may also be unknown to Indigenous people. With the opening of the conversation about our shared past, Canadians of all ancestral backgrounds are starting to recognize the need

to address past wrongs and to build more equitable relationships moving forward. These stories have been told in the past, such as when legendary Mohawk Chief Joseph Brant wrote, in around 1789, this comparison of his people to the Europeans he had encountered: “Cease then while these practices continue among you, to call yourselves christians [*sic*], lest you publish to the world your hypocrisy. Cease to call other nations savage, when you are tenfold more the children of cruelty, than they” (Kelsay, 1984, p. 535). More recent documents such as the massive *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (Government of Canada, 1996) also made an accounting of generations of injustice, yet they have never really been listened to. These conversations have taken place in formal settings such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and in such informal spaces as Idle No More protest sites, climate justice circles, and Friendship Centres. Within these spaces, First Peoples and non-Indigenous peoples have begun to find ways to work together. Allies understand the need to pursue justice, and they have found ways to express their alliances. In exploring and coming to understand the narratives of a select group of allies, I hope to articulate some of the commonalities and diversities of educational and lived experiences that have informed the allies’ recognition of their own privilege and formed the foundations of the identities of non-Indigenous allies. Viewing alliance as a process of adult learning and adult education, I wish to provide other educators and allies with insights and resources to support and broaden and understand the engagement of allies in decolonization efforts.

Allies have been part of conversations about social justice for many marginalized groups. In particular, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirit, and queer or questioning community has embraced the activism of allies.<sup>2</sup> One group, known as Parents, Families and

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<sup>2</sup> LGBTTQ\*, sometimes shortened to LGBT\* (Sexuality Education Resource Centre MB, n.d.)



Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), initially invited participation of parents and friends of gay individuals. The group now identifies as supporting a wider diversity of gender-identifying individuals and persons of all sexual orientations (PFLAG Canada, n.d.). Allies have also stood alongside other marginalized groups. One prominent historical example that comes to mind is the Underground Railroad that assisted Black slaves in escaping slavery in the American south. Then, as today, some allies undertook to support these causes, sometimes at risk of personal persecution. While seeking to understand how the participants have learned about the oppression of Indigenous peoples and how they are responding as allies, I also inquired about the emotional and social dynamics involved in becoming recognized as an ally. I suspect there are emotionally charged and socially challenging situations that may arise for allies. Studying these reactions will grant some insight into ally experience that may be helpful for educators who are supporting ally work, creating safe spaces to foster ally development, or who are working on their own process of decolonizing relationships.

### **Foundational Epistemologies and Theoretical Framing**

In terms of axiology, ontology, epistemology, and methodology, the nuances of human identities and social relationships have proven to be complex terrain for researchers to navigate. I was initially drawn to constructivism to theorize social research; however, I will admit that the choice was more of a default reaction, a need to get *something* into place. A couple of crucial conversations with my supervisor led me to investigate critical realism (CR) as an alternative perspective, and my shift to this philosophy seems more consistent with the views that I brought to the study. Initiated by Bhaskar in the mid-1970s, CR has gained an arguably limited but dedicated following. For the purposes of my study, the beauty of CR is its approach to agency, as championed by Archer (2002), and its refusal to conflate agency with structure or epistemology

(i.e., beliefs about knowledge) with ontology (i.e., beliefs about reality). Thus, we may study human individuals who put their ways of being into practice and the structures in which they operate. Archer recognized the transition from personal identity to social identity through a process of experimentation and reflection

conducting an endless assessment of whether what it once devoted itself to as its ultimate concern(s) are still worthy of this devotion, and whether the price which was once paid for subordinating and accommodating other concerns is still one with which the subject can live. (p. 19)

It is not difficult to imagine that people who purposefully place themselves in challenging or uncomfortable social situations will accordingly find themselves in the iterative process of negotiating their sense of self-identity and how the self interacts within a social space. Within my inquiry, CR has become the paradigm from which I explore the core concepts of ally and alliance and their relationship to adult learning.

Beyond Archer's perspective on self and agency, CR is a philosophical perspective that attempts to explain the nature of reality and how we acquire knowledge, a metatheory of things and knowledge about them. In summarizing CR, Danermark, Ekström, Jakobson, and Karlsson (2001) asserted that reality is emergent and stratified. Furthermore, what we know at any given time is constantly being realized and articulated through hypothesis, experimentation, and theorization. The things that we empirically discern are part of reality, but only one part, and even that part is subject to fallacy. That assertion becomes persuasive when we consider that theories undergo regular revision and, sometimes, rejection. There are conditions which we have yet to discover, but they are nonetheless there, and our comprehension of any phenomenon is always partial at best. There are constant discoveries of things that were there all along, but we

researchers lacked the ability to find, solve, or even envision it. A simple example is the existence of bacteria prior to the invention of the microscope. Bacteria were present, but no one knew that they existed or caused dreaded diseases. Bhaskar (1975) explained the *transitive dimension* as the “means of the production of knowledge,” while the *intransitive dimension* “the things that exist and act independently of [knowledge] production” (p. 113). Theories are transitive, since they are the means through which we establish the nature of what is. Danermark et al. (2001) contended that the reasoning that Bhaskar applied to natural science is applicable to the social sciences as well.

Investigation in the social sciences differs from research in the natural sciences in that the natural scientist is investigating a research object “one-sidedly,” while social scientists are researching and interpreting social phenomena, which are themselves socially interpreted (Danermark et al., 2001). Social scientists using CR recognize that there is a material dimension, as well as social practices involved in the interpretation and analysis of social phenomena. They also acknowledge that power and dominance are brought to bear on these social practices (Danermark et al., 2001). By making note of these elements that factor into social practices, researchers can critically analyze existing and emergent social practices in ways that can explain and promote emancipatory processes.

Critical realism’s recognition of the material dimension of social phenomena is applicable to the conditions of racism and colonialism. Indigenous peoples in Canada are materially affected by the inequities in income, education, experiences in the justice system, and healthcare, to name only some. These social facts are rooted in the colonial reality that has foundationally affected the historical relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, and also into the social practices that continue to uphold systemic racism. This is not to

suggest that all Indigenous peoples experience racism in the same way. The material reality of the social conditions of racism and colonialism present in many iterations, and CR provides researchers with the philosophical grounding upon which to examine these conditions and to make recommendations to address these inequities.

In seeing reality as an emerging condition, and people as personally and socially reflective agents, Plumb (2013) argued that CR holds true emancipatory potential: “Our knowledge of entities, their properties, and the specific events they are part of, as fallible as it might be, is always open to verification and improvement through empirical observation, logical argument, critical reasoning, and creative theorization” (p. 157). If we see reality as emergent and transcendent, then we give ourselves the ability to transform the situations in which we find ourselves, with an eye to striving for improvements to the human condition. Significantly, this philosophy embraces other forms of knowledge gathering, as each epistemology manifestly adds to one or another of the levels of reality.

While much of the focus of Bhaskar, Archer, and others has been to build a philosophical foundation for CR, there are others who have taken up CR to make use of its methodological and analytical implications. Both Fletcher (2017) and Lennox and Jurdi-Hage (2017) made explicit use of CR to study two distinct sociological phenomena. Fletcher turned her attention to Saskatchewan farm women and how they relate to working in off-farm occupations. Lennox and Jurdi-Hage applied CR to researching incidents of gender-based street harassment. In both recent studies, the researchers applied CR throughout their work, and provide practical and accessible examples of abduction (also called retroduction) achieved through using CR. Abduction “is an inductive argument whose premise (or premises) constitute the available evidence, and whose conclusion is a hypothesis regarding what best explains the evidence” (Cook, 2009, p. 4). In

other words, they were able to discern commonly occurring trends or themes (which CR calls “demi-regularities”) and causal mechanisms. The importance of these studies is that one criticism of CR has been its focus on the purely theoretical; however, this perceived limitation is being actively addressed and dismissed by contemporary social researchers.

The direct connections of CR to my work are based mainly in Archer’s (2002) work on agency and identity. Allyship is a complicated way of being in the world (Jubas, Garbutt, & Mizzi, 2016). Archer theorized that practice, which is always embodied, takes primacy in the emergent sense of self. Our complex sense of self derives from our associations with the natural, practical, and social worlds that we inhabit. Within each of these realms there are associated emotions. Our challenge, as human beings, is to create and perpetuate a self that can, with greatest comfort, negotiate the emotional costs and payoffs of living within the three spheres that we inhabit. It is through experimentation and reflection that we gain an understanding of how our actions within these realms have consequences for our well-being (Archer, 2002). This theory of agency, as applied to individuals, also has implications for society and the potential for emancipatory change:

The individual, as presented here in his or her concrete singularity, has powers of ongoing reflexive monitoring of both self and society.... In parallel, this subject is also capable of authentic *creativity* which can transform “society’s conversation” in a radical way, one which is foreign to *Society’s Being*, who is condemned to making conventionally acceptable permutations upon it. (Archer, 2002, p. 19)

Equipped with the tools provided by CR, social research can proceed in a way that deeply considers the role of the individual in a transforming society.

## **Assumptions and Biases**

I am a well-educated, middle-aged, able-bodied, culturally Christian (non-practicing), heterosexual woman descended primarily of English settlers. I have occupied a lower-middle to middle-class socioeconomic status for most of my life. Except for identifying as male or being from the upper class, I would suggest that I am among the most privileged of people currently occupying the planet. For the most part, however, I have had very little control over my circumstances, including where I was born, from whom I am descended, my gender and sexual identity, my bodily wellness, my intellectual capacity, or my early socioeconomic status. I have exerted some influence over the level of my education, mental and physical fitness, and current finances, but I have had the opportunities to make choices for myself in all these matters. In other words, the level of privilege to which I have become accustomed and from which I benefit is largely unearned (McIntosh, 1989).

By undertaking this study of allies, I need to be aware of my biases and emotions around this research. Racism is emotionally loaded for me. I tend to react quite angrily towards displays of racism, which may not always be a helpful choice. However, I have recently been reflecting on this reaction and I am beginning to realize that, while I may be angered by a racist comment, I am not responsible for the behaviour of the person making the comment. Instead, I can be more effective as an educator if I remain calm, sensitive, and reasoned in my approach. Becoming angry was perhaps a mark of my feelings of guilt by association with the privileged group. Conversely, when I think of people who have been affirmed as allies, I am biased toward seeing them collectively as people interested in social justice, equality, and selfless contribution. I must caution myself against interpreting the data that emerged in my study through this admittedly optimistic and naïve lens.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Within Canadian society the relationship between the Indigenous peoples who lay claim as first occupants of this land and those of non-Indigenous descent has been fraught with tensions that far pre-exist Confederation. The creation and legacy of the Indian Residential School system, whereby children were removed from their parents and communities to systematically erase their culture and replace it with a more Eurocentric worldview, has led to tragic years of oppression, violence, poverty, and cultural deprivation for the First Peoples of Canada. Perhaps what is so alarming about Canada's racism is that it has been easy for those not directly affected by it to ignore it. Of late, however, privileged Canadians have been called to account for their smug denial of living in a racist country. In a side-by-side statistical comparison of key indicators of disadvantage, Indigenous Canadians were more likely to be worse off than African-Americans living in the United States (Gilmore, 2015). To be clear, the charge of racism is directed at the treatment of Indigenous peoples within Canada. So, while many Canadians pride themselves on a national level as a welcoming, accepting, and inclusive place for newcomers and refugees to settle, they have turned a blind eye towards the deep injustices inflicted on the peoples who accepted their own ancestors into this land as newcomers. The paradox is deeply disturbing.

However, with the inception of the Idle No More movement, and its subsequent widely publicized protests and calls for change, an increasing number of non-Indigenous people have been inspired to self-declare as allies in re-imagining their relationships with FNMI and Non-Status Indigenous people. In the words of Indigenous activist Wab Kinew and former president of the University of Winnipeg, Lloyd Axworthy (Axworthy & Kinew, 2013), "The seeds of a new relationship are here, but we must work together to sow them" (para. 11). As an increasing

number of Indigenous students are entering Canada's post-secondary institutions (Graham, 2013), the gathering of the stories of allies is both timely and significant. The more we understand the ways in which allies come to be, the better we, as adult educators and as a society in general, can foster the conditions where alliances can be formed. If Canadians are looking towards a future in which Indigenous peoples and settlers can be reconciled, then it is important that we begin to study the stories of those who are intentionally reaching out to bridge the divide between the populations. It is public pressure that will drive policy change.

### **Significance of the Study**

It is my hope that the findings of this study will be of interest to a wide variety of adult educators working in post-secondary settings, occupational spaces, social movements, or any other forum, not just those for whom diversity and equity are key priorities of their programs. In my own education, I identify the study of Canadian literature as a powerful influence on my ability to empathize with persons of Indigenous ancestry. Perhaps the study will also be useful to those who investigate curricula, in that there may be common elements of study for those who aspire to be allies. There may be interest from a sociological perspective in looking at the kinds of spaces in which alliances were, and are, formed. Educators must address the knowledge gap of mainstream Canadians with respect to Indigenous issues if our country is to move forward in ways that dismantle colonialism. Perhaps we as adult educators can help cultivate the spaces where we can address the gaps and support those who aspire to become allies. The study will also likely be of some benefit to those who are already in alliances. Both sides of the relationship—oppressed persons and their allies—can access support by reading the stories of the allies that I have studied. The ally voices will become part of a larger community and hopefully further a national conversation on how we may move forward together as equal partners in



nation-building in a redefined way that is based in mutual respect. The *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (TRC, 2015c) provided a list of 94 recommendations in the Calls to Action (TRC, 2015b). I have spoken with allies who are involved in a broad spectrum of social contexts to determine how their work may (or may not) be aligned with the Calls to Action. The prior failed attempts by government to use royal commissions and inquiries to gain the attention of most Canadian settlers would seem to suggest that the TRC's calls are likely to fall on deaf ears. Though there is room for cautious optimism, meaningful change will require unprecedented engagement and determination from all.

- pride and self-righteousness
- tim horton's self-congratulatory attitude
- destructive policies and practices

- shame guilt moral obligation
- spiritual or religious
- legal or mandated
- or reasons rooted in social justice

- recognized allies enact

- adult educators cultivate the spaces
- ally voices part of a larger community

## Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

In conducting a literature review as part of this dissertation, I am mindful that my research builds on the work of those who have gone before, and it will occupy a position within the current scholarship conducted by adult educators on diverse concerns. I begin with a discussion of Indigenous thoughts on teaching, learning, and knowledge, which then helps frame my review of scholarly literature related to social justice education, allyship, and decolonization. For far too long, academia has privileged Eurocentric epistemologies to the exclusion of other rich ways of knowing. One way that scholars can begin to decolonize the academy is by normalizing the citation of Indigenous knowledge. The inclusion of Indigenous ways of knowing in education sectors must extend beyond land acknowledgements and acts of ceremony, though these pieces are important to decolonization in their own ways provided they are not tokenized gestures.

As much as possible, I ground this review in the field of adult education, although I extend beyond the field when doing so brings key ideas into view. I have found it useful to incorporate LGBTQ and feminist literature, especially as these thinkers were early adopters and critics of alliance-based relationships. In no way am I equating the experiences of marginalization or oppression across groups of people. Notable factors that are distinctive to the oppression of Indigenous peoples include direct ties to colonialism, separation from place and from place-based ways of knowing and living together, rupturing of families, and the role of Elders in community life and in confirming the qualities of an ally. It is also valuable to point out ways in which the literature speaks to my philosophical stance as a critical realist and to poetic inquiry as my methodological choice. Through this review, I highlight the historical roots and

more recent scholarship in these areas to establish a trajectory of thinking and praxis, analysis, and recommendations of the work that I go on to discuss in later chapters.

### **Indigenous Thoughts on Teaching, Learning, and Knowledge**

Indigenous knowledges take many forms and are enacted by peoples of diverse backgrounds from widespread locations. What Indigenous peoples know, how they know it, and how that knowledge is applied cannot be summed up within the space of this dissertation, nor within any one space for that matter. It is nonetheless important for me to include some of the widely acknowledged concepts of Indigenous thoughts on teaching, learning, and knowledge because allies generally will have an interest in respecting spaces for Indigenous knowledges to be shared and honoured, and they will recognize the importance of supporting the transfer of Indigenous knowledges from one generation to the next. That is not to say that non-Indigenous folks should adopt these ways of thinking and doing, unless they are invited to do so and accept with humility, and acknowledge the source of their learning. What I present here are some “strands of connectedness” that are woven into diverse Indigenous ideas of teaching, learning, and knowledge (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 40). These threads are not indicative of any one people but are accepted within many Indigenous cultures. Each cultural group has a history, present, and a future of how its unique knowledge will be remembered, enacted, shared, and shaped moving forward.

**Importance of Elders (Knowledge Keepers) and kinship ties.** In Indigenous communities, knowledge is generally transmitted by Elders and maintained through kinship and relationships as well as stories and songs. Because of their role in the preservation of the community’s knowledge and language, Elders are accorded a position of great respect by its members (Hare, 2011). The sharing of knowledge and language often occurs within a

relationship context, reinforcing kinship ties and relationships between people and the natural world. It is not surprising, therefore, that the colonial practice of removing children from communities to place them in residential schools was devastating to families, communities, knowledge practices, languages—all foundational to cultural existence and wholeness. Though the effects of residential schools have been devastating to communities, Hare (2011) found that within many locations the oral tradition of storytelling by Elders is well retained. Not only has this tradition been preserved, but school administrators are also recognizing the importance of having Elders within classrooms and in land-based learning environments.

Elders are also being recognized for their contributions to planning and researching curriculum and pedagogy at higher administrative levels. In her research of Inuit education in Nunavut, Canada, McGregor (2010) detailed the protocols of working with Elders on a project. It is important to note that Elders are not only sought out for their traditional practices. As educational environments strive to decolonize their spaces, many have formed advisory boards populated with Indigenous community members and with Elders, who are recognized as being the experts on Indigenous knowledges and practices (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2018; McGregor, 2010). In the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action (2015b), education is one of the key areas of focus. For many schools, universities and other places of learning, the inclusion of Indigenous communities and Elders in planning Indigenous content and activities has been a response to the TRC's Calls.

**The role of story and language.** Deeply connected to respect for Elders and the importance of kinship ties in teaching, learning and knowledge is the role of story and language in Indigenous worldviews. Story is an important pedagogical tool that engages learners from a very young age. Revered writer and Ojibwe storyteller, Basil Johnston (1995) wrote, "Stories

about the manitous allow native people to understand their cultural and spiritual heritage and enable them to see the worth and relevance of their ideas, institutions, perceptions, and values” (p. xiii). Johnston’s deep connection to the stories led him to record the narratives in print, translating them into another form so they may co-exist alongside the traditional oral realm. He recorded stories that explain the nature of life for Anishinaabe people from the point of creation, to their contact with Europeans, and their eventual resurgence. The stories are a mixture of English and Ojibwe words, extending engagement and providing others with glimpses into Ojibwe culture. Johnston’s work highlights the practical, spiritual, and intellectual content derived from the stories and from the language itself. Stories and songs, like textbooks, hold information on safety, finding and preserving food, the connectedness of plants, animals, and the environment to humans, and how to relate to one another.

Indigenous scholar and storywork researcher Archibald (2008) engaged with several Elders in her research into storywork, the researching of stories, and how it can enhance education. During her research, Archibald found that the stories took on a cyclical nature as she spent time with the Stó:lō Elders who gifted them to her. She often found that the stories were open-ended and that she had to go away for a time to figure out what they meant, then return for further stories. In short, she found herself responsible, in many ways, for the meaning-making process. Learning happened in real life, not just during the storytelling process. In addition to learning from the Elders, Archibald (2008) took up the idea of reciprocity, which is inherent in many teachings within Indigenous worldviews, and has written about her work in such a way as to share it with others.

Stories are sometimes metaphorical, sometimes personal, but sharing and engaging as either a storyteller or as a listener is a way to build and preserve Indigenous knowledges. The

coyote, or other trickster figure, is important to many Indigenous cultures and may be represented in various incarnations. The Trickster has “lots to learn and teach while travelling in the world... Trickster is a transformer figure, one whose transformations often use humour, satire, self-mocking, and absurdity to carry good lessons” (Archibald, 2008, p. 5). Hare (2011) suggested that the use of the trickster as metaphor for human behaviours is valuable in the acquisition of language in children, as they learn through repetition and wordplay. The telling of personal narratives is powerful as well and has been a necessary part of the truth-telling phase of the TRC (2015a; 2015c). Narratives of the experiences of survivors have taught Canadians about the atrocities committed in Indian Residential Schools, and of the loss of hundreds of women and girls who have gone missing or who have been murdered.

Reclaiming stories and languages is important work in the preservation of Indigenous knowledges. Stories serve to reinscribe connections between people and nature. Bruchac (2003) related that Indigenous languages are sometimes characterized as poetic, often making references to nature. For example, he pointed out that Kanien’keha:ka Elder, Tom Porter, referred to a blue dress as “a dress that is the colour of the sky” (p. 32). Rather than naming the colour, his language references the colour as it exists in nature. The language itself reflects reverence for nature. To lose language is to lose these important references and their attachment to values. The hard work of reclaiming languages and names is ongoing and evolving. Language classes are springing up in universities, online, and in community locations such as elementary schools and recreation centres. Books like Younging’s (2018) *Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing By and About Indigenous Peoples* remind scholars of the currency of change and how the project is ongoing: “The process of decolonizing language surrounding Indigenous Peoples is not finished: terms, names, and styles continue to evolve. So, plan on not getting it right” (p. 50).

This statement acknowledges the reality of things as they are, opening the door for continued critical conversations about the nature of the emergent reality of decolonization.

**Connections to the land and environment.** Indigenous peoples are deeply connected to the land and the natural world, and their knowledge has been undervalued by Eurocentric science. Simpson (2002) argued that the basic principles on which western science is predicated run counter to Indigenous worldviews. The scientific method relies on objectivity and rigorous analysis, while the Indigenous approach to understanding nature takes a more holistic view. Land-based education is relevant to Indigenous peoples when it includes Elders, stories, practical knowledge, spirituality, and how to resist colonization of the resources (Simpson, 2002). Environmental education, Simpson asserted, is growing in importance for Indigenous people, as there has been a progressive degradation of the environment as an effect of colonization, and the idea of land as commodity. Yet the environmental education that is most accepted within academic settings and for policy making is one that privileges western-style scientific thought. Very few Indigenous students populate physical science and environmental studies programs, perhaps at least in part because of deep philosophical differences between Indigenous thought and western science.

Children who are raised in an atmosphere where Indigenous teachings are valued are often introduced very early on to Mother Earth, which is referred to in western rhetoric as land-based education. Within the setting Hare (2011) studied, caregivers often took children on walks through the woods and taught the children about how plants are traditionally used, how to show respect to the earth, and how to recognize and honour the changing seasons. In another study, researchers witnessed the learning effect of picture books about Indigenous environmental stories on children and the participating adults (Korteweg, Gonzalez, & Guillet, 2010). They

called upon educators to incorporate storytelling through picture books as an engaging tool to bring environmental knowledge not only to the children at whom the books were specifically aimed, but also to the adults who interacted with the children. The pedagogical effectiveness of blending of art, storytelling, relationships, and a profound message further substantiate Simpson's (2002) claim that environmental knowledge and science are approached differently by Indigenous peoples than by western academics. However, different should not be construed as inferior, especially if matters of common interest for all people, such as environmental reclamation and protection, are at stake.

A balanced approach to the integration of western scientific thought and Indigenous traditional cultural teachings is appropriate for teaching Indigenous learners (Cajete, 2010). For Indigenous thought to benefit students within modern society, Cajete (2010) argued that Indigenous scholars must work to critique the concepts within a contemporary setting and create new language and projects to establish how Indigenous and western thinking can be integrated. The effects of this kind of work are far-reaching, with "community, political, social, arts, environmental, curriculum, institutional, leadership health and personal work" named as just the beginning (Cajete, 2010, p. 1127). Much is to be gained from adopting a more indigenized approach to education, especially as this approach applies to learning about the natural world: "*Traditional Indian education is an expression of environmental education par excellence*" (p. 1128, emphasis in original). However, the paradigm is radically different from the Eurocentric model: more egalitarian, greater emphasis on wisdom, more holistic, more collaborative. By infusing education with the spirit of Indigeneity, perhaps even more Indigenous students will persist in furthering their education and taking their place within an invigorated and more relevant academy that respects the foundational principles of their cultures. Furthermore, the



Indigenous paradigm of learning has much to offer all learners—an antidote, perhaps—to the model that has resulted in disparity, excess, and conflict.

**Indigeneity in adult and higher education.** It is hardly surprising that issues of space, control, and belonging surface in post-secondary environments where Indigenous students seek to be educated. There have been forays into the creation of Indigenous-controlled spaces for adults to be educated, as well as efforts to make mainstream post-secondary institutions more inclusive and supportive of Indigenous students. One early example of an Indigenous-controlled post-secondary institution was the Native Education Centre, now called the Native Education College (NEC), located in Vancouver, British Columbia. The privately administered college is owned and operated by British Columbia First Nations (NEC, 2018). Haig-Brown (1995) published an extensive research report on the college, describing how it was established and how administrators dealt with some of the inherent tensions of gaining acknowledgement of the credentials awarded there. It took much political will and organization on the part of Indigenous groups to have NEC established. Non-Indigenous adult educator Ray Collins had worked extensively with Indigenous adult learners and First Nations leaders trusted him to help establish the centre, based in Freirean ideals, where literacy becomes a gateway to social and political empowerment (Haig-Brown, 1995).

A second thriving example of an independently operated Indigenous post-secondary institution is First Nations University of Canada (FNUC) in Regina, Saskatchewan. First conceived as a university-college in 1976, and formerly called the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, FNUC lies adjacent to the University of Regina, but its curved architecture marks it as a distinct campus. At present, approximately 3000 students are enrolled, and many thousands more have graduated from the various programs that FNUC offers (FNUC, n.d.).

Creating all-Indigenous spaces for post-secondary education is possible and effective, but Indigenous students should feel welcome and supported in any educational space they wish to attend.

Education in Canada holds the paradoxical position of being both a tool of oppression and colonization, and a potential key to decolonization. To this point Indigenous forms of knowledge and pedagogy have been ignored, or worse, condemned by Eurocentric systems of learning (Battiste, Bell, Findlay, Findlay, & Henderson, 2005). By infusing the systems of education with Indigenous ways of knowing, education systems can become more responsive to Indigenous learners and begin to decolonize the hearts and minds of all learners. Battiste et al. (2005) called for “animating Indigenous humanities” through the reclaiming of Indigenous knowledges as a counternarrative to Eurocentric worldviews that are typically presented in institutionalized learning environments. They argue that universities have been privileged thinking spaces, and that Indigenous spaces have not been acknowledged by the academy as locations of thinking and critique. By recognizing Indigenous humanities within university spaces, the university space can be criticized and decolonized effectively from within (Battiste et al., 2005).

Within some universities, programs have been established to educate Indigenous people for specific careers. Because Indigenous peoples have become interested in educating their own people, many of the programs within universities have centred on teacher education. One such venture, the Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEP) started in Vancouver at the University of British Columbia (UBC). Verna Kirkness, esteemed Cree educator, built a career in Indigenous education and eventually was offered the position of supervisor of the program (Kirkness, 2013). Under Kirkness’s leadership NITEP became responsive to the needs of

Indigenous students and the community at large, opening centres in multiple locations to support a greater number of Indigenous teachers to be educated (Kirkness, 2013). In 1987, Kirkness further solidified her legacy as a leader in Indigenous education when the first-ever World Indigenous Peoples' Conference on Education was held in Vancouver, organized by Kirkness (2013). Other universities, like Brandon University, have similar programs where Indigenous students have greater access to teacher education (see <https://www.brandonu.ca/pent/>). While these programs certainly address community needs and student aspirations, they are somewhat limited to specific professions, like educating future teachers.

Indigenous students are interested in having the opportunities to populate careers in all fields, so programming needs to respond to students regardless of which discipline they choose to study. Indigenous students are present in all levels of post-secondary study, and supporting these students is a priority for people working to reduce barriers to student success. Recognizing that Indigenous students are still underrepresented in graduate studies, Pidgeon, Archibald, and Hawkey (2014) studied the role of interpersonal relationships in the outcomes of Indigenous students in a university graduate program. They found that fostering relationships, especially of a mentoring nature, was beneficial in creating a supportive environment for Indigenous graduate students. Because of the relationships they formed with peer mentors, students were more likely to feel accountable to their goals and to persist with their studies (Pidgeon et al., 2014). Furthermore, programming that was holistic in nature and that was culturally relevant was integral to the students' perception of a positive experience. This kind of support helps students to overcome barriers presented by being few in numbers or coming from families or communities that have had few, if any, graduate students. Moreover, students are supported

across a wide variety of disciplines, rather than limiting student support to disciplines or programs that have targeted Indigenous student enrolment.

**Concluding thoughts on Indigenous ways of knowing.** Despite the destructive effects of the project of colonization, Indigenous knowledges, ways of teaching and of learning persist and flourish. As part of the project of decolonization it is incumbent upon all educators to make space for Indigenous thought and people. Hare (2011) looked at making space for Indigenous storytelling to support early childhood literacy, and I would affirm that inclusion of Indigenous knowledges is appropriate at all levels of education. These epistemologies offer new ways to critique topics in the humanities (Battiste et al., 2005), and a more holistic way of looking at the natural world (Cajete, 2010). Education systems in Canada have long been part of attempts to erase Indigenous thought, and space for Indigenous thought has become a necessary part of dismantling colonization.

Indigenous knowledges  
to be shared and honoured

Elders within  
classrooms  
land-based environments

Storywork  
reciprocity  
connections between people and nature

Indigenous humanities  
holistic

## **Social Justice Education and Awareness**

The land that is now commonly called Canada has a history of adult education scholarship and practice that focuses on social justice. By social justice, I am referring to “an ideal condition in which all members of a society have the same basic rights, protections,

opportunities, obligations, and social benefits” (Turner, 2005, p. 370). People who strive to espouse social justice causes are concerned with inequities that create conditions whereby privilege allows for one group to develop to a higher potential (Turner, 2005). Adult educators often see themselves as at the forefront of championing social justice work through education (Nesbit, 2013). Canadian adult educators have made significant contributions to scholarship on social justice on a national and international stage and remain vigilant and critical, ready to shine a light on inequities; however, that work has not shone so brightly in the area of Indigenous education.

The importance of Freire’s 1970 (in English translation) seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, to the foundation of social justice education cannot be overstated. There is a material reality and objectivity to the conditions of social injustice that align with the critical realist perspective. Freire (2009) suggested that the “radical demand” (p. 50) for transformation is brought about with the realization on the part of both the oppressed and the oppressor that the objective reality must change. He further argued that waiting around for things to change on their own is bound to be fruitless, rather “subjectivity and objectivity in constant dialectical relationship” (p. 50) are required to bring about demonstrable changes. Those who choose to engage in the struggle to rid society of oppression are forever changed by that decision. Leading students to this transformative change can be enhanced through “problem-posing education” (p. 79), which enhances criticality much more so that the “banking” style of education (p. 72), where facts are transactionally acquired.

Problem-posing education not only enhances criticality in students, it also invites students to become agents in the construction of their reality. Freire’s affirmation of problem-posing education is well-aligned with critical realism’s perspective on an emergent and stratified reality.

Moreover, Freire's endorsement of this style of learning suggests that education is always unfinished business. Adults can be continuously engaged in problem-solving and transformational work if they recognize and commit to it, becoming agents in change and social justice. If we see ourselves as unfinished beings, then there is always a reason to strive for improvement in our collective human condition.

Freire (2009) laid out many of the foundational principles for ally work within *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He acknowledged that there will be those who wish to join with the oppressed to assist with the struggle, but he also pointed out that such a "conversion" is often fraught with difficulty (p. 61). There is no escaping the reality of privilege from whence the ally has come. The will or need to help may be accompanied by patronizing gestures or an unwillingness to take a back seat to leadership within the oppressed community. Freire likened becoming a true ally to a "rebirth" (p. 61) because there is no going backward in the act of seeking authentic and lasting change. The fact that there is even an injustice to struggle against is predicated on the existence of the inequity. The ally may derive validation from involvement in the movement and, whether they acknowledge it or not, may long to see the struggle continue.

People who embrace transformation, however, do find ways to transmit thought into action. Words have the power to transform, Freire (2009) argued, "there is no transformation without action" (p. 87). Allies find ways to put thoughts into action in a variety of ways. Dialogue, action, and reflection are key to transformation, though Freire added that love is also essential: love for the world and for the humanity that inhabits it. Activism and dialogue not infused with love risk becoming ways to reinforce the dominance of the oppressors. Freire clearly outlined that oppressed persons are agents of change, but loving and critically aware

allies have a role to play in working alongside oppressed persons in a loving, transformative praxis, so long as they maintain a critical perspective and awareness of their positionality.

**Radical social justice education.** The call for radical social education was further advanced by a collective of women of colour led by Moraga and Anzaldúa (1983). The collection of scholarship they published used a variety of genres, including poetry, to bring attention to the voices of women who were not being heard, even within communities advocating for social justice. Latina, Black, Indigenous, and Asian women were being excluded from conversations about social equality, particularly if they were also marginalized by their sexuality, class, or physical ability. The book *This Bridge Called My Back* (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983) is at least in part a call to action for people who are already involved in social justice to educate them about the inequities within the movements that, on their face, strive to resolve inequity. Moraga (1983) overtly took aim: “The deepest political tragedy I have experienced is how with such grace, such blind faith, this commitment to women in the feminist movement grew to be exclusive and reactionary. I call my white sisters on this” (p. xiv). Moraga’s position also called attention to the vulnerability of oppressed persons within a movement, speaking to issues of trust in the “daily deciding/risking who it is we can call an ally, call a friend (whatever that person’s skin, sex, or sexuality)” (p. xix). In other words, alliance cannot be assumed based on shared identifiable characteristic, such as shared colour, gender, or sexual preference. The joining in the struggle, making spaces for all voices, and the maintenance of trustworthiness are far greater markers of alliance.

Seizing the metaphor of the bridge, Rushin (1983) discussed the exhausting work of activism for marginalized feminists. In “The Bridge Poem” Rushin described this experience:

I explain my mother to my father my father to my little sister

My little sister to my brother my brother to the white feminists  
The white feminists to the Black church folks the Black church folks  
To the ex-hippies the ex-hippies to the Black separatists the  
Black separatists to the artists the artists to my friends' parents

Then  
I've got to explain myself  
To everybody

I do more translating  
Than the Gawdamn U.N.

Forget it  
I'm sick of it  
I'm sick of filling in your gaps (p. xxi)

Rushin addressed the challenge that minority voices are not only marginalized, but also homogenized. She also wrote of being the “sole Black friend to 34 individual white people” (p. xxi) and how her presence amounted to tokenism and constant pressure to explain the Black experience, as if her life was representative of all Black women. Even within otherwise well-intentioned communities, the risk of overburdening oppressed persons with requests to explain the broad context of the oppressive situation is very real. It is even more intolerable to expect oppressed persons to explain the nature of their oppression to their oppressors without the safety and support of well-informed allies.

Another contributor to *This Bridge Called My Back*, Cameron (1983), is a Lakota lesbian from Paha Sapa (Black Hills) in South Dakota. Her memoir spoke to racism on the part of white people, and to racism within what she called “third world people” (p. 48). Like Rushin, Cameron addressed the common issue of being called upon to represent marginalized voices and to assume responsibility for educating racist people:



*It is inappropriate for progressive or liberal white people to expect warriors in brown armor to eradicate racism.* There must be co-responsibility from people of color and white people to equally work on this issue. It is not just MY responsibility to point out and educate about racist activities and beliefs. (p. 51, emphasis in original)

Clearly, being well-intentioned observers of racism is not enough. Placing the responsibility for educating the population about inequity is not the responsibility of oppressed persons. The cause must be taken up by those who represent the oppressor people, but those who do take up the responsibility need to be educated and nurtured in their roles so that their efforts do not amount to dangerously insidious racism that is cloaked in neoliberal clothing.

The works between the covers of *Bridge* are lively and engaging pieces drawn from many genres: poems, memoirs, interviews, and essays that relate experiences from diverse marginalized women. The appeal of such a book is that it is widely accessible, rather than presenting as a work of only scholarly interest. The works are also emotive and short, inviting reflection on the part of the reader. Looking back on the impact of *Bridge*, Aanerud (2002) commented on its importance as one of the most cited feminist works of its day. She also noted that “*Bridge* offers no single and unified statement on racism” (p. 72). The diverse voices in the text allow for each one to be heard and acknowledged, rather than creating an artificially homogenous protest against racism and other forms of oppression. That was exactly the problem that *Bridge* tried to address: the loss of marginalized voices. Aanerud also addressed the positionality of white feminists making use of *Bridge*, and how effectively Cameron (1983) recognized her own tendency to essentialize the experience of non-Indigenous women. Cameron, Aanerud argued, opened the door to alliances between white feminists and feminists of colour when she wrote about racism as a product of culture, rather than as a product of whiteness. The

popularity, impact, and continuing importance of this work affirm that arts-based works, like those in *Bridge*, representing a variety of diverse experiences, do have the power to generate sustained challenges to oppressive situations.

Knowing what the oppressive situations are, and how to name and act upon them became the basis of Young's (1990) work to expose the "Five Faces of Oppression." Young argued that oppression as a term is difficult to understand, and that people may avoid the labelling injustice as oppression if they lack a working knowledge of how oppression manifests. In answer to this ambiguity, Young set out to name oppression's five manifestations: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. By clearly identifying these conditions, and how the conditions relate to those of the oppressor population, Young created a useful set of lenses for the examination of social inequality. The message is that this framework gives social justice activists more and better ways to articulate the means through which oppression is maintained and how it may also be dismantled. Like Aanerud, Young recognized that the oppressive circumstances may not be maliciously intended, but are sometimes a function of cultural longevity, systems sustained for so long that we no longer notice. The analogy of the fish that has no idea that it lives in water is appropriate here (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Recognizing the five faces, however, involves taking stock of the material reality of the oppression and, as Freire suggested, recognizing humanity's transformative power to enact change.

**Indigenous social justice education.** An Indigenous social justice pedagogy provides learners with a set of tools to confront the effects of colonization. Such a pedagogy might help equip participants to engage in preserving and growing Indigenous material culture and ways of being in and knowing the world (Shirley, 2017). Indigenous educator Shirley of the Diné Nation

researched a social justice education program that targeted Diné youth. Shirley suggested that one of the steps is “*rethinking* the process of schooling” to decolonize curriculum through teaching Indigenous histories and the effects of colonialism on Indigenous peoples (pp. 165-166, emphasis in original). Though this learning may disturb students and elicit strong emotions, she advised that educators “teach into these risks” (p. 166). The telling of truths and the resulting potential trauma may be managed through Indigenous healing processes. The focus, Shirley argued, must be on empowerment of the youth to enact change. The truth-telling and empowerment pieces of this part of Shirley’s work may be appropriately applied to ally pedagogy, but the Indigenous healing model should be approached with great caution by non-Indigenous folks. Many ceremonies are open to everyone, but some sacred spaces are meant for Indigenous peoples only. Non-Indigenous peoples should seek guidance from an Elder or Knowledge Keeper (using appropriate protocols) or wait to be invited to an open event before participating in ceremonies (BCPVPA, 2013). Allies may also seek counselling through community mental health resources, their employee assistance program, a clergyperson, or through their family doctor.

A second way that Shirley (2017) argued is necessary for Indigenous social justice pedagogy to be upheld is through the infusion of Indigenous epistemologies into all facets of life. She suggested that Indigenous ways of knowing can be incorporated into community living as well as into educational structures. Indigenous epistemologies can assist, in this case, Diné youth in developing stronger kinship ties and a more grounded and pride-filled sense of identity. Allies can become supporters of Indigenous epistemologies by embracing curriculum activities and pedagogies that are led by Indigenous educators and Elders in whatever community the allies

find themselves. Allies may also seek advice and guidance on bringing Indigenous epistemologies into their own classrooms, if they have sufficient resources to do so.

A third way that Shirley (2017) advocated for Indigenous social justice pedagogy is through nation-building. She argued that Indigenous youth must be able to access their Indigenous epistemologies, like language, traditions, and ceremonies, to be able to represent their people as distinct from the Eurocentric hegemony. Allies can become partners in this mission through their support for Indigenous language options in schools, policies that respect and value Indigenous traditions and ceremonies in public spaces like schools and workplaces. Allies can also recognize sovereignty and historicity by learning to properly and publicly acknowledge treaty rights and territories, along with traditional homelands and current Indigenous governing bodies. Although Shirley's work on social justice engaged with Diné youth specifically, there are identifiable ways that allies may offer support or take up work that can foster more just relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Allies can become agents of change and emancipation (Plumb, 2013).

In examining how Indigenous teachers and learners interact in university settings, Indigenous scholars Sumida Huaman and Abeita (2018) began to question and trouble the role of each side of the educational equation. They argued that social justice is best served when the dialogue is maintained as an egalitarian relationship between teacher and learner. When knowledge is truly exchanged and decolonized, the relationship between teacher and learner is more fluid, with learners sometimes becoming teachers, and teachers sometimes taking the role of learner. Pedagogy becomes less oppressive and more collaborative. A less oppressive higher education structure, they asserted, is more accessible to Indigenous students. The academy is an important resource for Indigenous students, despite its colonial foundation, because there are

western forms of knowledge that provide access to economic relationships, scientific knowledge that contributes to solving problems like climate change, and wider access to social and cultural knowledge bases. Sumida Huaman and Abeita suggested that western knowledges and Indigenous knowledges are not incompatible, especially when teachers and learners adopt a dialogical and collaborative approach to the learning. Similarly, allies will find that adopting a fluid approach to the teacher and learner stance serves well in situations where equity and social justice are at stake.

Written before the days of Idle No More, Alfred's (2005) *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* called upon Indigenous peoples to become warriors of a new kind to oppose settler privilege and to tear down the oppressive colonial structures that create such disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous folks. Alfred profiled Indigenous individuals who had taken up the resurgence of Indigenous power and discussed the roles of both violent and non-violent action in the quest for liberation. He also questioned the value of "justice," defining it as "a liberatory concept...not capable of encompassing the broader transformations needed to ensure coexistence" (p. 27). Rather, he suggested that the goal of the resistance and resurgence is more aptly peace, of which "justice is one element" (p. 27). "Peace," he explained, "is hopeful, visionary, and forward-looking; it is not just the lack of violent conflict" (p. 28). However, peace that exists merely because of the powerful exerting pressure through laws and order is peace that exists through domination. The peace Alfred envisioned is one where social justice is integral. That, he explained, is something that requires "personal and collective transformation" and a new kind of warrior spirit. Allies may not be warriors in Alfred's vision of resistance and resurgence, but not every part of the work is necessarily meant for allies. An engaged interest in

dismantling the means of domination and an eye towards a future built on justice and peace is something that all allies can strive to support.

**Allyship.** As I have previously stated, adult educators have often taken up social justice causes as part of their mandate. “Pedagogy for the Privileged,” Curry-Stevens (2007) argued, “seeks to transform those with more advantages into allies of those with fewer, [presenting] a considerable impetus for broad, societal change” (p. 35). She further suggested that it is the responsibility of adult educators to engage in a practice that elevates the awareness of privileged folks so that they may be transformed into activists. Educators have access to students, and the opportunity to raise their consciousness, just as Freire (2009) pointed out, is not to be squandered. In her study, Curry-Stevens found that adult educators who engaged in teaching the privileged about oppression identified that the transformative changes emerged on many levels for the learners: spiritual, ideological, psychological, emotional, behavioural, and intellectual. The study also outlines key steps in the process of educating the privileged wherein the challenges and risks, along with the potential benefits are discussed.

Curry-Stevens identified criticisms of the practice, and its goal of transforming privileged folks into allies. Those learners who become identified (or who self-identify) as allies then face the complexities of allyship that does not end with the raising of consciousness (Jubas et al., 2016). Social justice education that is aimed at the privileged, even though privilege is relative and exists in many forms, is quite often directed towards white people (anti-racism), men (sexism), heterosexual (anti-homophobic), and the like. There is some healthy scepticism in seeing members of the oppressor group become educators positioned against their own form of privilege. Curry-Stevens addressed this scepticism and acknowledges that positionality of the

educator is of concern and could be used as a means, or at least an appearance, of elevating the teacher's own ego.

To be clear, not all educators addressing social justice pedagogy are (nor should they be) members of the privileged group, nor is the audience always privileged learners. I have focused on privileged learners to this point because I have an interest in the development of allies. Even in discussing Freire's work, I focused on the parts that related to the oppressor. However, ally development is not the only form of social justice education, and I wish to widen the circle to include additional minority voices. Though I have looked at some of the pieces from *This Bridge Called my Back*, written by female radical scholars or public intellectuals of colour, theirs is far from being the only contribution from marginalized voices. As this study focuses on allies of Indigenous peoples, it is fitting to look at work from Indigenous scholars on the teaching of social justice. There are pieces of these works that may be applied to fostering ally development.

Being an ally presents individuals with an opportunity to engage in social justice work, but it is a term and a role that is rife with complexity (Jubas et al., 2016). The idea of an ally exists in many different aspects of social justice, and it may be taken up in different ways. Some scholars have looked at broad concepts of allyship (Bishop, 2002; Curry-Stevens, 2007), while others have looked at more particular circumstances, such as where Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples have worked together (Gehl, n.d.; Wallace, 2013). Ally work is generally quite self-effacing (Bishop, 2002; Gehl, n.d.). Wallace's (2013) work looked at many undertakings where Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities have built relationships to work towards common goals. To date, little of this work has focused on the experiences of individual allies. Brubacher (2008) interviewed individual allies for his master's thesis work, with a focus on how critical race theory and historical ways of perceiving allies affected the

allies' work. Allies do see themselves as committed to a community and to goals much larger than themselves, but I do think that there can be space for the stories of individual allies to be shared—not for the glorification of the individual—but for the sake of gaining an understanding of the struggles, failures, learning opportunities, and successes that the actions, emotions, and social tensions experienced by these people can offer.

reality of privilege  
patronizing gestures  
dialogue action reflection  
Love

feminist Bridge  
opened the door  
to alliances

new kind of warrior spirit  
dismantling the means of  
Domination

widen the circle  
fostering ally development

## **Postcolonial Theory and Decolonization**

Many European countries engaged in projects of colonizing lands that did not belong to them for a variety of reasons. While some of the political, economic, and ideological structures of colonization have been successfully resisted and overthrown, others have remained in place (Williams & Chrisman, 1994). Colonized peoples have used methods ranging from armed conflict to peaceful protest, and from legal challenges to diplomatic negotiations to regain territory or property, or to renegotiate relationships between themselves and colonizers/settlers. Use of the term postcolonial is problematic, because the degree to which any previously (or currently) colonized country has progressed to being postcolonial is widely variable (Williams & Chrisman, 1994). Canada, and other countries that became heavily populated with white settlers,



are different from many other colonized areas, as dominion status was granted early on by the British government, nominally moving these nations away from colony status. Yet we still refer to the process of decolonization as part of the journey towards forming right relationships with Indigenous peoples in Canada. In many ways that matter, Canada has remained a colony, and Eurocentric worldviews and hegemony are normative. Postcolonial theory offers tools for critique, and insight into the conditions of colonization. Moreover, there is hope that through efforts towards decolonization a new reality for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada will emerge.

**Historical roots of post-colonial thinking.** Among the voices that have contributed to postcolonial thought, there are a few that stand out as having resonance for this research and for the colonial conditions that Canada has maintained with respect to Indigenous peoples. These voices also offer insight into forms of resistance that have in the past and continue to weaken the structures and attitudes that uphold the colonial realities of Canada. Spivak (1994) offered critique that is both Marxist and deconstructivist in nature, while Mohanty (1994 & 2002) brought a feminist vision to her critique of colonial capitalism and how that project has inscribed itself on the bodies of women.

Spivak originally published her essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in 1988, to point out that hegemonic power structures consistently negate the voices of the Other. Power and desire allow for the elite to speak and to be presented as a multitude of voices, each carrying with it the weight of hegemonic authority. Meanwhile, the Other or Subaltern, has been reduced to a singular marginalized voice that Spivak suggested has been muted. The Other only exists based on its difference from the elite or powerful group. Silencing has been a powerful tool in the oppression of Indigenous peoples in Canada. Treaties were written in English, the language of

the colonizer, to the exclusion of the tribal languages. Moreover, the practice of making treaties official through writing was inconsistent with Indigenous oral traditions. Traditional languages were banned in the Indian Residential School system, and children were punished for using their mother tongue.

Western colonial powers legitimized their claim to political structures that adopted an attitude of beneficence towards the colonized. As a stark example, Spivak (1994) recalled the practice wherein some Indian (referring here to people of south Asian heritage) women would sacrifice themselves upon the funeral fires of their dead husbands. These women, known as *sati* in Sanskrit, seemed to disturb the British colonizers to such an extent that they passed a law against the practice, ostensibly saving “brown women from brown men” (p. 93). Moreover, the practice seemed to enjoy a brief resurgence upon Indian independence from Britain, further strengthening the colonial argument that the Indian people reverted to what the British interpreted as a barbarous practice in the absence of a benevolent colonial presence. The implication is that an inferior subaltern population should be saved from itself. Indeed, the oppression of culture that took place in Canada bears striking similarity, with the influx of missionaries and Residential Schools used to save Indigenous peoples from their supposedly savage and uncivilized ways.

Mohanty’s (1994) essay, originally written in 1986, took up a feminist perspective to comment on the problematic ways in which colonized women had been represented. She argued that colonized women had been homogenized and been (mis)represented as victims, powerless and voiceless and in need of protection, especially from men. Moreover, the sources of discourse on the so-called “third-world woman” were often feminist writings from the normative middle-class, mainly white feminist theorists (p. 197). The casting of the Other in this way, coming from

a normative westernized feminist source, lent additional authority to the distorted and singular image of the down-trodden underprivileged woman. Imagining women as united in their suffering and oppression does little to empower individual women. Furthermore, any effort to make change assumes that all women want or need the same thing when, more appropriately, women need to have access to the tools of self-determination.

Mohanty (2002) undertook to revisit her landmark essay nearly twenty years after publishing “Under Western Eyes.” In clarifying her earlier work, Mohanty stated that she was not interested in creating a dichotomous *us versus them* perspective in pointing out the ways in which so-called western feminism had characterized transnational feminism. Rather, her goal was to point out the dichotomy that existed so that it could be addressed and that solidarity among feminists working towards decolonization could be a goal. She addressed what she called “common differences” as a foundational belief that could be leveraged by feminists from a wide variety of contexts. In this revisiting of the original essay, Mohanty also acknowledges the struggles of Indigenous women and proposed that terminology like “Third World” does not adequately describe the conditions resisted by Indigenous peoples (p. 505). Mohanty recognized her own position of privilege within the academy and reviewed how she could still express solidarity with the struggle for decolonization.

**Defining decolonization.** It is helpful to understand the mechanism through which the land now referred to as Canada has become colonized, as this understanding will contribute to an examination of what it means to decolonize the space. Wolfe (2006) discussed the mechanism and impact of settler colonialism and described it thus: “settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event” (p. 388). In effect, there are negative and positive pressures put onto the Indigenous populations. Negative in the sense that there is some sort of process of

elimination and positive pressure in the form of settlement of the land base. To be sure, elimination takes on several forms, which can include forms of assimilation, intermarriage, homicide, rehoming, and others. Settlement of the land base can include renaming of landmarks, assumption of control over resources, governmental structures that maintain boundaries, and the like (Wolfe, 2006). Europeans notoriously seized upon the notions of the doctrines of discovery and the idea that North America was, to them, *terra nullius*, no one's land. In other words, as there were no other Europeans already present, they laid claim. The communal land relationship that Indigenous people practiced was replaced by European colonizers who sought individual ownership and control over whatever resources that land produced. Wolfe described the process of settler colonialism as "structural genocide," which he explained is appropriate in that the term expresses the brutality of past and current practices that serve to eliminate Indigenous populations and privilege the settlers' frameworks (p. 403)

If the land people now refer to as Canada is the result of settler colonialism, how do the Indigenous and non-Indigenous inhabitants go about decolonization? What exactly would decolonization look like? Are reconciliation and decolonization synonymous or antithetical? Indigenous title to many lands in Canada is still being disputed by the federal government, particularly in locations where the territories have never been ceded to Canada under treaty agreements (Assembly of First Nations, n.d.).

**Decolonizing education.** Education in Canada and other colonial contexts has a long and troubling history of being used by colonizers to eliminate the existential threat of Indigenous culture. Perhaps ironically, Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders and educators now see education as a powerful tool in enacting decolonization. Four detailed items in the list of the ninety-four recommendations in the Calls to Action resulting from the TRC outline steps to build

curriculum into Canadian schools at all levels that reflects Indigenous knowledges (TRC, 2015b). The calls include the creation of oversight positions in government to ensure that there is an infrastructure in place to maintain Indigenous content inclusion through curricula, professional development, and research. Indigenous languages content, and the inherent ties between language and culture are also covered by the Calls to Action document, with a further five recommendations that address the revitalization and conservation of Indigenous languages. These recommendations include the reclaiming of Indigenous names, creation of a languages commission, the assurance of language rights, and establishment of post-secondary degree and diploma programs of study in Indigenous languages.

In a broad approach to examining the *hows* and *whys* of decolonization in higher education, de Oliveira Andreotti, Stein, Ahenakew, and Hunt (2015) troubled the notion of a streamlined, normative pedagogy aimed at decolonization. They found that complexities in educators' motivations, and systemic attempts to *solve* the issues of decolonization often result in paradoxical and contradictory methods and messages. Rather than seeing these inherent conflicts as symptoms of failure to decolonize, the authors find the pedagogical value in examining the tensions. They recognized that systems often resist change, and that progress towards streamlining or creating a "normative" praxis in the context of higher education may mean losing the criticality that is necessary to develop meaningful and sustained decolonization. In short, the process is messy, but there is much to be learned from examining the messiness of decolonizing higher education (de Oliveira Andreotti et al., 2015).

Messiness aside, there are some fundamental attitudes that educators must adopt in order to decolonize spaces and programs wherein education occurs. Mackinlay (2005) looked to Smith's (1999) work in developing embodied learning through dance in her ethnomusicology

classes. Mackinlay adopted the position that colonialism in education is not a relic of a past, but rather an ongoing process that is to be vigilantly and critically questioned. Moreover, it is not enough to question the motives of the education system, educators must also actively disrupt colonization and design educational experiences that “strive to change lives, stop people dying, and respond to reality” (p. 116). For Mackinlay and her students, the embodied-ness of dance that put Australian Indigenous teachings at the centre pushed Eurocentric academic knowledge to the margin, thus troubling the notion of western dominance in musicology.

There is a role for educators to take up in decolonization of education systems at all levels within Canada. Improved education that is inclusive of Indigenous forms of knowledge is necessary for all Canadians. For Indigenous peoples, the resurgence of language will counter the effects of the “muteness” of subalternity that Mohanty cautioned against. While for non-Indigenous folks, learning the truth of Indigenous history and of current Indigenous knowledges can dislodge the collective forgetting that has fed into the systemic inequalities and racism that has characterized non-Indigenous attitudes for generations in Canada.

**Decolonizing research.** Research in Canada is slowly becoming less colonial as interest in and acceptance of decolonized methods gains acceptance in post-secondary and governmental contexts. Where researchers once (and sometimes still) conduct research on rather than with Indigenous peoples, there is now a greater awareness of adherence to ethics that respects the sovereignty of Indigenous groups with respect to approaching and working with peoples and lands, and the sharing, reporting, publishing, and archiving of research products. Researchers can look to several sources for support in establishing research that respects Indigenous protocols and methodologies (Cochrane et al., 2008; First Nations Information Governance Committee, 2007; Kovach, 2009; Mi'kmaw Ethics Watch, n.d.; & Smith, 1999). It is incumbent upon anyone

seeking to form a research relationship with Indigenous peoples to make themselves aware of the propriety of entering into that relationship and the protocols associated with approaching such a potential arrangement. They may also ask themselves if they have the right to do so.

In examining the potential relationship between Indigenous research methodologies and western academic research traditions, Kovach (2009) pointed out the convergences and divergences that speak to the complexities of recognizing the place of Indigenous research within, or distinct from, western traditions. Kovach observed that qualitative research methods within the western tradition are highly inclusive, inviting diverse methodologies. However, there is a bias towards using English as the inclusive language, a colonial language that contributes to the homogenization of diverse experiences. Tribal knowledges, languages, and thought differ substantially, so even within the paradigm of an inclusive qualitative spectrum of research possibilities there is the problematic enfolding of findings into the western qualitative tradition (Kovach, 2009). However, to set Indigenous methodologies apart from western traditions seeks to further *other* the knowledge. In practical terms, at least for now, the acceptance of Indigenous methodologies within the academy serves to raise the profile of valuable research being carried out by Indigenous people and within Indigenous contexts. Ideally, this research will influence and shape the academy in its own way.

**Decolonization and settlers.** As of the time of writing, we are over twenty years out from the Canadian federal government's official offer of reconciliation that resulted from the final report of the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (Government of Canada, 1996). Despite the declaration from the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Jane Stewart, that "the days of paternalism and disrespect are behind us," many of the promised outcomes have failed to progress beyond the pages of the address to Indigenous leaders

(Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 1998, para. 12). Epp (2008) stated that “limited-liability guilt-management on behalf of Canadians is one plausible characterization of federal policy” (p. 123). Epp further contended that any offers of apology by the federal government are inevitably couched in liberal democratic governmental foundational philosophies that are predicated on “an almost-willful amnesia about whatever might be divisive” (p. 126). Moreover, whatever action is taken by the government on behalf of its citizens, there cannot be meaningful reconciliation without those citizens participating in day-to-day relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (Epp, 2008). As much as Epp disparaged the progress made on the part of the government, and the existence of racism in interpersonal relationships in Canada, he saw hope in recognizing the treaties that originally conceived ways to live together. The fact is, we are not all treaty people. Epp’s work does not adequately recognize unceded tribal lands, nor does it recognize the unique political and historical circumstances of the Métis, but his point is well made that reconciliation must take place on multiple societal levels in order to be successfully realized.

Picking up the thread of Epp’s work, Hiller (2016) expanded by investigating what he referred to as moments of “treaty consciousness” among non-Indigenous folks who were involved in decolonizing work (pp. 383-384). What Hiller found was that these activists often experienced a turning-point moment when the realization that they lived within treaty terms was brought home to them. For one activist, that moment came with the realization that he himself lived with benefits of treaty rights (Hiller, 2016). Even for people who are actively engaged in the work that decolonization requires, there is a lack of awareness of the present-ness of treaty rights and obligations that apply to all Canadians, not just Indigenous peoples. The phrase “we are all treaty people,” as Epp (2008) so fittingly put it, is sometimes reduced to a catchphrase



with only a superficial understanding attached to it. Hiller captured the turning-points for activists, but if the realization of treaty rights is so opaque for these engaged folks, finding ways to teach less-involved folks seems daunting. Moreover, the recognition of treaty rights does not involve all Indigenous or non-Indigenous peoples. Much of Canada comprises unceded territory and lacks recognition for Métis and their land rights, further troubling reliance on treaties as a way to formalize economic and political relationships.

For many Canadians, a turning point in recognizing the severity of the rupture in relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples has been the TRC process and the issuance of its Final Report (2015c). For Regan (2010), a settler-identifying participant in the TRC's work, the un-settling events of the commission became a source of learning and an opportunity to reach out to and teach Canadians about decolonization. For Regan, decolonization is "necessary to authentic reconciliation" (p. 20). Teaching about decolonization in Regan's experience has involved creating sharing circles with Indigenous co-facilitator Brenda Ireland. These were intense sharing experiences for the participants in which Regan and Ireland encouraged emotional risk-taking with the provision of debriefing. The facilitators corrected historical inaccuracies and provided opportunities for participants to explore moving beyond the workshop setting to transition the knowledge to real world reconciliation work. The atmosphere allowed participants to come to grips with "unsettling pedagogy" (p. 23) that moved beyond theory to embody the experiences of confronting the racist truths of Canada's collective past and present.

In enacting critical pedagogy, Regan (2010) embraced and extended Freirean principles linked to hope and to transformative learning. Indeed, I have also referred to Freire as a foundational influence in my own work. However, not all scholars embrace Freirean thought as

foundational in decolonization work. Tuck and Yang (2012) provided an unsettling contribution with their article “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor.” I am still processing the implications of this provocative piece in which the authors called for the return of colonized lands to Indigenous peoples. Anything short of this action, they claimed, is a rejection of the primacy of Indigenous ownership. Moreover, Tuck and Yang suggested settlers are engaged in “moves to innocence” that are bound up in metaphors of decolonization (p. 1). An Internet search for reaction on this piece turned up a blog post written by University of Maryland physicist Gupta, dated November 26, 2017 (Gupta, 2017). Gupta identified several sources of my own discomfort with the Tuck and Yang piece.

While Gupta understood that the use of the term *decolonization* can have a homogenizing effect on multiple fronts of social justice causes, he maintained a scepticism over rejecting the term out-of-hand. Like Gupta, I am keenly aware of my settler positionality in critiquing Tuck and Yang’s position. It is one of the many ways that this article is unsettling. The question of decolonization, Tuck and Yang argued, is not accountable to “settlers, or settler futurity,” but rather to “Indigenous sovereignty and futurity” (p. 35). They seemed to dismiss engagement in decolonization work that does not involved repatriation of land as falling within what they call “moves to innocence”: actions that are only metaphorical in effect, and that are more focused on assuaging settler guilt and discomfort. Unapologetically, Tuck and Yang leave the question of “*what will decolonization look like?*” open-ended (p. 35, emphasis in original). However, as much as I understand and appreciate my own discomfort with this article and its message, I am left wondering if I have any role at all to play, or any work to contribute, if Tuck and Yang’s argument prevails. Gupta (2017) put one of the conundrums eloquently:

Maybe by repatriation they mean restoring the relationship of people with land, undoing the ontology of land as property, as source of exploitable resources rather than as a nurturing mutually-ecologically bound being. If that's the case, then Tuck and Yang mean repatriation as a metaphor (which kinda would be surprising given that the argument is against using decolonizing in a metaphorical sense). But I am limited in my reading of Tuck's extensive scholarship, where I might find more clarity. (para. 9)

Decolonization needs to be transformative. It needs to be noticeable and unsettling. The arguments that Tuck and Yang (2012) contributed are difficult to incorporate and at the same time difficult to ignore. I feel conflicted by my positions as an emerging ally and as a property (land) owner. My unsettled thoughts and discomfort are, appropriately, residing with me as I continue to forge ahead with writing from the settler position.

**Moving forward with decolonization and reconciliation.** As the previous sections of this chapter suggest, “decolonization is a messy, dynamic, and a contradictory process” (Sium, Desai, & Ritskes, 2012, p. ii). Within the messiness, however, are signs that the process is slowly moving forward, led by resilient Indigenous peoples and supported by non-Indigenous allies. Sium et al. (2012) recognized that decolonization is a community project, but that the involvement of community is precarious:

Alliances and solidarity are not a given.... Community must be built, not assumed. This is especially true in the face of a neoliberal colonial force that emphasizes individuality, individualized rights, and competition for destruction. Community is not easy, it is always threatened, and it requires embracing complexity and contradiction. (p. xi)

Knowing and recognizing that the path will not be easy is an important aspect of the community-building process. Anticipating differences among community members and finding ways to work together, even when there are outstanding issues, needs to be part of activists' skills set.

Two Indigenous-led initiatives that have been quite successful in drawing diverse Canadians together are the Idle No More (INM) movement and the call for investigations into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW). These movements sparked notable involvement from non-Indigenous peoples, many of whom were new to the experience of acting in solidarity with Indigenous peoples. At times, these people were uncertain as to their role.

Walia (2014) stated,

“I am waiting to be told exactly what to do” should not be an excuse for inaction, and seeking guidance must be weighed against the possibility of further burdening Indigenous people with questions. A willingness to decentre oneself and to learn and act from a place of responsibility rather than guilt are helpful in determining the line between being too interventionist and being paralyzed. (pp. 46-47)

Walia provides a valuable perspective as a non-Indigenous person who is deeply involved in social justice work. Non-Indigenous folks who are accepted as allies by Indigenous peoples can inform and guide those who are new to the movement.

A significant lightning rod for the INM movement, and one which drew media attention and the mobilization of activist writing was the hunger strike by Attawapiskat First Nation Chief Theresa Spence in December 2012. Living conditions in the First Nation had deteriorated and Chief Spence was determined to meet with Prime Minister Stephen Harper. Spence's action galvanized INM, prompting letters, essays and tweets from Canadians of all walks of life (Academics in Solidarity with Chief Theresa Spence and Idle No More, 2014; Canadian Union

of Postal Workers, 2014; Denis, 2014; Klein, 2014; & Rollo, 2014). Canadians had witnessed through television the extreme poverty and substandard living conditions that the people of Attawapiskat had endured while the federal government had, in 2008, apologized for the Indian Residential Schools. It seemed that Canadians were no longer willing to ignore the hypocrisy of acts of apology coupled with cuts in funding to First Nations communities.

### **Literature Review Conclusion**

There is a rich heritage of adult educators being involved in social justice education and movements. The literature provides strong pedagogical foundations for educators who wish to take on the work of teaching adults about social inequities. Ally scholarship is more recent, and its complexity invites wider study. Public awareness of allies acting alongside Indigenous peoples has increased in Canada only in the last decade or so. Non-Indigenous people are taking a far greater interest in Indigenous philosophies and ways of life. Canadians of every heritage are reflecting on what terms like reconciliation and decolonization mean and what kinds of implications these concepts will have for everyone. It is in these times of great transformation that I have chosen to look at how individual allies have learned to negotiate their actions, emotions, and social situations within an ally context. Changes are happening rapidly; Indigenous people leading the way towards redefining formal intergovernmental relationships and informal social relationships. Allies seek active and supportive roles. Non-Indigenous people who are committed to becoming allies can benefit from learning about Indigenous philosophies and what it means to walk alongside and take on roles in reconciliation efforts.

Theory  
tools for critique and insight  
Other reduced to a  
singular  
marginalized

voice

Silencing  
has been a powerful tool

Decolonizing  
messiness aside  
dis rupt  
co lo niz a ti on  
inviting diverse methodologies

we are all treaty people  
[are we] all treaty people

unsettling  
un sett ling  
U nsE tTt Ll eD

No longer willing  
To ignore the hypocrisy

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### Methodological Approach and Rationale

In my study, I made use of poetic inquiry methodology and the critical realist perspective that I explained in the previous chapter. Through poetic inquiry, I gained an understanding of how those who are recognized as allies alongside Indigenous peoples in Canada are engaged in actions, emotional responses, and negotiating social settings pertaining to their allyship.

Poetic inquiry is rooted within narrative inquiry, one of the traditions of qualitative inquiry. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) described narrative inquiry as a “relational form of inquiry” (p. 45). The relative strength of narrative inquiry is its situated-ness in human experience. The nature of alliance-building between individuals and communities calls for a methodological approach that is open to individual differences and perspectives, at the same time as it recognizes structural matters. Although critics may argue that there is a trade-off in exchanging the more universal findings that quantitative methodologies offer for the particular and local for, I would argue that the pool of recognized allies is still quite small, and there is value in examining their individual experiences. Moreover, poetic inquiry propels researchers into the data and challenges them to come up with arts-based pieces. For me, this process stimulated creative interaction with the data. I approached the process of crafting the found poems from a number of perspectives: the poet, the researcher, the participant, and the audience. I became invested in all of these perspectives as I worked. Creating the poems stirred up emotions for me, and perhaps the poems will evoke emotions in readers as well. Lawrence (2008) spoke to the power of emotion in arts-based learning as an opportunity “to go deeper...gain greater insight into ourselves and the world” (p. 70).

I made a deliberate choice to study ally-identified participants from Manitoba, the province where I live and with which I am most familiar. An article from *Maclean's* (Macdonald, 2015) magazine labelled Winnipeg as the most racist city in Canada. The article directly identified that racism is directed at the large Indigenous population in this urban setting and, I would suggest, throughout Manitoba. Finally, although I am not researching the stories of Indigenous people themselves, the methodology of poetic inquiry, and poetry as a spoken art form, aligns with the tradition of oral narratives and knowledge-keeping that many Indigenous people recognize and celebrate. Poetry also appeals to my personal interest in literature and literary studies, so the methodology seems appropriate on multiple levels.

I do not wish to appropriate Indigenous research methodology, but I believe that choosing poetic inquiry honours those who have struggled to keep Indigenous storytelling as “truly Indigenous education,” that which is used to “educate the heart, mind, body, and spirit” (Archibald, 2008, p. xi). Wilson (2007) observed that research by anyone can be “Indigenist,” meaning that such research is accountable to Indigenous people (p. 194). Wilson compares his approach to the understanding that one need not be a woman to use a feminist paradigm.

**Poetic inquiry.** Early adopter of poetic inquiry Butler-Kisber (2002) decided upon the form because of her interest in arts-based research and because her research subject “demanded an evocative portrayal” (p. 232). Similarly, I have always gravitated towards arts-based ways of knowing and have a longstanding interest in literary art forms. As Butler-Kisber stated, “Understanding is mediated by form” (p. 232). Poetic inquiry, as a methodology, can be a strategic choice for researchers who unapologetically seek to engage with the data in such a way that the product is one that resonates with researchers and readers (Butler-Kisber, 2002; Görlich, 2016; Patrick, 2016; & Prendergast, 2009). In creating found poetry for analysis, researchers



sometimes limit themselves to selecting words taken directly from the interview transcript (Butler-Kisber, 2002). Other researchers may opt to construct their own original poems, rather than finding the poetry in the transcript. I decided to use only the participants' words, but I also turned to my field notes to guide me through some of the creative process. For instance, my notes sometimes suggested where line breaks should occur, poetically representing a pause or shift in the participant's body language. Creating found poetry is an iterative process that requires deep immersion in the data. I found the process to be revelatory and sometimes astonishing in what it both demanded of and gifted to me.

The decision to use poetic inquiry as a methodology is not uncomplicated. There are what Patrick (2016) referred to as "risks" and "rewards" (p. 393). On the one hand, research poets can disrupt academic convention while still faithfully representing the data and grounding the research in solid theory. On the other hand, the creation of research poetry may be judged by some academics as somehow less rigorous or too atypical of traditional methodologies to be accepted (Patrick, 2016). For me, the rewards outweigh the risks. I am making the most of the privilege I currently enjoy in my working and personal life to embolden me to take the risk and do what *feels* right to me. One of Patrick's (2016) found poems resonates strongly with the choice I have made:

*Research Audience Rewards and Risks: A Found Poem*

Form matters.

Research poetry influences

reception of qualitative research writing.

Through compression and expression,

research poetry penetrates the heart of human experience.

Form matters.

Research poetry creates  
aesthetic and artistic spaces and places for audiences.

*however...*

Blending art with science is risky.

Keep one's research poetry hidden...

from those who criticize  
alienating art,  
from those who dismiss  
blurring boundaries,  
from those who reject  
comprehending complexity.

Take the poetic path at one's peril. (p. 398)

Knowing that there are others who see value in the work of research poets and knowing that research poets are risking taking up this path and finding voices within academe is heartening.

**Rationale.** I am interested in learning how allies' experiences have led them to maintain or to take on recognized social justice actions alongside Indigenous peoples. I think this type of narrative is especially revelatory in geographic areas where there is a higher degree of contact between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. The *Maclean's* article claimed that Winnipeg, which has a high Indigenous population, is the epicentre of racism in Canada; however, I would argue that there are also increasing numbers of alliances being formed within that same community through initiatives. The 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Canadian Confederation was notably subdued in many cities, including Winnipeg, where a diverse group of activists promoted awareness of Indigenous issues instead of celebrating. A number of Winnipeggers came out to raise awareness for Shoal Lake First Nation, whose water supplies Winnipeg, yet the First Nation has been under a boil water advisory for decades (CBC News, 2017). The ally population seems

to be growing, but we continue to know little about the individuals involved in those movements and their level of commitment and the degree of change they have experienced through their involvement. By studying the participant interview narratives and the subsequent found poetry, I gained information about what has influenced the actions of these individuals, be it a formal course of study, or informal meetings, friendships, and acquaintances. Furthermore, it was important to understand the degree to which non-Indigenous allies present their identities to other non-Indigenous people. In other words, I asked how comfortable they felt with confronting, teaching, or influencing others in interactions where racism became apparent.

### **Research Context**

Atleo (2013) has already written on the “zone of Aboriginal education,” overlapping areas of Aboriginal and settler education. Pictured as a Venn diagram, the overlapping portion is where Atleo imagined a third space in which learning occurs on a more egalitarian and dialogical foundation than in the past. Furthermore, she has described several spaces where this interaction could occur, and they are often the banal places we occupy on any given day, such as a coffee shop or a hockey arena. If we rely solely on academic or formal spaces as the settings for us to gain an understanding of one another, then we risk ignoring the richness of everyday life and of those people who do not tend to inhabit formal or academic places. To confine the conversations and stories to scholarly, government, or judicial spaces means that I will not have sought out the kinds of third spaces that Atleo (2013) mentioned, such as coffee shops and hockey arenas.

### **Participant Recruitment**

To find appropriate participants, I purposefully sought individuals whom Indigenous people perceived to be allies. Because I reside in southwestern Manitoba, it made sense to ask people who were part of local primary, secondary, and post-secondary learning institutions,

faith-based organizations, arts venues, Friendship Centres, and healthcare facilities. I was acquainted with many Indigenous students, faculty, and Elders who have connections to allies. These inquiries led to chain sampling, also known as “snowball” recruitment (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 248). I planned to include 10 to 15 participants in the completed study and I was successful in recruiting 10 allies to participate.

Seidman (2006) made many useful suggestions in his chapter on selecting interview participants. Notably, when utilizing a snowball method of sampling, Seidman pointed out that an often-asked question, especially of new researchers, is how many interviews are enough to complete the research. In his pragmatic explanation, he stated that “there are two criteria for enough: The first is sufficiency” (p. 55). In obtaining enough results, the researcher is assured that a wide enough range of demographic participation has been included, with some attention paid to having more than one participant in each assessed category. “The other criterion is saturation of information,” Seidman explained (p. 55). In this case, he described a scenario where the researcher is beginning to hear much the same thing, over and over. This is a signal that nothing novel is likely to arise. However, Seidman also cautioned that research being conducted by doctoral students is likely to benefit from having too many interviewees as opposed to too few, as analysis becomes difficult in situations where data are lacking.

In addition to the notion of snowball sampling, I needed to introduce criteria which had to be met for the participants to be included in the study. In order to ascertain the legitimacy of a would-be participant, I required some confirmation from an Indigenous person who could confirm that the potential participant was identified as an ally. This confirmation was a necessary component of the sampling process since, according to Bishop’s (2002) work, there is a degree of action involved in being an ally. To address the possibility that there might have been some

individuals who were unsure how to assess whether or not a person was an ally, I developed some qualitative criteria. I used the characteristics suggested by Bishop (2002) to create an information sheet to attach to the materials wherein I advertised the study (see Appendix A). I also purposefully selected allies from a variety of contexts, in order to fully explore the spaces that Atleo (2013) suggested may be dialogical in nature.

### **Overview of Information Needed**

I began by seeking the stories of participants and how they came to be recognized as allies. As my investigation centred on actions, emotions, and social experiences, both formal and informal, I led the interviews to elicit the stories that focused on the interviewees' related experiences. I was also interested in the formal and informal learning experiences that led to participants' interest in pursuing social justice for Indigenous peoples. Formal learning included history or social studies courses in primary or secondary school. Beyond the K-12 school system, some participants have taken courses in university or college, trade school, or on the jobsite, that provided opportunities for them to learn about the historical or current injustices that affect Indigenous people in Canada. However, many people who are part of these formal experiences do not emerge from the coursework with an ally identity. It was important for me to probe further into the specific incidents or personal turning points, reflective of informal learning that created suitable conditions for participants to begin to identify as allies.

The interview process also sought informal learning experiences that may have led participants to identify as allies. These stories were highly individualized, and eliciting information about them required more prompting and probing than did stories about formal educational experiences, which seemed somewhat easier for participants to identify. Informal educational experiences arose from personal relationships with Indigenous people,

television/films, arts-based experiences, travel, business relationships, cultural programs, and other encounters, texts or experiences. Participants were not always highly aware of the circumstances that informally led them to be identified as an ally. For this reason, I was careful not to rush interviewees to provide answers to questions in the part of the interview that dealt with such informal experiences and learning. I occasionally paused to allow the participant to reflect before providing answers, resulting in what I hoped would be a richer response. As much as possible, I provided probing questions in addition to the standard list of questions that I asked all the participants.

### **Research Design**

**Data collection methods.** The data collected process consisted of a personal interview arranged at mutual convenience with the participant. Each individual interview produced a narrative. I had a stock set of questions to ask, with some probing questions in hand to ask if a particular area of inquiry seemed to be generating a rich narrative. Sessions were recorded in accordance with ethical guidelines including labelling, storage, and eventual disposal of interview data. Following recording, I personally transcribed the interviews into text to facilitate analysis. As I have previously stated, some participants found that they needed to reflect upon interview questions. To allow for these reflections to be recorded, narrators/participants were offered the opportunity to journal following the interview, or to have a second follow-up interview if they found it necessary. Though none of the participants wished to have a second interview, approximately half of the ten participants offered clarifying statements, requested deletions, or made corrections upon viewing the transcript text. These participants received another draft of the transcript once the requested changes were made. In all cases, the participants indicated satisfaction with the final transcript, either through direct communication,

or through expiration of a waiting period in which to indicate their wishes for edits. One participant responded to the process with an unsolicited, personally-crafted poem that she wrote after the completion of the interview and transcript revision process.

The questions that I posed to all participants included the following:

- What do you identify as formative (or influential) in the development of your ally identity?
- What memories do you have of learning about Aboriginal people?
- How did you come to understand that Aboriginal people in Canada have suffered discrimination?
- How do you enact your identity?
- In what kinds of activities do you involve yourself with Aboriginal people?
- How do you feel about these actions?
- How does your ally identity affect relationships with peers/other non-Aboriginal people?  
How have your activities with Aboriginal people affected your relationships with family, friends, or coworkers?
- What feelings have arisen for you when your friends, family or coworkers discuss Aboriginal people?
- How do you see yourself and your efforts contributing to reconciliation?
- In what ways can allies of Aboriginal people contribute to reconciliation?
- To what extent are you aware of “crossing the line” between being an ally and a leader?

It was my intention to keep the questions as open-ended as possible, and for the line of inquiry not to lead the interviewee in any direction, but to allow the participants to feel free to answer the question in any way they chose.

Another important source of data was my own journaling of the interview process. In addition to the narrative, the non-verbal ways in which interviewees responded to questions was revealing. Some examples of data recorded in my observational journal were facial expressions, voice modulation, non-verbal utterances (e.g. chuckling, whistling), body positioning, pauses and periods of silence, and tempo of speech.

**Ethical considerations.** Prior to any investigation involving human participants, and in accordance with University of Calgary policy, I secured ethics certification for this study (ID REB16-0177) and prepared annual reports while the certificate was in force. Brandon University Research Ethics Committee also approved the study under a multi-jurisdictional application process. I was granted Ethics approval under file number 21904 (2016) on May 19, 2016. I have received TCPS2 certification, and this certification accompanied the application.

I acknowledged the interview process may have caused participants to recall past events that may have induced feelings of discomfort for the interviewees. This could have been intensified if the participant felt that he or she has not been fairly or truthfully represented in the final draft of the interview transcript. In advance of beginning the interview process, I provided all participants with a list of local resources that offer counselling, should they have felt the need to seek these services. In addition, I provided draft copies of the interview transcripts, along with the opportunity to correct any details or interpretations that the narrator deemed to be inaccurate. I advised participants that they were welcome to schedule a second interview if they wished to follow up or respond by email if they were comfortable with doing so. Approximately half of the



respondents made requests for additions, deletions, or clarifications. A revised draft was sent to participants for their final approval if they requested any changes.

Research involving participants requires strict adherence to providing such measures as informed consent, assurance of anonymity, and the disclosure of circumstances that may legally require the breaking of anonymity (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2014; Seidman, 2006). Consent extended not only to the granting of the interview, but also to measures such as whether the interview may be recorded. Once there are material products of the research (transcribed interview documents, digital recordings) care must be taken to treat these artefacts with the respect and confidentiality that they deserve. The participants needed to be made aware of the processes I used in handling, storing, and eventually disposing of these material and electronic items (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Each participant was given the opportunity to choose a pseudonym or to use their real name. Two of the participants chose to use a pseudonym while eight of the participants chose to use their real first names. I have chosen not to identify which participants are using pseudonyms or which are using their given names.

**Issues of trustworthiness.** As with any study involving human narrative, this study had inherent issues of reliability and trustworthiness. Recalling his own earlier writing, Freeman (2007) wrote thoughtfully on the nature of truth in autobiographical narrative:

We often *do not know* what is happening when it is happening... There is an essential openness to the historical past, and there always exists the possibility that the story of what happened will be rewritten, again and again. Nor...do I wish to suggest that the truth of narrative can be neatly encapsulated in some specific form. It is perhaps

preferable in this context to speak of a *region* of truth (Freeman, 2002a) rather than a discretely bounded one. (p. 137)

In other words, Freeman supposed, and I agree, that there is no one definitive version that can represent *the truth*. We are constantly reviewing and revisioning events of the past and creating interpretations that make sense to us within whatever context we find ourselves. However, by accepting Freeman's region of truth, there is an ontological hook upon which to hang the participants' narratives.

In attempting to delve deeply into the individual narratives, I limited the number of participants. Limiting the sample size is a common feature of qualitative research, resulting from the focus on depth rather than breadth of the study (Cresswell, 2012). As a result, the relatively small sample size means that results may not be widely applicable to the Canadian population. However, while acknowledging this limitation, I would maintain that the knowledge gained in going more deeply into the narratives is critical in these early days of understanding how strategic Indigenous-non-Indigenous alliances come to be. For it is through understanding how these partnerships are formed that we as educators will be able to foster an increased number of alliances.

A second issue of trustworthiness is the possibility that some participants misremembered events, embellish, or edit, to present their story in the best possible light. The participants were made fully aware of the nature of the study, to understand alliances, but they may not have wished to reveal their own insecurities or failures in how they arrived at being recognized as an ally. Or, the opposite scenario may have occurred if, for dramatic effect, participants may have chosen to present themselves as initially highly racist or *flawed* in some way, so that becoming an ally became a form of redemption. In either of these cases, my skill as an interviewer and,

later, as an interpreter of the data was tested. I assured participants that their stories were of value, and that their identities would be protected, so that I created the best possible conditions for truth-telling.

In terms of personal bias, I acknowledge that the perspective I bring to the study could be construed as that of an insider in the sense that I consider myself to be an emerging ally interviewing like-minded people. I do recognize that my learning within this identity is relatively recent and I am still discovering how to enact this identity. On the one hand, this “insider” perspective gave me some insight into the narratives of my research participants. I understand how other emerging allies may feel conflicted at times, as they attempt to navigate the complexities of decolonization from different sides. On the other hand, my insider perspective made me aware that I bring to the interview and analysis process a set of biases, not the least of which is that I expected the allies to be involved for altruistic reasons. Although I do not want to counter this bias by adopting a cynical perspective, it is healthy to recognize that I felt personally invested in seeing positive narratives emerge from the research, and to find hope that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians will see the wisdom in finding improved ways of relating to one another.

It is important to note, however, that the complexities layered within communicating cross-culturally, across generations, genders, experience, education, and myriad other identifiers makes the process of determining “insider” or “outsider” status incredibly complex. One might even question the usefulness of categorizing identities. Merriam et al. (2001) suggested that it is difficult to determine status, often until the moment of the interview, and that the degree to which the interviewer is seen by the research participant as an insider or an outsider can shift throughout the interview process. What was most important is that I remained aware of changing

circumstances, and the subtle negotiation processes that accompanied the power dynamics of the research relationship, so that I reflected upon positionality as part of the analysis process.

**Limitations and delimitations.** Limitations came into play within the scope of this study that explored the narratives of non-Indigenous allies. As the research is part of a doctoral dissertation, the study took place over a relatively short span of time. The interviews occurred over an approximate six-month period. As such, the narratives formed a “snapshot” view of how the participants described their actions, emotions, and negotiations of social situations, along with the formal and informal learning that led to their ally recognition. The brevity of the research period is mitigated by the choice of a qualitative research methodology, as this methodology invites participants to adopt a reflective stance, thereby permitting the narrative to be limited only by the memory of the teller. Thus, history can still be attended to in the narrative, despite the short research period.

Delimitations applicable to this study included constraints made to the demographics of research participants selected for interview. I limited the study to adult participants, as the focus of the dissertation is explicitly for the attainment of a Doctor of Education degree in the specialization stream of Adult Learning. Participants also necessarily identified as non-Indigenous, or not representative of the identity of a First Nations, Métis, Inuit, or Non-Status Indigenous person. Although the perspective of these peoples in the formation of alliances is critical, it is not within my current ability to seek the narratives of Indigenous participants.

As I interviewed the participants in person, the study was limited geographically to participants who resided within a four-hour driving radius of my location, near Brandon, Manitoba. Although I could have attempted to conduct interviews via Skype (or other video/audio Internet-based interface), I was concerned that any difficulties with technology could

have interfered with the quality of the interview experience and, therefore, the quality of the narrative as well. As I have identified field notes as a source of data, I believed it was necessary to be physically present in order to observe the subtleties that were part of the interview process, such as changes in the interviewee's voice tone, or shifting of body positioning. As I acknowledged this geographic limitation, I might also point out that Manitoba (where all of the participants resided at the time of their interviews) has one of the highest representative populations of Indigenous people across Canada (excluding territories), including the largest Métis population (Statistics Canada, 2011). Locating the research in Manitoba allowed for rich participation with a relatively small interview population.

My lack of direct experience in Indigenous research protocols, the necessity of working without an Indigenous partner, and lack of time to devote to the respectful development of relationships with the appropriate Indigenous communities meant that I focused on the voices and stories of the non-Indigenous side of the ally partnership. As a descendent of settler ancestors, I felt that it was appropriate for me to conduct narrative research with the non-Indigenous populations, and by doing so to engaged non-Indigenous people in being active in decolonization of Canadian society. The results of this research will contribute to the knowledge of ally formation in Canada.

**Data analysis and synthesis of the found poetry.** Once I had recorded the relevant data, transcribed the contents of the interviews, and received approval of the final draft of the transcripts from the participants, I turned to the process of analysis and synthesis. Specifically, I made use of found poetry to engage with the data and to represent the findings that led to the analysis and discussion. Found poems “take existing texts and refashion them, reorder them, and present them as poems. The literary equivalent of a collage, found poetry is often made from

newspaper articles, street signs, graffiti, speeches, letters, or even other poems” (American Academy of Poets, 2004). In its purest form, found poetry often preserves word order, leaving structural decisions, such as where to insert line breaks, to the poet (American Academy of Poets, 2004). For me, as a research poet, the form of found poetry offers the opportunity to work closely with the interview transcripts (the qualitative data) to create an arts-based research product that remains focused on the participants and their voices. At the same time, the poems will hopefully resonate with those who read them, creating an affective experience within the context of reading research findings.

The process of creating research found poetry places the method within arts-based inquiry. Prendergast (2009) referred to the process as “intuitively sorting out words, phrases, sentences, and passages that synthesize meaning from the prose” (p. 547). There is an inherently performative quality to the act of piecing together these resonant elements (Prendergast, 2009). Patrick (2016) described details of this practice:

I began the iterative practice of combining and moving around words, all the while paying close attention to poetic devices such as imagery, rhythm, repetition, and the use of space. I read each incantation of the poem aloud, striving for the perfect placement of words and line breaks. (p. 65)

I grew up with an appreciation for poetry both as a craft and as a finished product. I recalled writing poems as a child when, in school, teachers encouraged me to express my feelings through the creative process of poetry writing. I occasionally entered my poems in student contests, and sometimes even won. In university, I explored poetry further in my undergraduate and graduate level courses in English literature. In class, I revelled in the process of uncovering the poem’s magic, bit by bit, peeling away the layers of metaphor, imagery, and symbolism to

expose the deeper meanings and emotions packed within. I saw the literary devices as tools that the poet used to invite the reader into their work.

After going through the transcripts many times, I observed how the participants had responded to the questions that I had posed. What surfaced in my reading and re-reading of the data was a pattern in focus on three issues: how participants enacted their ally identity (action), how they reacted emotionally to engaging in allyship (emotion), and how they negotiated social situations in which their allyship was a factor (social). In analyzing the transcripts, I used coloured highlighting markers to identify the major themes in the transcripts: yellow for action, blue for emotion, and pink for social. Colour-coding all the transcripts in the same way allowed me to compare my observations of the participants' data, looking for thematic similarities and differences. Highlighting the thematic findings also made it easier to construct the found poetry in thematic categories.

Once I had identified each participant's thematic content, I turned to the task of creating the found poems. Research found poetry, it seemed to me, brings together elements of rigorous scholarship and the multi-layered engagement that art forms offer. Grounding the research in sound theoretical perspectives and situating the work within foundational work on allies and Indigenous perspectives lends gravitas to the analysis work. The resulting poems are part of the analytic process, but are also pieces of work unto themselves. The pieces can be read as integral to the dissertation, or they can be read separately as an art form. In no way am I suggesting that I am a professional poet, or even a good poet, but I aspire to create poetry that uses literary devices to create an intellectually and affectively provocative experience.

I looked for repeated words, evocative images, sensory details, and other linguistic data that had resonance. As I placed the captured text on the page as poetry, I paid attention to

placement of the words, choosing alignment and spacing to give weight to words and ideas that seemed to reinforce or contrast with each other. I created breaks to separate ideas, or to signal concepts like confusion or disconnection. Longer lines sometimes seemed appropriate to signal more fluent thoughts, or more of a stream of consciousness. I enjoyed my role as the research poet. I constructed for each participant an action poem, an emotion poem, and a social poem.

**The politics of the capital and formatting.** As I looked at the poems I reflected on my role as the research poet. I began to ask myself some questions as I reflected: What agency do I have here? Am I reflecting the participants or am I influencing the results? What am I learning about decolonization by doing this work? What more could I do? I became a bit uncomfortable with the number of I-words on the pages. In English, it is practically unavoidable to speak of oneself without using I, so seeing “I” is not surprising. Allies, however, do not act out of self-interest, so the focus on the individual seemed counter-intuitive. I eliminated as many of the I-words as I could while still making sense and trying to create poetry.

My next move was to turn the remaining I-words into lower case i. This is not an easy thing to do using Microsoft Word. Word automatically capitalizes the single i. In order to have a single lower case i, one must type the I, then backspace, then retype the i. This leaves a tiny red squiggle to indicate that one is violating the parameters of grammar or spellcheck, as defined by Microsoft Word. Retyping the i-words proved laborious, but I reflected on decolonization as a process, and set out to do more.

Thinking about the place names that came up in the poems, I realized that the names non-Indigenous people use to identify places are colonial names that replaced the previous Indigenous names. I decided to take some of the power away from the place names by de-capitalizing these as well. It turns out that Word is also assertive in maintaining capitalization of



place names. Again, I worked to force lower case letters onto the beginnings of place names. At this point I began to realize that the program that I use every day to write what I hope is socially conscious content is calculated to uphold colonial naming and claiming. I became more determined to override its power.

My next discovery came about when I decided to print some of the poems. I had not thought through the process prior to sending the poems to print. When I picked up the sheets, I realized that the little red squiggles that underlined all of the work that had gone into decolonizing the poems had disappeared in the print. I was upset by this realization because Word (in collusion with the printer) had neatly swept the subversion under the rug and presented the poems as if *nothing at all had happened*. The metaphor of art imitating life became all too clear as the history of what I had done disappeared like a microcosmic colonizing action. I wanted the history to show. I wanted the poems to bear witness to what the allies work for alongside Indigenous peoples.

Putting the red squiggles back into the poems in such a way that they will print proved a technically daunting task for me. I enlisted the help of a colleague in IT and formatted squiggly red underlines that would print. The next hurdle was to confirm that I would be permitted to have coloured print in the dissertation. With the help of my supervisor, and with close reading of the guidelines, we determined that it could be done. I went back to the poems and added formatted lines on top of the ones Word put in by default.

Clearly, my acts of *decolonization* here are metaphorical and perhaps even trivial, but the process provided me with deep experiential learning. I began with a plan to create some resonant pieces, but I became fascinated with the system that has a colonial bias as its default. Subverting the colonial bias became a process that required me to act with intention, be vigilant, and learn

new things. I had to stretch myself and not give up. Readers will note that the challenges to the colonial conventions of I-capitalization and capitalization of allies' proper names and place names are reflected in Chapters 4 and 5 of this dissertation. This choice reflects my personal learning journey with decolonization and my solidarity with Indigenous peoples who are asserting their title and names of territories. While I appreciate the scholarship and the message behind Tuck and Yang's (2012) "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," I cannot help but think that sometimes metaphors are instructive. Metaphor as a bridge to action is powerful.

### **Chapter Summary**

There will be no easy resolution to the fractured relationships between Indigenous people and those of non-Indigenous descent in Canada, and those that represent the in-between. Atleo (2013) proposed finding new ways to educate, moving away from *accommodationist* and *assimilationist* positions to a more mutually *dialogic* way of understanding one another. One way to accomplish this change and create an "aboriginal zone of education," as Atleo suggested, is to study narratives that capture the shifting attitudes towards more equitable ways to coexist as allies.

This study used poetic inquiry to study the stories of those who are considered to be allies of Indigenous people. Although the number of participants was necessarily limited, and the process complicated by the possibilities of misremembering, editing, and embellishing, these are the qualities that make us human. We are flawed beings, but with our faults there is still potential for change and improvement in the way we treat one another. This study does not seek perfection. It seeks to fairly portray those who have recognized the existence of their own privilege and who seek the dismantling of the system that upholds that unearned advantage (see Bishop, 2002).

As a settler-descended Canadian, I believe that the time has come to investigate how people who share my interest in decolonization view themselves in society. There were times of discomfort resulting from the narratives, but this is part of the dialogic process. It is time to move beyond bystander status and embrace the more activist stance of the ally. Sadly, it may take more non-Indigenous people coming forward and being more vocally supportive of Indigenous people to convince other non-Indigenous people that it is not acceptable to turn away from the racism and inequality that have long been normalized within Canada and other western societies. Privileged folks have the luxury of choice of whether or not to support social justice causes and, for some, the decision to participate happens only once a critical mass of privileged folks are already involved.

poetic inquiry  
strategic choice  
requires deep immersion  
demanded  
and gifted  
to me

sufficiency and saturation  
required some confirmation  
probing questions  
generated a rich narrative

region of truth  
there is an ontological hook

found poetry  
    evocative images  
    sensory details  
    resonance

red squiggles  
my act of decolonization

## Chapter 4: Findings

Decolonization is a process. The process is complex, challenging, contextual, individual, and collective. It confronts the foundational precepts of many systems and relationships. For these reasons it is unsettling, uncomfortable, and demands time, energy, space, and emotion. In short, it is work. It is hard work. Writing, whether in prose or poetry, entails working with language; it is a sociocultural practice embedded within a sociocultural practice. In opening this chapter, I offer an explanation, which picks up a thread introduced in the previous chapter, of how language and linguistic practices are part of the colonization process and can be part of decolonizing work.

This chapter picks up on the ideas about analysis introduced in the previous chapter. Following an explanation of how those ideas fit into my analysis to produce the findings discussed here, each of three themes that surfaced in the data—interview conversations with participants as well as my own journaling—are presented, through segments of found poems as well as my own elaboration of the poems as illustrations of the themes. The poems in this chapter reflect the major thematic areas at the centre of interviews with participants. Selected from the array of found poems within each interview transcripts, one excerpt for each participant is presented to illustrate or speak to three main themes: action, emotion, and the social. The chapter concludes with an overview of key findings and a consideration of how participants struggled with concepts of decolonization and reconciliation.

### Writing as a Theoretical and an Analytical Process

Working in english, the language of british colonizers, means that some of its conventions will impart colonial values (Migge & Léglise, 2007; Pennycook, 1998). For instance, in English the “I” is always capitalized, as are proper nouns, giving weight and

importance to the individual. Note that english does not capitalize “we” or “us,” connoting a sense of ego-centrism around the capitalized “I”. Forgoing the capitalized “I”, therefore, is an act that disrupts a convention in english that is largely taken for granted.

A second colonial convention has been the Doctrine of Discovery, which assumes that the colonizer is the discoverer of the landscape, erasing pre-existing indigeneity (Dean, 2001; Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, 2014). This convention assumes *terra nullius*, meaning that the land belonged to no one prior to it being *discovered* by a colonizing force. As a result, Indigenous names for geographic locations, landmarks, and waterways were replaced with those of the colonizer. In order to disrupt this convention, i have chosen to remove the capital letters from most place names and from the adjective forms of place that describe some people, such as the word “canadian.” Although this act of decolonization does not reverse the colonial naming of place or reinstate the Indigenous names for places, it does disrupt and call attention to the assumed authority of colonial naming practices.

Another interesting observation is that microsoft word is programmed to uphold the conventions of English that i tried to disrupt and destabilize. Word will automatically capitalize a single letter “i.” In order to disrupt the program, i had to type the letter, hit the spacebar, go back and retype the letter and then constantly remember that i had made that choice (red squiggle underscore in place), until such time as i decided to accept the change that i had forced upon the text. The same occurred in the case of place names. The work of physically backspacing and retyping in order to force the program to take non-capitalized versions of these words was repetitive and served as a constant reminder that i was not aligning my writing with what is standard and *proper*.

In addition to removing the capital-I, i decided to put the allies' names in lower case, not to suggest that i disrespect their work or contributions to alliances, but rather to reflect the self-effacing nature of ally work (Bishop, 2002; Gehl, n.d.); however, i decided to maintain the capitalization of Indigenous names, including names of tribal lands, peoples, honorifics, and individuals. This choice is meant to signify that Indigenous peoples are the leaders of the movement to decolonize and reconcile relationships. Decolonizing the found poetry and these concluding chapters is, for me, an act of decolonization on a tiny scale; however, the task symbolizes how insidiously colonial constructs are maintained within canadian society. The shift to these more decolonized writing choices is intentionally only occurring in the findings and conclusion chapters of this dissertation, representing my personal growth in the writing and analysis process. i did not know what i did not know until i had fully engaged with the data.

Until i took on this study, i had not considered the implications of using a program like microsoft word. Naively, i thought that the program was a value-neutral tool that i could use however i wished. It was only when i attempted to defy colonial convention that i discovered the program's grounding in hegemonic ideals. A further realization that occurred to me when i tried to disrupt the capital i and the capitalization of place names is that once i was able to force the text into lower case, the printed hard copy reflected none of the disruptions. The squiggly red lines that signified the changes made to counter the effects of colonization disappeared entirely in the printed version. Symbolically, the work was erased, and it appeared as though everything was normal, though i knew that it was not. i wanted the red squiggly scars to bear witness to the process. To make the scars visible in print, i learned how to format a wavy underline in red. i put these underlines into the places where the word software program had them, but where they would not have shown up on print. The steps that are necessary in subverting established systems

take labour and vigilance. i am reminded of the words of one of the study participants, mitchell, who said, “There’s an idea around allyship and reconciliation that it can be like [pause]...easy. And it’s like, no—no it can’t.” What mitchell suggested is that decolonization and reconciliation demand work from those who wish to be a part of the process. In a small way, decolonizing the poetry gave me a glimpse of this lesson.

By choosing poetry as the form of presentation for the participants’ words, i have privileged the oral and visual resonance of the language used by the allies (for the complete collection of found poems created for this dissertation, see Appendix B). Purposefully subverting conventions of english, such as sentence structure and capitalization, are my ways of calling into question some of the rules that have reinforced colonialism. i am by no means the first, nor the last, to engage in subverting language for a purpose. Though language is only one part of the complex discussion around decolonization, it is an important part of the dialogue. Some of the value for me in trying to decolonize the language of this poetic inquiry is that the process has made me aware of how hidden but extensive the colonial systems truly are. It is only by doing the work of decolonization that we come up against the barriers and inherent racisms inflicted by spaces that seem innocuous at first, to say nothing of the places that we know are flawed and racist. My aim is to provoke conversation with this study, and with these poems.<sup>3</sup>

### **Meeting the Participants**

Before i proceed with the presentation of my findings, i will introduce the allies who participated in my study. Doing that, i believe, will help humanize and personalize their words. i was fortunate to have had the opportunity to be introduced to 10 people that were referred to me

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<sup>3</sup> Portions of the preceding section titled Writing as a Theoretical and Analytical Process have been presented within a poster at the International Writing Centers Association Annual Conference in Atlanta, GA on October 11, 2018.

by Indigenous contacts. These participants provided me with a snapshot of how they enacted their ally identity, how they felt about allyship, and how being an ally affected their social engagements. Again, some of the allies elected to use their real names while others elected to use a pseudonym.

brandy worked as an administrator in the social services sector, providing leadership in a centre that serves female-identifying clients. Growing up in a small town, brandy was exposed to what she considered racist attitudes within the community. She admits that she also held these racist attitudes in her younger years. As an adult, brandy learned much more about the history of Indigenous people in canada, and her belief systems had changed dramatically. brandy met and married an Indigenous man and embraced his family and the wider community in which he grew up. Personally and professionally, brandy had supported a variety of Indigenous-led initiatives aimed at improving awareness of causes that matter to community and ways to improve conditions for Indigenous peoples living in brandon.

craig was an american-born church minister who had worked on right relationships within a spiritual community that had formally apologized to residential school survivors. craig admitted that his knowledge of Indigenous matters in canada was minimal when he arrived in canada and he immersed himself in reading to gain the knowledge that he felt he needed. Much of craig's work focused on helping his congregation to understand the nature of establishing right relations with Indigenous peoples and honouring the survivors and those who perished in church-run residential schools, particularly the one that was in brandon. craig had also enjoyed a productive working relationship with students affiliated with the brandon university Indigenous Peoples' Centre.



diane was an aspiring educator looking forward to graduating from the education program at university when she spoke with me about her allyship. diane had lived for a while in an Indigenous community where her spouse was working as a teacher. diane had also worked in the school, and their family had embraced living on-reserve. Growing up in a community where there is a federal penitentiary, diane had witnessed first-hand the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in the corrections system. She had also learned from her mother that all people should be included in community and school events. diane had become passionate about including Indigenous literatures in the classroom and about including Indigenous accomplishments in her curricula.

joanne grew up in a small community where there were racist attitudes directed at Indigenous peoples, but her family did not adopt those sentiments. joanne became more familiar with a community of Indigenous people while living in another province. At that time, joanne was challenged by addictions and was living an unhealthy life. joanne noticed that she held privilege as a white woman among a mixed group of people with addictions. Indigenous spirituality offered joanne a way out of addiction and back to health. Elders entrusted joanne with several spiritual teachings and ceremonies, and she was working towards building a career in the justice system. joanne aspired to work with Indigenous clients and the judiciary in the pre-sentencing phase of the system.

katherine was a young researcher who grew up very near to an abandoned residential school in brandon. katherine remembered being astonished that, for a long time, she had not understood the purpose of the building on the hill. She learned most of what she knew about the injustices of residential schools through post-secondary education. katherine approached the Chief and Council of a nearby Indigenous community to see if they wished to partner on a

project to identify the children buried in the cemetery of the residential school. With the consent and encouragement of the community, katherine began a non-invasive examination of the cemetery grounds and beyond to try to identify the children who had perished in the school.

kelly had very little understanding of Indigenous history growing up in manitoba. Much of what kelly learned about the injustices and racism faced by Indigenous people she learned from her spouse when she married a Métis man. Being in a relationship with an Indigenous person made kelly keenly aware of racist comments and attitudes that others expressed in their presence. Much like diane, kelly was determined to make her elementary classroom more inclusive by including Indigenous literature, resource materials, and symbols like the Métis flag. Though she had encountered some resistance from coworkers, kelly was determined to bring more Indigenous content into the school for the benefit of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

Like many of the other participants, kelsey did not learn much in her youth about the history of Indigenous peoples or the systemic racism that has marked relationships with non-Indigenous peoples. Post-secondary education provided kelsey with much of her foundational knowledge of the injustices, and she has actively sought to educate herself further through personal and professional interactions with Indigenous peoples. Working in the healthcare system, kelsey advocated to Indigenize spaces and to have Indigenous spiritual practices accepted as beneficial for some clients. Though she participated in ceremonies, kelsey was aware of her positionality and checked in with Elders to ensure she remained respectful of spaces where her presence would not be appropriate.

Like brandy and kelly, leanne also married an Indigenous man and learned on a personal level how to be a partner to an Indigenous person. As a young person, leanne was very

comfortable with Indigenous people because, like many of her Indigenous friends, she grew up in relative poverty. Working in healthcare, leanne saw many Indigenous clients and recognized that sometimes coworkers were not well acquainted with the inequities in the healthcare system that Indigenous people experience. leanne reflected that she learned much from her children, who reminded her that she cannot fully understand their experiences as Indigenous people, even though she is their mother. Despite her limitations, however, leanne felt deeply connected to her community and welcomed at gatherings.

Similar to craig, lyndon grew up outside of canada and had encountered a steep learning curve when educating himself about the racism and colonialism that Indigenous peoples encounter. lyndon shared that he initially believed that Indigenous people no longer existed in canada, and was surprised to learn that they were a diverse and resilient population. lyndon had learned much about how Indigenous people encounter inequities in the education system from the adult students he works with. The adult education environment in which lyndon works partners with the local Friendship Centre, supporting mostly Indigenous students. lyndon formed relationships with the students and identified ways to help them succeed in work or in furthering their education.

mitchell was a student who was active in climate justice movements, frequently working alongside Indigenous peoples. Like almost all of the other participants, mitchell felt that his early education did not inform him about the reality of racism and colonialism in canada's past relationships with Indigenous peoples. mitchell was well aware of his positionality within the climate justice movement and frequently checked his privilege, taking a step back so that non-white and non-male people would be encouraged to take the lead. As an ally, mitchell looked for ways to support Indigenous friends on social media and in person. He and others would take on

dealing with racist remarks, rather than leaving that work to Indigenous people to shoulder on their own.

i am grateful for the richness of experience that this participant group represents. Their diverse backgrounds, their frankness and generosity have been entrusted to me. i hope that sharing their stories and their work in the following poems and analysis will inspire others to educate themselves and to begin or further the work of decolonization.

### **Action Poems**

One of the areas that i identified as thematically important for allies was their willingness to act, to be involved in the day-to-day work of decolonization. Critical realism invites us to see reality as stratified and emergent, and “human agents [as]... bio-psycho-social structures with emergent powers of intentionality” (Gorski, 2013, p. 668). Within human action there is the capacity for individuals to reflect upon their actions and to change their actions when additional learning has taken place. When i asked many of the participants about how they would describe their actions as allies, some expressed concerns about the ways that they enacted their allyship in the initial stages. When i began looking at the interviews and seeking thematic information about their actions, i focused on the verbs they used. Quite often i found the verbs tended to be repeated several times, suggesting a deeper level of engagement in a particular action. Some verbs appeared frequently across participant interviews while other verbs seemed to be favoured by certain participants.

Though i did not purposefully seek participants from a variety of professions or backgrounds, the actions that these allies engage in are connected to five broad areas. kelly, diane, and lyndon all identified as educators. craig and joanne had taken on roles with deeply spiritual connections. For kelsey and leanne, actions sometimes intersected with their roles as

healthcare providers. mitchell and brandy were regularly involved in activism work. katherine was an academic and researcher who engaged in alliance through this work. For the purpose of discussing the action poetry findings, i have grouped the participants into their profession/work/volunteer roles; however, i do not wish to suggest that the roles the participants took on defined how they engaged as allies. i offer this way of organizing the findings to speak to the similarities and differences between allies acting within a variety of roles. i do not wish to be reductive in analyzing the findings as somehow occupationally specific. The participants all had rich lives outside their profession/work/volunteerism, so the ways that they enacted their allyship is the result of multiple emergent realities.

kelly had been proactive in bringing Indigenous objects, such as the flag of the Métis Nation, and children's literature into her classroom. The verb *think* figures prominently in teacher kelly's poem, revealing the duality of action and reflection. The persistence of *think* suggests that kelly's process of becoming engaged outwardly was accompanied by significant internal contemplation:

**excerpt from kelly's action poem**

i think you've got to start  
you've got to start  
i think it's got to be  
i think  
i think just by standing up  
clarify or correct  
i'm an ally now—i think

i shared

i don't know  
i know for me  
when i hear comments

an ally is somebody who is *beside*

i think

i think

i think

would i step up? i think

For kelly, it seemed that reflection happened before an action occurred, as in “would i step up? i think,” and after an action: “i’m an ally now—i think.” The work of allies is complex and demands reflection for the person to assess their effectiveness within themselves and within the community.

diane saw her role as an educator as an opportunity to teach young Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to make them more aware of Indigeneity both past and present. At one time, diane and her family lived in a reserve community where she and her spouse both had jobs within the community’s school. One irony that diane encountered while living on reserve was that the staff, who were primarily non-Indigenous outsiders, had to supervise the open gym time at the community’s school—their own school. Living off-reserve, diane felt her knowledge of Indigenous culture and history was part of who she is, and she wanted to share what she knew with the students she taught:

**excerpt from diane’s action poem**

i said

i want you guys to feel

free to ask questions

say things

go over all the terms

what are some of the terms

you’ve heard for aboriginal people

wrote them

on the board

explained the definitions

explained when

appropriate to use  
which term  
kids  
they're like  
oh okay—yeah  
i never knew what fnmi meant  
they still use indian?  
that's the legal term  
still on the books  
only place to use it  
is if you're talking about  
a legal document

diane spoke about creating spaces where youth could feel safe to ask questions about Indigeneity without fear of reprisal or shame. diane also used literature by Indigenous authors in the classroom to promote understanding and because she saw the works as artistically engaging regardless of being labelled as Indigenous works. diane's pedagogy was in alignment with Shirley's (2017) suggestions on Indigenizing teaching spaces as a way to promote social justice.

lyndon's work as an educator put him primarily in contact with adult Indigenous students. Working under the brandon Friendship Centre's leadership, lyndon worked alongside students who sought skills through the centre's literacy programming. Operating out of a former storefront, the literacy centre aims to help students build skills, but also to see students as whole people who may need other forms of support to be able to attend and be successful. lyndon reflected on his actions as an educator and commented on how his upbringing in england did not prepare him for the realities of being an educator in canada:

**excerpt from lyndon's action poem**

have to be careful  
my training  
that i'm not too much  
doing things for people  
as opposed to

letting them do it  
was working as an ea<sup>4</sup>  
saw  
    the canadian approach  
    if it was a british classroom  
    if i'd come here  
to the friendship centre adult education  
    with that kind of attitude  
i'd've been in big trouble  
that's not what people need

lyndon learned that enacting his allyship as an educator meant doing so in a way that was culturally relevant to his surroundings. Critical assessment of the learning environment led lyndon to modify his teaching and provide a better learning experience for his students. lyndon credited a teacher he worked under as instrumental in mentoring lyndon when he began working in canadian elementary schools and working alongside the Indigenous students who are present in significant numbers in brandon.

Some allies have considerable public identities that they must consider whenever they take on alliance actions. For them, consideration of Bishop's (2002) notions of allies working in the background, and making space for oppressed people to engage as leaders, becomes problematic. brandy's action poem reflects this struggle:

**excerpt from brandy's action poem**

j was contacted about  
the Bear Clan  
i'm not one of the organizers  
j am not an Indigenous person  
j was very clear with the media  
*gave* them contact information  
for the folks who were  
starting up Bear Clan  
and they still—you know—

---

<sup>4</sup> educational assistant



wanted to talk to me  
for national media  
to come and talk to me  
i was just kind of like  
i just really can't speak to that  
i can only speak to safety in our city  
they still  
put the Bear Clan spin on it  
which made it seem  
like i was  
speaking on behalf  
of the Bear Clan  
as a non-Indigenous person  
that is *not* what i wanted  
media really need to  
to check themselves

brandy's frustration stemmed from her recognition of the traits of allies where they usually defer to Indigenous leadership to speak to media regarding Indigenous issues. Despite brandy's overt attempts to distance herself from being the spokesperson for the media, the interview she gave maintained its colonial overtones. Gorski (2013) gave a critical realist's perspective on problems like brandy's: "Social structures [in this case, the media] have agency, an agency that transcends and influences the intentions of individual agents that co-constitute them" (pp. 668-669). These kinds of frustrating moments do cause allies to tread with trepidation when it comes to working alongside Indigenous peoples and communities. Sometimes the risk brings great rewards in the advancement of the work of decolonization.

For mitchell, a student who volunteered extensively within the climate justice movement, being aware of his positionality had been vital to his work. Like many of the others i spoke with, mitchell reflected on the work he does, but mitchell seemed particularly tuned to how his level of privilege informed his role within the activist community:

excerpt from mitchell's action poem

being conscious of  
do i need to contribute right now  
can i take a step back  
let someone  
who has newer to the table  
who isn't white and male  
contribute their own voice  
being conscious of  
knowledge i have to offer  
logistical information to share  
not taking up too much space  
not taking up any more  
being conscious of  
the kinds of roles i take on  
focusing more on the back end  
nitty gritty  
time consuming  
not very public work

Like brandy, mitchell did not want to become the public face for activism work that should rightfully be led by Indigenous folks. Both activists spoke about the intentionality with which they shunned the spotlight. Both also mentioned that a feminist perspective informed the work that they do, deepening their critical reflection on their allyship. Post-secondary coursework had been an important influence in raising both mitchell's and brandy's awareness of injustice.

Addressing injustice has also been at the forefront of the work that craig and joanne take on as allies. Both participants identified a strong spiritual connection to their actions. craig spoke about his calling to work within the church community and how he recognized that there is a troubling record of abuse that distances Indigenous peoples, especially given that the history of church involvement in residential schools is a justified source of betrayal and mistrust. craig and members of the congregation had been seeking to redefine their relationship with Indigenous

peoples through offerings of food, space, and solidarity. he tread cautiously when he asked  
Indigenous people into church spaces:

**excerpt from craig's action poem**

i kind of served  
as the emcee  
for the opening of the  
brandon residential school learning centre  
we did a ceremony that day  
to honour the children  
that didn't come home  
a member of Peguis First Nation  
attended the school  
attended knox<sup>5</sup> while she  
was at the school  
a letter from her  
asking  
to hold a ceremony  
to remember the children  
so we did that  
went to ask an Elder  
wanted to ask  
is it appropriate for us  
to hold this  
on church grounds  
he was affirming about that  
the need to do that  
then asking him  
would he be willing to do a smudge  
participate  
sharing his story  
knowing  
that what i'm asking  
is for a survivor to  
once again  
bear a lot of responsibility  
for leading us in healing  
knowing  
that this would be difficult—

---

<sup>5</sup> knox united church in brandon, mb

survivors relive  
a lot of the pain of the experience  
we want to be very aware  
that people can be  
re-traumatized

we're seeking  
    to do truth-telling  
    to educate  
    to name what happened  
and that's a good thing  
but it comes with a cost

we give thanks  
for these opportunities to dance together

At the risk of making other folks uneasy, craig was not comfortable with proceeding with one community member's request to use the church to honour the deceased children who attended the brandon residential school. By seeking the Elder's guidance, craig approached the Elder from a position of humility, and sought his wisdom before proceeding with a sensitive ceremony. It is with humility that allies must seek to repair relationships.

Like craig, joanne worked to bring a more just context to the spaces she occupied. At the time of the interview, joanne was preparing to work with accused Indigenous peoples within the justice system. joanne expressed her commitment to bringing a fuller sense of the systemic injustices that plague the justice system to the forefront of submissions to judges involved in sentencing. As a person who previously struggled with addictions, joanne found healing and purpose through Indigenous spirituality. Now, joanne contributed to the spiritual lives of many folks, and had been given a role within the community as a facilitator of some ceremonies. she was clear that this role had come about gradually and that she was under the direction of Elders. joanne understood that there are *wannabes* who cross the boundary between acceptable practices

for non-Indigenous folks and stepping into spaces and ceremonies that are not meant for non-Indigenous peoples:

**excerpt from joanne's action poem**

been given items

that white people weren't allowed to carry

first started going to ceremonies

couldn't have pipes

i was absolutely fine with this

didn't even want any of it

i carry a pipe

been given a sweat lodge

work with medicines

will never see things

like an aboriginal person

i will see things differently

you know nothing

you understand even less

you'll never go wrong

always live by that

i'm a pipe carrier

a helper for the people

i'll do a sweat for them

Elder who gave it to me

i try to have him there

so he can speak the language

i speak some of the language

i've walked this way for so many years

been asked to sort of *guide*

not a leader

can guide things

been shown to do things

sharing what i've been told

joanne was clear that she saw her role as a bridge between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. she admitted that she made lots of mistakes along the way as an ally, but that she learned to accept criticism with humility. she encouraged others to get over their fear of making mistakes when working alongside Indigenous folks. Bringing a good heart and being willing to learn is more important than making a mistake.

The relatively high population of Indigenous peoples in manitoba means that folks who work in professional areas like healthcare will encounter Indigenous clients daily. kelsey and leanne both worked in healthcare settings and both have worked extensively alongside Indigenous peoples both inside and outside of occupational settings. kelsey had been very intentional about educating herself through reading about Indigenous issues and positive things like the strengths of Indigenous spirituality. Within workspaces kelsey had been an advocate for Indigenizing the environment:

**excerpt from kelsey's action poem**

there is some activism  
in my old workplace  
it used to be a struggle  
this is important  
to be welcoming  
to all people  
everyone  
in this culture  
is valuable here  
maybe  
we should push this culture  
a bit or a lot  
we have a lot  
of people coming  
to our workplace  
who  
identify as Indigenous  
we want them

to feel extremely  
welcome  
d cor  
language  
that was quite an argument

educating  
about the spiritual practices  
that need to be available  
and are necessary  
for some people to feel  
content  
happy  
connected  
there is some advocacy  
in making that  
available  
not hidden  
vital to what i do  
as a professional  
but also  
in my home

kelsey made it clear, however, that activism does not begin and end in the workplace: it was part of who she was. mitchell expressed a similar sentiment when he said, “And it’s constant, ...you can’t take a vacation from it.” kelsey enjoyed social outings, book club meetings, and spiritual gatherings with folks who are Indigenous and non-Indigenous. her life reflected her activism.

leanne’s life was intimately intertwined with Indigeneity both personally and professionally. Married to a First Nations man and having children who are First Nations meant that leanne saw first-hand the struggles and successes of decolonization. leanne’s work in healthcare also placed her in contact with many Indigenous folks, often when they were in crisis. At times leanne was frustrated with the lack of education healthcare workers received before they encountered Indigenous folks:

**excerpt from leanne's action poem**

we're the front-line providers

we're the ones   in the mental health system  
working in addictions  
in crisis  
                where we find aboriginal people  
i graduated    i heard  
  but there was nothing

i can't speak for other education programs  
i know for nursing  
i know  
i could tell you  
i know  
we talk about it  
we have professionals  
                they don't have a hot clue

i think i would walk away sometimes  
when push comes to shove  
i have stood up and said things

Like kelsey, leanne engaged in action within the workplace to make those spaces safer and more welcoming for Indigenous clients. Their activism at work reflected how they conducted their lives; activism and decolonization of relationships were not just things that happen at work for leanne and kelsey.

katherine was a researcher who approached an Indigenous community to ask for their permission and guidance for a project. As an aspiring forensic anthropologist, katherine had become interested in assisting with the identifying of remains of children who are buried in the vicinity of closed residential schools. As a non-Indigenous person, katherine approached the work with caution, and contacted the First Nation in closest proximity to the closed school. Using appropriate protocols, katherine presented the project to the community for their approval



and input. Together, katherine and the community established a close working and research relationship:

**excerpt from katherine's action poem**

doing my undergrad  
taking  
    intro to First Nations studies  
doing  
    forensic anthropology  
taking those two classes  
at the same time  
realized  
    we had a residential school  
    here  
    in brandon

consider doing this as a project  
get a meeting with the Chief and Council  
asked them  
a study  
to look for the cemeteries  
to look for the unmarked graves  
identify the names  
of the students  
    they said  
    we want you to do that  
that's how it all got started

For katherine, learning there was a residential school so close to where she grew up was a shocking realization. her decision to study anthropology offered a way for katherine to contribute directly to responding to recommendation 73 of the Calls to Action issued by the TRC (2015b). This recommendation calls for the location of unmarked graves where children who died at residential schools are buried. Further Calls to Action set out notification of next of kin of the location of the children's' remains and for memorializing the loss of the children.

Acknowledgement of the truth of the children who died as a direct result of attending residential schools is an important part of recognizing canada's role in the attempted decimation of Indigenous culture. katherine acknowledged that moving forward with her work will be complicated. Not all Indigenous peoples or groups agree on how to proceed with the identification and locating of the remains of the children in residential school cemeteries. katherine was conscious of her role and followed the direction set by the communities involved.

### **Emotion Poems**

Curry-Stevens (2007) asserted that emotion is an important dimension in adult learning, integral to the process of critical learning. Allies often place themselves in situations where they embrace unsettling events and the learning that goes along with the feelings and reflections they experience. i was interested in knowing what kinds of emotions were raised in people who are non-Indigenous people recognized by Indigenous peoples as allies, and how they have made sense of their emotional journeys. Not surprisingly, the mix of emotions that the participants felt reflect the complex nature of ally work. In this section of the findings i present a representative sample of the emotions that the allies reported. The participants each reported multiple emotional responses, but in this section i selected one emotion that each person reported and then grouped them together. brandy reported feeling a great sense of guilt when she began working with Indigenous peoples. craig, diane, and katherine all found that they experienced, at least in some cases, feelings of nervousness or fear. joanne and leanne talked about how they found love and acceptance when they work alongside of Indigenous folks. Feelings of anger and frustration have, at times, been part of the ally experience for mitchell and kelsey. Finally, kelly and lyndon both expressed a sense of empathy.

When brandy thought back to the time before she learned about the injustices that Indigenous peoples have experienced, she characterized her own attitudes as racist. Furthermore, she believed that the small town that she grew up in did nothing to dispel racism. As a result of these past beliefs, brandy's engagement activism had been marked somewhat by guilt:

**excerpt from brandy's emotion poem**

i was racist  
myself  
when i was growing up  
there's a lot of  
guilt there for me  
to do something for myself  
reconcile that guilt  
i guess

Walking with our Sisters  
that was probably  
the most  
emotional thing  
i've ever done  
i talked about  
the guilt that i have  
we did a closing ceremony  
i like just  
broke down  
into tears in front of everyone  
    i thought i was going to be okay  
    i wasn't okay

brandy's reaction of guilt seems to be at odds with Gehl's (n.d.) "Ally's Bill of Responsibilities," and with Bishop's (2002) work on allies. The guilt seems to be focused for brandy on her personal shame at having had a racist attitude in the past as a very young person. brandy was very honest about her emotional reaction to this work, and perhaps the feelings of guilt reflected imperfection. i would argue that Gehl and Bishop defined ideal ally attitudes, and there is space for emerging and aspirational allies with imperfections. Many of the participants spoke of how

they must accept that they will not get everything right, but they must continue to work towards decolonization regardless.

Many of the allies also spoke of how they dealt with feelings of nervousness and fear. This finding is not surprising, as ally work purposefully puts privileged people into situations where they must put their unearned advantage aside. For craig, his position within the church put him in the position of representing one of the institutions that has been an acknowledged source of the betrayal of Indigenous peoples through the running of residential schools and through the condemnation of Indigenous spiritualities. craig was keenly aware of this positionality in his activism:

**excerpt from craig's emotion poem**

i remember going into that meeting  
palms being a little sweaty  
because here i am asking  
someone who self-identifies as a survivor  
leading us in healing  
knowing this would be difficult  
it comes at a cost  
i'm always a bit pensive  
just say nervous  
where i'm asked to do these things  
when i have to—when i'm in those  
situations

Here craig asked a survivor of a residential school, who was also an Elder, to take part in a church-led ceremony to honour children who died within the residential schools that the churches ran. craig met the Elder knowing that there was a very real chance that the Elder would not agree to participate. For craig, it was important that he understood his role in the church and, even though he was recognized as being an ally, he saw the complexity of having his role associated with the wrongs committed by the church. craig accepted that he must be open to

receiving the criticism and negativity in hope that there will be healing and progress that comes from his involvement. This progress was the larger aim of his work.

Like craig, katherine's nervousness was the result of approaching Indigenous people as a representative of an institution guilty of long-term betrayal. As a researcher, katherine knew that Indigenous folks had long been subjected to unethically designed studies that did not take the well-being of the individuals or their communities into account. Before she approached the community, katherine became acquainted with the practices that had resulted in past wrongs that researchers conducted, but she was still acutely aware of her positionality as a white researcher:

**excerpt from katherine's emotion poem**

i was pretty young and nervous  
was beyond pleased

nervousness especially  
the first time i met the chief  
we have a fairly good relationship now  
i always joke about how nervous i was  
he used to be rcmp

i really psyched myself up for it  
    i'm very caring  
    it's a difficult topic  
    a sensitive topic  
it's complicated  
i think patience is a big virtue

you don't know where to start  
you're scared to start  
i know that some are scared  
because of what parents might say  
it's hard to break those  
comfort zones

katherine's experience reflects a respectful way of approaching research. She sought permission and guidance from the Chief and Tribal Council, and asked if this was research that they wanted

to participate in. katherine had established and maintained a close working relationship with the Chief and Council as she progressed with the work, but she took nothing for granted.

Communicating her movements had been key for katherine, as had been her involvement with Indigenous researchers who were leading some of the projects that are linked to the TRC's (2015b) Calls to Action.

Some of the fear that diane experienced preceded her work as an ally when she lived in a community that shared space with a federal penitentiary. As a child, diane and her family attended some events at the prison, and this put her in some spaces with Indigenous inmates who were at that time and continue to be overrepresented in manitoba corrections facilities:

**excerpt from diane's emotion poem**

could be very intimidating  
for some people

growing up in stony mountain  
penitentiary there  
there were powwows  
as a child

i was afraid i thought the indians are gonna come and scalp me because in the movies

you can go to the internet  
even if you're afraid  
go to Dakota Ojibway  
every community has  
a website now

every  
see  
i'm getting passionate

fear  
of being  
politically correct  
definitely out there  
better to be wrong  
and apologize

than

not to talk  
not to stay

in that  
stasis

It is interesting to note that diane implicated the media as a source for her fear that she may be scalped. Many allies spoke of how their formative impression of Indigenous folks was shaped by the media representations of the people as savages. However, diane saw media as a possible solution to this fear. The internet gives people the ability to go to band websites and to connect with Indigenous content, even if they are still too fearful or nervous to connect in person. Perhaps by initially seeking an online experience, non-Indigenous people will gain the confidence or dispel enough of the myths so that they can try spending more time with Indigenous folks. diane saw the potential of media like the internet and books to engage this kind of participation from non-Indigenous people.

leanne also grew up in a community where she frequently came in contact with Indigenous people but, instead of being fearful, leanne connected to them through the shared reality of poverty. Among Indigenous friends and neighbours, leanne found love and acceptance. Although leanne still recognized her personal privilege as a white person, she treasured the love that she received and continued to find within the community:

**excerpt from leanne's emotion poem**

j just feel super        j just feel great  
j feel like what we're  
      what i'm doing is worthwhile  
it's meaningful  
j feel hopeful  
      j could get pretty hopeless  
      j could get pretty jaded

i've seen so much negativity  
i choose not to  
i feel it gives me hope  
for humanity  
we really don't know what it means to work together

For leanne, acceptance and love continued to motivate her work. her love for her family, who are all Indigenous, gave her an added incentive to be hopeful and to keep moving forward. she knew that she will never feel the injustice as much as they do, but she had witnessed enough of the poverty and the discrimination first-hand to know that she could not give up hope that the fight for equality is worth it.

Like leanne, joanne found acceptance and love within the context of close relationships with Indigenous peoples. joanne lived for a time as a street-involved person dealing with the effects of addictions. she has also shared spiritual spaces with Elders and with other Indigenous folks who were learning about medicines and ceremonies. For joanne, these places have meant support and love, and have brought about healing through teachings and relationships:

**excerpt from joanne's emotion poem**

something about the culture attracted me  
that connectedness that i would feel  
that i didn't feel anywhere else  
always felt different  
not connected to humans  
and not of this world  
so i found a place to belong  
  
and acceptance  
well sort of  
you're never really accepted  
it's never about acceptance  
'cause our job is to learn to accept ourselves  
  
i know that somehow there was something



to do with my purpose  
was always very spiritual  
even as a kid very spiritual nature based  
just sort of unfolded in this sort of  
beautiful way  
and kind of like it was meant to be

there's such a loving kindness  
respect  
goes way beyond acceptance  
that i experienced

Despite these close connections and acceptance, joanne understood that there were limitations attached to her whiteness. There are Indigenous perspectives and knowledge that she will never have access to, and that was fine for joanne. she accepted the role that she had access to and acknowledged the Creator's wisdom in granting her this positionality.

To gain love and acceptance seems like an ideal emotional consequence of engaging in decolonizing work, but the ideal is not always within reach. Some allies experience frustration and anger, particularly in their encounters with non-Indigenous folks who are either racist, indifferent or apathetic in addressing past and current inequities that mark relationships with Indigenous peoples in canada. Often allies are quite attuned to subtle forms of racism that are more widespread than overt displays or acts of violence. Microaggressions can build up and have cumulative negative effects. For mitchell, one source of frustration had been the trivialization of the term reconciliation:

**excerpt from mitchell's emotion poem**

there's an idea  
around allyship and reconciliation  
that it can be  
like  
easy

and it's like  
no it can't

it's a lot of work  
a lot of introspection  
really thinking about  
how you function in groups  
and in spaces

this idea  
that reconciliation  
is just this thing  
we can put on a stamp  
on our letters from the city  
and be like  
it's done

mitchell referred to an initiative by the city of winnipeg to declare 2016 as the year of reconciliation in the city, but mitchell felt the move was premature. canada post used a post mark for mail that was processed in the winnipeg facility that declared it the city's year of reconciliation. In mitchell's mind the city had not yet acknowledged all of the truth-telling that needed to be done, so the declaration of reconciliation seemed rashly optimistic. Moreover, mitchell seemed irritated that the move trivialized the hard work that people were still doing, and that was clearly nowhere within sight of concluding.

Frustration and anger with non-Indigenous peoples were also part of kelsey's early story when she was beginning to understand the injustices that Indigenous friends lived with and continue to encounter. At the time of the incident described in the poem, kelsey was a high school student. her locker was beside a friend who happened to be Indigenous. At first kelsey did not understand why her friend was treated differently from the other students. her frustration erupted when she connected the mistreatment with her friend's Indigeneity:

**excerpt from kelsey's emotion poem**

i don't get it  
it was really annoying  
to watch people treat  
him differently  
really pissed me off

As much as kelsey expressed feeling angry or frustrated with racist behaviours she, like many of the other allies i spoke with, observed that it is best to find constructive ways to express that frustration. For example, kelsey described how she used her anger to send a message to people who were exhibiting racist behaviour:

**excerpt from kelsey's emotion poem**

i'll shoot a look  
or a comment  
or something  
if i don't feel that  
the space is welcoming  
or something  
has been done or said  
i try not to be too *big* about it  
but i make it very obvious

kelsey reported that she sometimes resorted to non-verbal cues, like shooting a “look,” while other times she made a comment to the person. Many of the allies spoke about their frustration with racism, and varying levels of comfort they had in addressing racist behaviours directly with the people who were committing racist acts. i examine these strategies further in the section focused on the poems that emerged from participants' social situations.

Some of the participants turned inward to access feelings of empathy when they witnessed Indigenous people experiencing unfair conditions or when they encountered racism. For kelly, married to a Métis person, the racism she encountered never really bothered her until

she had a close relationship with her spouse, a relationship that made racism a personal matter. kelly's sensitivity for her partner's feelings elicited more pronounced feelings in her when she considered how Indigenous peoples experience racism. In fact, the racism existed before and after kelly's awareness of it, but her heightened sensitivity was the result of having a close relationship with an Indigenous person.

**excerpt from kelly's emotion poem**

empathize  
it was awkward

never felt rejected  
turned away  
pushed  
or anything

there's a wall—  
like a slap in the face

it's hurtful  
j know it cut me

kelly used words “slap” and “cut” to connote that the racism was violent and hurtful, though the assault was verbal in nature. As a non-Indigenous person, kelly experienced racism through her spouse, and realized that she had not experienced racism at all prior to entering a relationship with him. For kelly, to know one person deeply changed her entire perspective on how affective racism is.

lyndon, and some of the other participants, cited an experience of poverty as influential in developing empathy for Indigenous peoples. For lyndon and his spouse, a brief period of being on social assistance was enough to impress upon him that poverty degrades the person. Systems in which impoverished peoples find themselves are problematic:

### excerpt from lyndon's emotion poem

i think  
there is a part of me  
that does feel  
a bit protective  
do feel  
i'm with them  
on things  
because  
i do feel  
other people don't always understand  
the struggles

being made to walk along  
the coloured lines  
to go to the next person  
you had to go and see  
a totally humiliating experience

Because of his past experiences lyndon, a white male who occupies a position of privilege, empathized with and worked toward helping others to overcome this kind of social inequity.

When allies understand their own oppression and how easily they can be on the disempowered side of the social equation, they are able to emerge with a stronger sense of empathy and a willingness to address the imbalances. Bishop (2002) reminded us that allies are agents in working to resolve their own situations of oppression. lyndon and others reflected not only on their positionality as far as privilege is concerned, but also as it related to their oppression.

### **Social Poems**

When i asked the study participants about how they navigate and understand their social experiences as allies, i was astonished at the variety of situations they identified. Social situations are complex and are often coloured by the actions and emotions that accompany them. From the messiness of human social interactions, six general themes emerged for the allies. lyndon and

kelly spoke about how education in the past and present has an important social role in communicating how Indigenous folks are represented within that context. For leanne, family was a complex social arrangement when Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples forge intimate relationships. Learning about the nature of racism and anti-racist social encounters had been a learning experience for both katherine and mittell. brandy pondered the role of government and grassroots social movements in creating change. For craig, work was a place where social justice and group dynamics intersected, which created some tension. Finally, diane, kelsey, and joanne discussed how their positionality and awareness of their own privilege had influenced their conduct in social situations.

Adult educators realize the importance of reaching learners through formal and informal learning. All the allies expressed disappointment and frustration with their early experiences in the education system. To varying degrees, all explained that as children they either learned little to nothing about Indigenous peoples, or what they had learned was essentialized or sanitized to put relations with the canadian governments in a better light. As adults, some expressed that they learned about Indigenous peoples through post-secondary coursework or by self-educating through reading. For lyndon, who grew up in england, learning about Indigenous people was more of a history lesson:

**excerpt from lyndon's social poem**

school education was in england  
can still sort of picture it  
    Navajo people what they did  
    Apaches      what they did  
    Sioux people  
but probably most people  
would never've heard of  
    Ojibway people

Cree people  
they're more familiar  
through american history  
through movies  
let's face it  
you know  
the hollywood version  
everyone knew about  
little bighorn  
wounded knee  
oh yeah  
then everyone went home  
and it was almost like  
there weren't any more  
of these people

lyndon recalled that when he first came to canada he was astonished that Indigenous people still existed at all. his education had not prepared him to encounter a living culture, and his american-movie-influenced preparation further excluded many of the tribal communities that exist in canada. Several of the participants alluded to popular media as an early educator on Indigeneity. The hollywood version of Indigenous persons has focused on stereotypes that served to fill the gap left by insufficient legitimate education.

As much as some educators see the need to infuse Indigenous content across the primary and secondary school content in canada, there are others who are reluctant. For some, their reluctance may be bound up in a lack of confidence in teaching subject material about which they know very little. For others, the reasons for teaching about Indigenous peoples is misapprehended, as kelly discovered:

**excerpt from kelly's social poem**

i wanted to teach  
i wanted to, the last couple of years  
an Indigenous—

there's a curriculum there  
to teach for the high school  
and kinda that was shut down

we don't need it here  
we don't have anyone Métis  
we don't have anybody  
i said—  
it's not *for* the Métis  
it's not *for* the Indigenous  
it's for the white people  
like, the white people

they don't want it

kelly was shocked to discover that her colleagues did not understand the rationale for teaching students about Indigenous peoples. They assumed that the curriculum was intended to educate Indigenous students when, in fact, it was meant for everyone. kelly explained that the resource materials are often available to teachers, and that these resources are often available free of charge, but that some educators had not been made aware of the importance of making all children aware of Indigenous history and contemporary culture.

Even for people who have a much deeper understanding of Indigenous history and culture, social situations involving family can be filled with tension. leanne married into a First Nations family and has children who are First Nations. As a non-Indigenous person, leanne tread the path between both sides of her family and her social identity:

**excerpt from leanne's social poem**

well, it's not me that did that	it wasn't my dad that put you
in residential school	it was my grandfather or great grandfather
colonization is in our dna	
it's passed down	
we still have responsibility for it	



you're only an ally if they say you're an ally

i look back at my mom  
    she's caucasian  
    she's white  
she knows what i'm doing  
what i'm doing  
how i'm living  
    to a certain extent  
she may not  
    i think  
not know me totally  
when i think about it  
i'm not close to my family all the time  
    it creates a separateness  
    it does create a separateness  
whereas  
    some of the community gatherings and ceremonies  
    people have their aunts, uncles, cousins, sisters, brothers, moms  
and i'm just sitting there

leanne had to learn about the tenuousness of family relationships. For non-Indigenous people there may be a desire for family members to distance themselves from the actions of their ancestors. In leanne's case, there was some distance created by her choice to marry an Indigenous person and to live within that social group. At the same time, leanne felt accepted by the larger Indigenous community, but was aware of her lack of ancestral relationships in that group. Other allies also expressed that their families generally accepted their choice to affiliate with Indigenous peoples, but many of them felt that their families did not fully understand why they chose to be socially active within Indigenous circles.

As the participants became engaged in ongoing relationships with Indigenous peoples, they became more aware of the forms of racism that exist. Many of the allies suggested that racism is an ongoing problem and that dealing with racism was one aspect of allyship that

presented difficulty in social settings. The first step, however, was becoming aware of the way that racism presents itself. katherine found some of the racism is lodged in the perpetrators' unwillingness to acknowledge the contemporary effects of colonization:

**excerpt from katherine's social poem**

definitely  
there's racism  
                  structural racism  
                  systemic racism  
                  why don't they just get over it  
                  just forget about it  
                  let's turn the page  
comments like that mean  
they don't fully understand  
the history  
therefore are not compassionate  
or understanding  
quick to dismiss  
    that history  
    turning the page  
    let's forget about it  
    let's move on  
                  your traumas  
                  you're exhibiting  
                  now  
                  or that you're feeling  
                  now  
                  shouldn't have  
                  anything  
                  to do  
                  with those  
                  past things  
it's sort of this disconnect  
  
day-to-day issues  
with racism  
people won't say it directly  
    it's implied  
but once you're aware of it—you can see it everywhere  
even in brandon

friends feel like  
they get unequal  
treatment at retail stores  
hospitals  
no one will come out and say it

katherine suggested that there was an insidious quality to the racism she saw in brandon. Rather than being overtly displayed, racist systems and actions operate almost imperceptibly. The suggestion that katherine saw racism in the hospitals confirmed the claim in leanne's action poem that not all healthcare workers were trained to understand Indigenous clients. The ability to see racism, katherine explained, is linked to having social relationships with Indigenous peoples. her social relationships with Indigenous peoples sensitized her to the subtle forms of racism and microaggressions that they encounter.

The activist community that mittell participated in has developed a positive and constructive method for dealing with subtle racism within the group:

**excerpt from mittell's social poem**

people usually respond pretty quickly  
to a call-out  
oh shoot, that was not intentional  
we're trying to build  
in the activist community  
*calling in* as opposed to *calling out*  
messaging someone privately  
or speaking to them in person  
hey, you might not realize it,  
but this is actually really insensitive,  
here is the way  
you should probably delete that post  
probably apologize  
reduce the amount of shaming that happens  
  
it becomes easier  
to stick up for those things  
without losing friends

'cause you're doing it  
in a way that doesn't  
make people feel bad  
or ashamed  
a british comedian  
wrote a whole book  
about public shaming  
on social media  
trying to avoid that  
really helpful in  
maintaining relationships

The group's way of addressing racism took deliberate aim at the behaviour without ostracizing the person involved. Given the ubiquity of social media, this collective seemed to have engaged in critical thinking about the reality of public shaming and its potential destructiveness. The group operated from the perspective that racist behaviour within their context is largely unintentional, and the person's motives are generally good, but the words or behaviour can be addressed and the important work they shared could continue. mitchell was clear, however, in saying that the group was populated with mostly well-informed individuals concerned with climate justice, so their willingness to participate in the *calling in* scenarios was quite high.

Other allies reported their unwillingness to address racist behaviours with individuals who appeared to be reluctant or unready to change. Some allies expressed that they felt it was pointless to get into conflict with people about racist behaviours or language if the perpetrators were not ready to hear why their actions are offensive. On the other hand, some allies have tried to engage people who say or do racist things by addressing the stereotype or myth that they were perpetuating. By focusing on the misinformation, rather than the vitriol, the allies hoped to calmly diffuse the situation without attacking the person responsible for expressing the view. mitchell also talked about taking on the burden of explaining a racist behaviour or offensive

language when an Indigenous person feels emotionally drained from resisting racism. Allies realize that the burden of vigilance against racism should not fall to those most affected by it.

Grassroots initiatives, like the ones that mittchell and brandy are a part of, are essential to mobilizing ally efforts. Unlike government organizations, which are slower and more cumbersome in their operation, small groups can frequently make improvements to social situations where it counts, in neighbourhoods and communities large and small. For some of the participants, like brandy, government played an essential but frustrating role in the addressing of social inequality for Indigenous peoples:

**excerpt from brandy's social poem**

we can  
inter-organizations  
work together  
provide that stuff  
but  
before it comes down  
from some  
authority  
we're pushing against  
some  
bigger power  
i hate to say  
but  
that's the way  
our world works  
grassroots  
can only get so far  
    government  
        needs to step in  
            governments  
            school divisions  
            police force  
            people that have power  
  
Indigenous folks are  
still heavily regulated  
so many hoops

red tape  
and everything  
to get anything done  
on reserve especially  
faults in the system  
n u m e r o u s

Government systems are inescapable. Many activists and allies try to circumvent or systems in order to make improvements to people's lives in whatever ways they can, but government is pervasive and must eventually reflect the changes that society makes. brandy saw the necessity for government to make changes in legislation that concerns Indigenous peoples, but she recognized that grassroots organizations can be nimble in their responsiveness. Most allies agreed that government systems are problematic, and that the legacy of the indian act is crippling. Most, however, choose to focus on the situations where their actions can have a positive effect, rather than dwelling on the much larger and unwieldy problem of government policy. Although unspoken, i suspect that some allies see the role of negotiation with government as more suited to Indigenous tribal leadership, who see outstanding issues like Indigenous title as nation-to-nation discussions. Solutions should, therefore, be negotiated through treaty or other consensus mechanism or, unfortunately, litigated between the two parties.

Workplaces present interesting social dynamics for allies where personal, professional, and policy concerns are often intersecting. allies feel tension around relationships with others who do not necessarily share their views on social justice for Indigenous peoples. For craig, working in a church, the congregation with whom he associated is made up of diverse people. The church, and craig as its representative, is committed to acknowledging its complicity in establishing and running residential schools. Right relations were at the forefront of craig's ministry:

excerpt from craig's social poem

in brandon

it certainly has affected  
my relationship with parishioners  
members of the congregation  
there's a small minority  
of folks who take issue  
we do an acknowledgement of territory  
still a few people  
who are very uncomfortable with that  
there were a few folks  
who said

    why are we spending so much  
    time on this

their idea of reconciliation:

    we've apologized  
    we've named our complicity  
    we just need to move on  
    it's a thing of the past

so reconciliation means *forgetting*

and me saying:

    as long as survivors feel the need  
    to talk  
    as members of the institution  
    that participated in this  
    need to be able to listen  
    as painful as it is  
    as hard as it is  
    not because we need to feel guilty  
    or shamed  
    because we need to take ownership  
    be educated  
    so the relationships can  
    be transformed  
    and we don't re-traumatize  
    or oppress people once again  
    with the same mindset  
        same attitudes  
        same way of doing work together

a note  
slipped under my door

anonymously  
this past sunday  
with a little rewriting  
of our acknowledgement of territory

For thousands of years Indigenous  
peoples lived on this land  
in ~~their own~~ God's country.  
we've had probably a couple of people  
that have left because of the focus that  
we've had on right relations

Despite some dissension in the congregation, craig was determined to move forward with practices that are focused on reconciliation. Other allies expressed degrees of willingness to address issues of racism in the workplace. Some were willing to argue for increased awareness aimed at making Indigenous clients, coworkers, or students feel more comfortable. Others felt reluctant to name racist comments or behaviours if their coworkers seemed unwilling to change.

Participants react in social situations according to the position and privilege that they have in that context. As allies learn more about positionality and privilege, they can recognize their privilege and use it in ways to benefit others. diane spoke of how she located her position:

**excerpt from diane's social poem**

aboriginal people  
already moving forward  
they appreciate  
our help  
but  
they don't need us

we need  
to be  
a part of the process  
for it to be more complete  
more healthy



but  
the leaders need to be  
aboriginal

if i'm asked  
to do  
something  
hundred percent

a lot of great things happen  
when non-aboriginal people can release  
that need for power  
we can do things  
because of privilege  
yeah  
i'd use that

For diane, privilege is a tool and a voice that she could use in the service of social justice. she was ready to make use of her voice, but saw that non-Indigenous people need to give up power over the process.

For some allies, like kelsey, there was concern over when actions cross over the line into cultural appropriation. Particularly, when it comes to taking part in spiritual or ceremonial practices, allies have questioned whether their participation is appropriate. For kelsey, the dilemma over culture and appropriation became confusing:

**excerpt from kelsey's social poem**

lots of non-Indigenous people  
have appropriated so much culture  
i'm one of them right  
who've taken pieces of culture  
this fits for me  
and it wasn't mine  
i've already appropriated it  
then i'm confused about  
acceptability of that

it's an internal dilemma  
so i asked an Elder about it  
they say  
no  
this is meant for everybody

It was important for kelsey to ask an Elder to confirm that her presence at ceremonies was welcome and appropriate. This meant that kelsey had invested in a relationship with the Elder and the community enough that she felt comfortable in approaching the Elder with humility. The lesson for others is to recognize that ally presence is not a given; allies need to seek permission and guidance. non-Indigenous peoples, especially white people, have seldom questioned their presence. To approach others with humility to check to see if they are welcome in that context is an important step in seeking to redefine relationships.

joanne's example of privilege goes back to her time as a street-involved person. At a point in her life when she lost much of her personal privilege as a result of her alcoholism, joanne still maintained a level of privilege among the Indigenous people alongside whom she struggled:

**excerpt from joanne's social poem**

when i was on the other side  
the unhealthy side  
we'd be downtown drinking  
and the police would come along  
and they'd drag off my friends  
and i'd say  
well i'm checking in the morning  
and if he's got any marks on him

so i really saw early on  
the influence  
because of the colour  
of my skin

to advocate  
so i'd be like

oh, you're taking me with you  
that kind of thing

Even at her unhealthiest, joanne found that she still maintained a level of privilege beyond what the Indigenous folks had as street-involved people. joanne was less likely to be picked up by the police than the people she was drinking alongside, and she was less likely to be followed around at stores. joanne attempted to use what little privilege she had at that point to hold the police accountable for their treatment of others with whom she associated.

### **Additional Findings Related to Decolonization and Reconciliation**

In general, the allies i met with struggled to articulate the meaning and nature of decolonization and reconciliation. Many agreed with some of what Tuck and Yang (2012) argued, that decolonization is a term that has been used without adequate thought or definition. Thoughts of reconciliation seemed premature to most of the participants, as many cited that the process known as Truth and Reconciliation relies on *Truth* first, then *Reconciliation*. Many asserted that canadians have not fully heard or understood the truth, so talk of reconciliation was procedurally ahead of schedule. i also spent time reflecting on the meaning of decolonization and reconciliation. i reflected on my agency as a researcher and how i chose to represent the data. It became clear to me that what i had learned about decolonization, especially, is another finding to discuss.

**Researcher's self-reflective learning on decolonization.** For me, much of the learning that has occurred in writing this dissertation has been in my own use of language. Facility with language has long been a source of personal pride for me. Writing has come easily, and i do not remember a time when i could not read or write with ease. Decolonization on a very personal

level has meant relearning how to express myself. i have struggled with finding how much privilege has crept into the writing. At times i have been shocked at how obvious the errors and condescension are once they are pointed out to me. How can you not see that? i have asked myself. At times when i have been frustrated with my progress, i have found myself thinking, if i am struggling with decolonizing one small piece of scholarship, how on earth do we have any chance of decolonizing a vast chunk of a continent? The task seems insurmountable. Then i remember what mittchell said:

there's this idea that it's  
this easy thing  
and it's like  
no  
it's really a huge substantial  
commitment  
it takes real emotional  
intellectual  
spiritual work  
we really need to commit to it

The allies i have met have taught me that i needed to do this; i needed to commit to this dissertation work. i have read so much about decolonization, but reading about it and doing it are two different things. This is my small act of decolonization. i have been tasked to learn from it, but this is only the beginning of learning how to challenge systems that are insidiously colonizing. Being an ally should never be taken for granted by those who inhabit that role. Allyship is a commitment that requires action, emotional engagement, and placing oneself in social situations that are unsettling but critical to the process of learning about decolonization.

## Chapter 5: Walking the Path Ahead

The allies who participated in this study have taken an active role in the service of seeking social justice for and reimagined relationships with Indigenous peoples in canada. They had some understanding that they are able to work through their occupations and their personal relationships to become more active in seeking justice for Indigenous peoples. They showed some willingness to wade into the tensions that exist and erupt as others in canada both support and resist decolonization. They also sought to actively support Indigenous peoples' efforts to resist further colonization, to celebrate the achievements of Indigenous peoples, and to uphold Indigenous languages, cultures, and knowledges. As I read and analyzed the data presented in the previous chapter, I concluded that, to varying degrees, the allies who participated in this study seemed to express that there will be emotional challenges and uncomfortable social situations. They accepted these challenges and took some steps to work through their own imperfect abilities and reactions. They acknowledged that they make mistakes, but insisted that they must continue to act in spite of their own shortcomings.

At the end of this writing process, i find myself reflecting on how the subject i chose to study is changing and growing so rapidly that trying to capture the many voices calling for changes in educational and social practices and theories seems like trying to capture multiple moving targets. i am optimistic that the growth in shared initiatives between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples is indicative of willingness to take on the hard and important work of redefining the relationships we all share. As people who occupy the land now known as canada move forward as citizens bonded by a common state, it is important to consider the ongoing processes of building relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous folks and the implications of those processes and my findings about them. i begin by discussing the

implications for adult education theory and practice. Next, i connect the findings to the understanding of the ally and how alliances are enacted. Finally, i suggest possibilities for future research.

### **Implications for Adult Education Theory and Practice**

Many of the participant allies told me that much of what they have learned about Indigenous peoples came about as a result of their post-secondary education. allies referred to their lack of education in early years as problematic in their development. Through formal and informal educational experiences as adults, the participants overcame the gaps and misinformation in their earlier education. Steps are being taken in a number of educational environments to decolonize and Indigenize curricula. In 2016, two canadian universities, university of winnipeg and lakehead university, launched a mandatory Indigenous course requirement for all undergraduate students (Trimbee & Kinew, 2015); people at other institutions are pressing for something similar and, within some faculties, including Education, such a course has been introduced. A pilot program in new teacher service learning demonstrated that, when non-Indigenous teachers are exposed to an Indigenous (on-Reserve) school, they come away with a transformed perspective of their own ignorance about Indigenous educational environments (Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2017). This model, rather than focusing on the perceived deficits of Indigenous students, helps educators begin to see themselves as deficient in their own learning. The paradigmatic shift is an important one as it applies to adult learning theory and to ally work in general.

Beyond the post-secondary environment, the need to educate widely is evident. allies spoke of how they witnessed racism in settings like retail stores, where Indigenous peoples are sometimes followed by staff who appear to be watching for shoplifting, and in hospitals, where

staff who lack cultural awareness subject Indigenous people to unfair stereotypes. Teaching all canadians about Indigenous peoples, history, and worldviews to call into question the actions (past and present) of canadians, and make them more aware and accountable is central to the TRC's (2015b) *Calls to Action*. Workplace training aimed at educating all staff about Indigenous peoples and maintaining a respectful atmosphere is indicated. Furthermore, this training must be backed by workplace policies and practices that adopt clearly defined consequences when incidents of racism are identified. Unless we begin to act against racism, rather than just talk about racism, the message seems to persist that racist behaviours are acceptable. Police, corrections staff, the judiciary, healthcare, child and family services workers, and other front-line professionals are in positions of authority, making the misuse of their power all the more likely to maintain colonization and to extend intergenerational trauma. Workplace education and policy must inculcate respectful environments and support for the removal of employees demonstrating racist behaviours.

This kind of education should not be limited to workplaces, however, as informal messaging is all around us. Education on privilege seemed to have made an impression on at least some of the allies in the study. A crucial part of ally development is understanding privilege. In general, the allies i spoke with seemed to have a well-developed sense of their privilege and they had thought critically about that privilege. Awareness of privilege encourages allies to move with intention when it comes to determining their role within a space. In Indigenous spaces, non-Indigenous peoples should learn to remind themselves to step back when it is appropriate to do so, or to ask for permission or guidance if their role is unclear. Some had determined that it was appropriate to occasionally leverage their privilege if doing so is in the service of social justice. As allies develop their awareness of privilege, they can critically reflect

on their actions and how privilege and their positionality influence their actions. In practical terms, continued education on how privilege works, and how it reinforces neoliberal and neo-colonial attitudes, is a worthwhile and necessary endeavour for adult educators and, perhaps, even more so for educators working with children and youth. I would speculate that there is a large gap in basic awareness about the kinds of privileges that McIntosh (1989) observed. Further study on this front would perhaps help adult educators to develop and deliver effective ways to teach about the unearned privileges that white people enjoy, and how to appropriately and effectively leverage that privilege in the service of social justice.

One example of an adult experiential social justice learning opportunity is The Blanket Exercise, offered by specially trained facilitators from Kairos (see <https://www.kairosblanketexercise.org/>). In this exercise, blankets on the floor represent Indigenous lands prior to contact with Europeans. Participants stand on the blankets, representing the people. Various props are introduced, and the facilitators represent the European presence. Gradually, Indigenous peoples are eliminated and confined to diminishing space on the blankets. This immersive exercise includes a debriefing session where participants may choose to share how they feel about what has happened. This embodied learning experience was developed in consultation with Elders, suggesting that Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous educators can and should work together to develop beneficial pedagogies about colonization.

Many of the allies related that their early misinformed opinions of Indigenous peoples were influenced by movies. The effectiveness of art in all its forms cannot be discounted as a powerful educational tool in the progress of reconciliation. Today we have more critically acclaimed sources of films and television programming that are produced by Indigenous artists, technicians, actors, and others. This programming is influential in presenting a clearer picture of



Indigenous life to canadians and illustrates both the need to establish equitable space for Indigenous peoples and the talent and perspective that Indigenous peoples bring. Interestingly, a number of the allies (and i) experienced the art installation “Walking with our Sisters.” The experiential and immersive nature of this art created a lasting impression on everyone i ever spoke to who had a chance to attend it. Reading Indigenous literature was also a common thread in the ally interviews. Many read or included Indigenous authors in their teaching and believed that this is an important resource for learning about Indigeneity in canada. Art, in all its richness, has an important part to play in raising critical consciousness of emerging and recognized allies alike. Writing about arts-based pedagogies and leadership, Poitras Pratt and Lalonde (2018) suggested that “with the right navigator leading the way, content knowledge shifts to complex understandings, and possibilities for reconciling Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations open up” (p. 4). The adult education discipline has a rich tradition of embracing arts-based pedagogies, research methods, and community engagement in recognition of how the transformative power of art can be infused into public spaces and curricula (Clover & Sanford, 2013). Participants’ comments suggest that doing so is worthwhile.

To be clear, art has the power to be transformative, but it must translate into action if there is to be meaningful change. In this dissertation, i have embraced poetic inquiry and used it to identify and analyze how allies act, feel, and conduct themselves in social situations. The aesthetics of poetry is meant to engage a wider audience for the research findings, but to what end? Reading and being transformed are worthwhile, but true change can only come from acting, being accountable for actions, and holding others accountable as well. There is a lure in being transformed. Being awoken to injustice can *feel* like acting, but it is not. Being outraged or feeling compassion without acting upon those feelings is fine as a temporary state, but to remain

stuck in those feelings without acting is privileged positionality. Privileged people can opt to observe injustice, and even to feel guilt, shock, or shame with the conditions that cause the inequities, but they do not become allies unless they act. That does not mean that allies must take on projects they cannot manage. The participant allies in this study focused on the skills that they had, and they leveraged those skills to do what they felt capable of doing. Even so, they expressed that there was an element of risk and discomfort. They did not always get it right, but they approached their work with a good heart. The work must also be infused with critical reflection and modification of the action if the action was not as successful as the ally or activist group had hoped.

### **Enacting Allyship**

One area of allyship that seems to cause some hesitation for allies of marginalized peoples is the issue of addressing racism. It is crucial for those allies to find constructive ways to deal with racism. An example of possibilities is the process of calling in rather than calling out used by MITCHELL'S group. ALLIES can help one another by sharing practical tips on how to approach people who are exhibiting racist or other sorts of offensive behaviour. From the data in this study, it seemed that most of the allies were confident in their ability to address racism in some situations, but not in all social settings. Living a life that embodies respect and equity for others is the model that allies aspire to project, but they do need to step up and address racism when it happens. ALLIES need to be courageous and take on the work of making racism socially unacceptable. Indigenous peoples have borne the brunt of racist attitudes for far too long. ALLIES are and can continue to be the grassroots leaders who make racism and other forms of social injustice socially uncomfortable for those who perpetuate doctrines of marginalization.

Overall, allies did not seem to be concerned with labelling their roles or with putting names to major concepts like decolonization or reconciliation. They seemed to be more concerned with the day-to-day work of making interpersonal and intercultural relationships better. They appeared to be interested in the ideas, but they were not actively engaging in trying to define what they were doing. They were content if they saw progress despite whatever frustrations arose. This is not to say that allies were not reflecting on their actions and reactions; they did engage in such reflection, but concluded that doubt and criticality should not be barriers to getting the work done.

A key area that all of the allies spoke about is building personal relationships with Indigenous peoples. In manitoba, where there is a high proportion of Indigenous peoples, there is little excuse for non-Indigenous people who are serious about and committed to allyship *not* to be personally involved. In other parts of canada, where there are fewer Indigenous peoples, getting to know and understand Indigenous people on a personal level may be more difficult. For these people the arts, whether literature, drama, film, song, or any other form that represents historical and contemporary Indigenous stories and knowledges, offers a complementary embodied experience that is richer for learners than acquiring only factual information. Though art and education are important sources of information for activists everywhere, these resources take on even greater importance when learners do not have the same access to engaging with Indigenous people on a daily basis.

diane reflected her thoughts on the internet as an important source for information on Indigenous peoples that is widely available and valuable as a way to dispel myths and negative stereotypes. Although this may be true, it would be idealistic to assume that online interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples have been or will continue to be only positive.

The internet is also a place where people are able to hide behind the anonymity of usernames and geographic ambiguity. Within comments sections, it is not difficult to find racist remarks coming forth from trolls who insist on perpetuating myths and hatred. On the other hand, the prevalence of cellular phones with cameras and the presence of hidden cameras in public spaces has also created a society that is recorded now more than ever before. People who do or say racist things risk being caught and subjected to public shaming online. The importance of research into how social interaction is mediated through online communication cannot be overstated as, just as in real life, the results can be either racist or anti-racist. The dynamics of sharing the interactions, however, are very different than in face-to-face interactions. [mitchell](#) briefly described how allies can run interference for Indigenous peoples who find themselves resisting racism online, but much more work on how allies can be supportive in the online environment needs to be done.

Educating oneself was a common concern for the study participants. Many expressed that once they knew a little about the injustices that had occurred, they wanted to know more. [i](#) wish to highlight a couple of resources that have been valuable for me in my learning journey. The city of saskatoon, [saskatchewan](#) has created a large online resource that brings together a wealth of information for the public to access on ConnectR (see <https://www.beaconnectr.org/>). This thematically-organized site invites multimedia engagement through portals labelled spirit, head, body, and heart. While writing this dissertation, [i](#) also enjoyed an online course called Reconciliation Through Indigenous Education offered by the university of [british columbia](#) on the EdX platform (see <https://www.edx.org/course/reconciliation-through-indigenous-education-1>). Offered periodically, this MOOC engaged participants worldwide and included Indigenous teachings and worldviews from multiple continents. Many folks in my workplace took part in the

course at the same time and we shared a face-to-face meeting at the conclusion of the course to debrief what we had learned and how it could be applied to our setting.

Indigenous educators and activists are leading and creating opportunities for allies to become more involved in social justice efforts. Blackstock and the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society (FNCFCS, 2018) have developed a suite of actions that anyone can access online. These actions are collected under a page called “7 Free Ways to Make a Difference.” The resource provides information on initiatives like “Shannen’s Dream” and “Jordan’s Principle,” crucial to addressing the federal government’s failure to grant Indigenous children with equal access to education and healthcare. Jordan’s Principle has been designed to address the discriminatory practice of placing Indigenous children and their families in limbo when federal and provincial authorities are at odds over who is responsible for paying a child’s medical expenses. The Principle is named in memory of Jordan River Anderson of Norway House, [manitoba](#), who spent his entire life of five years hospitalized while governments argued over which level should pay for his home-based care. The “Bear Witness” section of the page provides a full record of the government’s failure to comply with orders from the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. The FNCFCS urges all [canadians](#) to read the tribunal’s findings and to decide for themselves if the federal government has failed to meet its obligations to Indigenous children. Readers who wish may then “bear witness” by writing to the appropriate government officials regarding the discrimination that they believe has occurred, and urge those responsible to take immediate action. Online resources like this offer not only the delivery of educational materials; they also offer opportunities for self-directed adult learners to convert their knowledge into meaningful activism.

Perhaps the greatest way that allies can offer their support is through the political process. All citizens have the right and opportunity to vote and to become involved in processes that decide the direction of all levels of government. Non-Indigenous voters can ask politicians about their stand on issues that matter to Indigenous peoples in canada and on local decisions that affect Indigenous populations. Once the officials are installed, the electorate must insist on accountability and integrity from those elected to represent the people. Rather than focusing on the deep issues that affect all residents of canada, politicians seem to concern themselves more ardently with partisanship and re-election. Voters can hold politicians to a better standard of action and integrity but, in order to do so, people must become or remain politically engaged. Several of the ally participants noted that governmental change moves slowly, but that is not a reason not to engage on that level. Voting is another way to convert knowledge to action, and when voters share information that is politically relevant, change can occur.

### **Directions for Future Study**

**Land and water activism.** Environmental and climate concerns, land and water rights, and issues of power and consumption are currently converging in contentious negotiations among big energy corporations, environmental groups, various levels of colonial governments, and Indigenous governments. The outcome of these negotiations is far from settled as pipelines and other initiatives become the fulcrum upon which campaign platforms are leveraged. In burnaby, british columbia, debate has raged over the expansion of a pipeline to bring crude and refined oil from northern alberta to the port. In june of 2019, the colonial federal government announced that the pipeline will be built despite ongoing protest (and some endorsement) from Indigenous communities, the province, environmental organizations, and their allies (Snyder, 2019). The dispute over constructing the Dakota Access Pipeline through the Standing Rock

Reservation in north dakota brought legions of activists to the area in protests that accused developers of environmental racism (Jacobs-Shaw, 2017). This dispute is one example of how Indigenous and non-Indigenous folks have rallied together in efforts that have resisted large developments that threaten not only the ecosystem, but also the rights of the Indigenous peoples whose lands are being exploited. In a book that explores multiple examples of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples working together for the good of the environment, Grossman (2017) noted

Native/non-Native environmental alliances are an example of a movement that—consciously or not—has creatively negotiated the tensions between particularity and universality and has attempted to interweave them by identifying Native self-determination as a way to protect the land and water for everyone. (p. 13)

In other words, instead of subsuming Indigenous interests within a call to band together for the greater good of the environment, activists are seeing that supporting Indigenous Title and rights to self-determine achieves the parallel benefit of environmental protection. More scholarship like this makes a case for how allies can best serve in the struggle for environmental and other forms of justice. The resistance should not end at relieving oppression. Allies must support movements that see Indigenous people assume their rightful place with respect to leadership, stewardship, and prosperity.

**Post-secondary decolonization and Indigenization.** Anecdotally, i have heard from a number of colleagues about the pressures resulting from administrations in post-secondary institutions and their drive to respond to the TRC. As universities and other institutions attempt to act upon the TRC's *Calls to Action* (2015b), there has been a surge of interest in Indigenization and decolonization in these settings. One of the problems, however, is that these

initiatives have begun with little thought as to what Indigenization and decolonization really mean in a post-secondary setting (or in any setting for that matter). Another problem is that trendiness and the potential to attract funding bring with them a possibility that some will employ rhetoric of Indigenous thinking, practice, and research without taking the time to build knowledge about Indigenous practices and relationships with Indigenous peoples. Moreover, these institutions are putting pressure on Indigenous academics to serve on multiple committees to represent a problematically imagined Indigenous viewpoint. As a result, Indigenous academics are called upon with staggering frequency to be the faces of reconciliation, a more progressive Indigenized academy, and a singular Indigenous perspective that does not exist. Meanwhile, I have heard anecdotally from many Indigenous colleagues that they are becoming burnt out by the extra work and, all too often, their voices are not heard by those who have to power to make real change even when they do take the time to participate in institutional processes.

The need for change within the academy seems obvious, but the *why* and *how* of change are much less clear. Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) broke down some of the ways in which universities have been navigating the processes of Indigenization and decolonization. The researchers surveyed just over two dozen academics who are heavily involved in the process within a variety of university settings across canada. They found that the universities' responses to the TRC's (2015b) calls fell on a spectrum ranging: "On one end is *Indigenous inclusion*, in the middle *reconciliation indigenization*, and on the other end *decolonial indigenization*" (p. 218, emphases in original). Indigenous inclusion, in short, manifests as a higher number of Indigenous students and faculty being supported in such a way that they become more adapted to the colonial structures of the university. Reconciliation indigenization imagines a more consensus-driven model of university with some structures of the academy adapted to build relationships



with Indigenous stakeholders. Finally, decolonial Indigenization envisions a completely transformed structure for the academy, where Indigenous knowledges are fully valued within a renewed university model. Despite the knowledge that the respondents had about the processes, the results showed that there is much cynicism about how the Indigenization and decolonization is unfolding in canadian universities. One respondent commented on an ideal vision of progress:

“Best possible outcome: an academic system which is sufficiently cognizant of the nature of social power and oppression to not repeat the horrors of the past.

Most likely outcome: an annual intercultural powwow.” (p. 222)

The researchers also recognized the tension that exists in trying to transform an institution that is simultaneously inherently colonizing and also a key to prosperity. If administrations are to be successful in their mission to Indigenize and decolonize, they must be willing to listen and to have the courage to be open to dismantling long-held beliefs about the academy.

In at least one case, an Indigenous faculty member has found support amongst her colleagues. Catherine Mattes, chair of the Iskaabatens Waasa Gaa Inaabateg (Little Smoke that goes far) department of Aboriginal and visual art at brandon university, spoke to me about how her department colleagues have worked together to ensure that Mattes, a proud Michif, never has to attend a meeting unaccompanied. These colleagues act as witnesses, speaking up when necessary, and as moral supporters. Mattes feels the support has improved her ability to handle the added stress of her role as an advocate for the rights of Indigenous students and faculty on campus (Mattes, personal communication, May 2019). This is one example of how non-Indigenous colleagues identified a need and worked with a colleague to make sure that she felt safer and more supported in her role. Certainly the allies in this case are not solving the larger issues of Indigenous academics being overworked, or of the fact that decolonization in colleges

and universities is messy at best. Successful stories like this one, however, can be gathered, shared, and studied to find even more effective ways to resist Indigenization or decolonization that is effectively a token move, rather than meaningful, structural reform.

**Academic writing.** my personal learning in writing this dissertation has been focused on learning about systems. i learned that colonization can be occurring in places we do not even think of. i had no idea prior to completing this study that a word processing program was capable of asserting subtle but persistent reflections of colonial language conventions. As a writing skills professional working in the english language and in an academic setting, i am complicit in upholding the colonizing nature of the systems of academic english that are used to determine whether or not students are adequately framing their thoughts within its confines. Rarely are students' disruptions of the colonial rules of the english language accepted by instructors, much less rewarded. Only when academics have reached a sufficient level of power and privilege may they challenge and disrupt convention and be rewarded for it, though often not without controversy. A challenge for me and for others who work within academic structures is to rethink the colonizing structure of english academic writing and to evaluate its purposes and effects on things like student evaluation, credentialization, and critical thought.

It is only when i became very intentional about decolonizing the writing that the barriers became apparent. i suspect that this is likely true of other systems as well. We must challenge systems in order to expose the ways that we are being colonized by them. Decolonization, as Tuck and Yang (2012) stated, is all too often reduced to a buzzword that administrators use to satisfy some imagined requirement aimed at reconciliation. Research into how and why decolonization is taking place in a variety of settings would help to establish better conceptual

frameworks and best practices. These research projects should be Indigenous-led or, at the very least, substantively informed by Indigenous peoples.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

The research that i have conducted has focused on non-Indigenous peoples for a number of reasons that i have previously articulated. By way of reminder, my own non-Indigenous background and interest in social justice has driven me to understand the circumstances of those who have the privilege to choose to involve themselves in standing alongside Indigenous peoples in seeking more just relationships in canada. At present i am not, nor may i ever be, in a position to work directly with Indigenous peoples to explore their reactions to non-Indigenous allies. i am sure that Indigenous peoples have many thoughts on how allies can best support Indigenous Title, languages, worldviews, culture, and a wealth of other projects. Research of this kind would require some input from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous folks, and leadership would require attention to protocols and relationships to set the research agenda.

Non-Indigenous allies have reflected on their interest in Indigenous arts and culture. Anecdotally, many of my acquaintances also tell me that they have taken an interest in viewing Indigenous popular films and television programming, and are reading literature written by Indigenous writers. The representation of the Indigenous person in popular media has, i would argue, shifted as Indigenous people take their rightful places as authors, directors, playwrights, musicians, artists, and other creators of cultural products. Research into the influence of these media on the attitudes and awareness of canadians will, i suspect, confirm the effectiveness of seeing a more balanced and realistic representation of Indigenous peoples in popular media. Indigenous art is a powerful tool that dislodges complacency regarding injustice, encouraging potential and engaged allies to act.

As I now take stock of the analysis of the participants' experiences, I note that I have categorized *thinking* as action, whereas, when the allies described their *emotions*, I have put those into a separate category. This way of categorizing the data might seem to elevate thinking as action-oriented and productive. This way of thinking, however, is not consistent with how some scholars of adult learning have characterized the importance of emotion to adult learners. Dirkx (2001) described how emotions are foundational to how we understand ourselves and how we understand our everyday lives. Emotions are inherently complex, often presenting in mixed form. Moreover, when coupled with an arts-based experience, emotion becomes even more important as a way to interpret the world, especially when the confines of language and cognition are let go (Lawrence, 2008). The more researchers understand the role of emotion in learning journey of allies, the more effectively educators can support those who are engaged in teaching emerging allies and the allies themselves.

Not long ago, I was privileged to attend an international conference for people who administer and work in writing centres. The conference theme focused on inclusive practices in writing centres, and how we can encourage people from all walks of life to feel comfortable seeking writing resources and assistance from peers and professionals in the writing environment. It was a large conference with hundreds of presentations, but there were only two of us who presented on anything related to decolonization or how comfortable Indigenous students would be accessing a writing centre. In my profession there is so much work to be done to welcome Indigenous students into academic spaces, and to reduce and eliminate colonial barriers to success. Acknowledgement of territory in academic spaces has become part of the fabric of what we do, and it is necessary, but that act cannot stand alone as a response to the generations of systemic racism and trauma that has occurred.

There is an enthusiasm to the way many canadians, especially non-Indigenous people, have approached the topic of reconciliation. From my conversations with allies, i learned that this optimistic enthusiasm is not warranted. While the optimism may seem earnest in its focus on moving forward, it is simply too soon. There is still healing that has not yet happened. allies see that we need to set aside our desire to embrace the headiness of reconciliation and wait. There are still traumatic circumstances and unspoken truths for many Indigenous peoples that we need to honour. There are material concerns of inequality in housing, healthcare, employment, education, the justice system, child welfare, and water quality, among others, that must be addressed. There is a role for allies, to be sure, to listen and to accept what they hear, and to push for the dismantling of systems of inequity. It will take time and trust for the solutions to make themselves known.

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# Looking for Allies

**I am looking for adult non-Aboriginal allies of Aboriginal people to interview for a research study on allies.**

**This is not a study of Aboriginal people. I am looking for stories from people who work alongside Aboriginal Canadians to seek a more just society.**

Participants must be referred by an Aboriginal person (First Nations, Métis, or Inuit), or receive a reference from an Aboriginal person, in order to be considered for participation in this study. Participants will have an individual audio-recorded interview lasting approximately one hour. Interviews will be conducted in Manitoba.

**For more information about this study, or to suggest a participant for this study, please contact:**

**Joan Garbutt, Doctoral Candidate  
204-727-7353 or email: [jgarbutt@ucalgary.ca](mailto:jgarbutt@ucalgary.ca)**

**This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance by the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board, Certificate ID# REB16-0177 and the Brandon University Research Ethics Committee, Certificate # 21904 (2016)**

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[Name]  
[phone]

# Who are Allies?

Allies are people who are interested in working to bring about change in society, even if they don't personally benefit from the changes.

One person who studies allies, Anne Bishop, puts it this way:

*“Allies are people who recognize the unearned privilege they receive from society’s patterns of injustice and take responsibility for changing these patterns. Allies include men who work to end sexism, white people who work to end racism, heterosexual people who work to end heterosexism, able-bodied people who work to end ableism, and so on.”*

- From

[http://www.becominganally.ca/Becoming\\_an\\_Ally/Home.html](http://www.becominganally.ca/Becoming_an_Ally/Home.html)

Another person who has looked at allies extensively from an Aboriginal perspective is Dr. Lynn Gehl. She has a blog, and has written the “Ally Bill of Responsibilities”©.

You can find Lynn Gehl’s work at [www.lynngehl.com](http://www.lynngehl.com), and click on the Settler Ally Resources link.

Please encourage allies you know to participate in this research study.





## **Research Study on Allies of Aboriginal People**

You have been identified as a potential participant in an approved research study (University of Calgary Ethics Certificate ID# REB16-0177; Brandon University Research Ethics Committee File # 21904) on allies of Aboriginal people in Canada.

You can learn more about the study, how, when, and why the research is being conducted, and find out what happens to the information you provide. Contacting the researcher does not obligate you in any way to take part in the study. The researcher will provide you with more details about the study so that you can decide whether or not you wish to take part. You will also have the opportunity to ask questions about the study. Participants will have an individual audio-recorded interview lasting approximately one hour.

Research is being conducted by in Manitoba. Thank you for considering your involvement.

Joan Garbutt, Doctoral Candidate

University of Calgary

- ❖ Email: [jgarbutt@ucalgary.ca](mailto:jgarbutt@ucalgary.ca)
- ❖ Phone: 204-727-7353



**Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:**

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**Title of Project:**

Narrative Identities of Allies of Aboriginal Canadians: Joining the Journey Towards Reconciliation

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

Ethics Certificate ID# REB16-0177

Brandon University Research Ethics Committee Ethics Certificate #21904 (2016)

**Purpose of the Study:**

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the experiences that have led non-Aboriginal Canadians to be considered allies of Aboriginal Canadians. I am curious to know how these allies have enacted their identity and if or how this identity has affected their relationships with peers or other non-Aboriginal people. As Canadians become more engaged in efforts to reconcile relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, I am interested in how allies see themselves and their efforts contributing to the reparation process.

### **What Will I Be Asked To Do?**

Potential participants are identified as an ally by one or more Aboriginal people (in this case an Aboriginal person may be of First Nations, Métis, or Inuit heritage). If the potential participant consents to be involved in the study, then the participant will be asked to meet with the researcher at a mutually agreed upon time and location for an interview lasting approximately one to one-and-a-half hours.

The participant's interview will be audio recorded so that an accurate transcript can be produced.

Following the creation of a transcript of the interview, the participant may elect to meet with the researcher a second time to check the accuracy of the transcript and to have an opportunity to supply any additional information that the participant may wish to have included in the study. Alternatively, the participant may receive an electronic copy of the transcript to review, and a period of two weeks to offer clarification, revisions, or insertions to the interview.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Individuals may refuse to participate altogether, may refuse to participate in parts of the study, may decline to answer any or all questions, and may withdraw from the study at any time up to the end of the two-week review period following the completion of the interview transcription. After the two-week review period, and once any requested revisions are made, then the interview will be considered closed, and the resulting data will be considered final.

### **What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?**

Should you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to provide your name, confirm that you are an adult (over the age of 18), and provide contact information. This research study is for adult participants only. The other information is necessary to maintain contact with you throughout the study.

Should you agree to have your interviews audio recorded, these digital files will be maintained in a confidential manner. Only the researcher will have access to the audio files and they will not be publicly shared. Five years following the completion of the study, the audio files will be permanently erased, and the transcripts, both digital versions and hard copies, will be destroyed/deleted.

There are several options for you to consider if you decide to take part in this research. You can choose all, some, or none of them. Please review each of these options and choose Yes or No:

I grant permission to be audio taped: Yes: \_\_\_ No: \_\_\_

I wish to remain anonymous: Yes: \_\_\_ No: \_\_\_

I wish to remain anonymous, but you may refer to me by a pseudonym: Yes: \_\_\_ No: \_\_\_

The pseudonym I choose for myself is: \_\_\_\_\_

You may quote me and use my name: Yes: \_\_\_ No: \_\_\_

### **Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?**

This study has few foreseeable risks. It is possible that during the course of this study participants may be asked about past and present interpersonal relationships. If these relationships are distressing to the participant, there is a possibility that the participant may be troubled and wish to seek counselling. Also, it is possible that participants may disclose personal information that may be embarrassing or induce feelings of sadness, shame or guilt. If, after the interview process, the participant should experience lasting feelings that are upsetting, the researcher encourages the participant to seek assistance through counselling. As a participant, you will be provided with a list of counselling resources that may be helpful should you require this service. While some resources can be accessed free of charge, the participant should be aware that other services do have costs associated with them. This study does not have funds set aside to cover the cost of any counselling services related to participation in this study.

If, within the course of the research study, the participant were to reveal any information that is required by law to be reported to a law enforcement or other agency (e.g., child abuse), then the researcher will be legally obligated to disclose this information to the appropriate authority.

The researcher assures potential participants that their decision to be included or excluded from the study will not result in any undue penalty or benefit to their career or their relationship with the researcher.

It is not anticipated that participants will incur any costs in connection with participating in this study.

### **What Happens to the Information I Provide?**

The information provided by participants in this study will only be accessible by the researcher and her supervisor. All files, whether hard copy or digital, will be stored in locked or password-protected storage files until such time as the participant withdraws from the study, or until five years following completion of the study, at which time all files will be destroyed or erased. The audio-recorded interview files will be destroyed as soon as possible, within two weeks, following the researcher's dissertation defence.

All participants will be given the option of using their own name or a pseudonym in the study. If the participant chooses a pseudonym, then any additional identifying information, such as the name of the First Nations, Métis, or Inuit organization with which you are affiliated, shall also be changed or withheld in order to protect the privacy of the participant.

If the participant chooses to withdraw from the study, all data related to that participant will be destroyed or erased in accordance with TCPS guidelines. Participants may withdraw from the study at any point up to the end of the two-week transcript revision period following the interview.

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### ***Signatures***

Your signature on this form indicates that 1) you understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) you agree to participate in the research project.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's Name: (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Name: (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Questions/Concerns**

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Ms. Joan Garbutt, Doctoral Candidate

Werklund School of Education

Work phone: 204-727-7353 Email: [jgarbutt@ucalgary.ca](mailto:jgarbutt@ucalgary.ca)

Supervisor: Kaela Jubas, Associate Professor, Werklund School of Education

Phone: 403-210-3921 Email: [kjubas@ucalgary.ca](mailto:kjubas@ucalgary.ca)

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 210-9863; email [cfreb@ucalgary.ca](mailto:cfreb@ucalgary.ca).

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

## Appendix B

Complete Collection of Found Poems

for

Walking Alongside: Poetic Inquiry into

Allies of Indigenous Peoples in Canada

## brandy's action poem

starting work at the  
    women's resource centre  
if we go back to  
when i started university  
became interested in  
working with Indigenous populations  
Indigenous people  
when i started work  
you realize right  
right quickly  
the scale is tipped  
not favour Indigenous people  
started working  
with a lot of  
different service agencies  
getting involved  
in community events  
everything just  
kind of blew my mind  
a little bit

started doing more  
*wanting* to do more  
for myself  
just for the community

i don't really remember  
learning about  
aboriginal people at all  
don't think  
i learned anything outside of school  
the things that i *learned*  
    aboriginal people were lazy  
    they drank all the time  
    they were tax—taxing the system  
    always on welfare  
    never wanting to work  
that's how i grew up

married into  
an Indigenous family  
just started spending  
more time  
learning more

taking some classes  
getting involved  
to educate myself

you quickly realize  
kind of thought  
like, what have i been thinking  
my whole life

just realized  
i needed to do more  
to try to help  
try to make  
other people realize

try  
to promote any sort  
of reconciliation  
try  
to promote Indigenous teaching  
think  
it's amazing and fascinating

i would be an active ally  
in the sense that  
if  
i see discrimination  
happening  
i will  
typically  
call people on it  
if  
i hear  
something that's  
stereotypically negative

racist  
in as nice a way as possible  
i can  
i will  
try to change  
the thought process  
just a little bit  
or ask a simple question  
about why  
just try  
to educate folks



in not a really forceful way  
in a really subtle way  
but still get my point across

involved in whatever i can  
learn as much as i can  
    i'm speaking  
    i know  
    who i can send people to  
i have  
    allies in the Indigenous community

was involved  
with Walking with our Sisters<sup>6</sup>  
learned so much  
spent so much time  
learned amazing things

i'm part of a planning committee  
    creating a new legacy conference  
helping  
attend things  
can go to those things  
take part  
where i am going to learn something  
pass that on

we need to change the narrative  
we need to be part of the solution

talk about Indigenous folks  
the work that they do  
important  
    be involved in that  
talk about  
we need to stop using  
these negative stereotypes  
    people around me  
    catch themselves  
    when they do that  
    whether or not

---

<sup>6</sup> *Walking with our Sisters* is a collaborative art installation consisting of nearly 2000 pairs of hand-designed 'vamps' or 'uppers' for moccasins. Participants walk a path alongside the vamps on the floor of the installation, which is designed to honour and remember the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in canada. For more information see <http://walkingwithoursisters.ca/about/artists/>

it changes their mindset  
i don't know  
but  
at least i've caused them to think twice

an attack  
on them  
is  
an attack  
on me

think of a question  
ask that person  
change the narrative  
    what makes you say that  
    how many Indigenous folks do you actually know  
    what have you experienced  
    do you have any friends  
        work with anyone  
        honestly think  
        all Indigenous folks are this way

really try to say something

attend  
    a sweat lodge  
    go to a sweat lodge

learn  
    all kinds of stuff

lead by example  
do it for myself  
my own  
my own process  
my own life  
try to lead by example  
hope other non-Indigenous folks  
will take part  
invite them to  
    a roundtable discussion about the trc

get some  
    non-Indigenous friends to come

maybe  
    it sparks something

maybe  
    they think

turn myself into a snowball  
    grab more and more

we can  
    move towards a better society  
    that works with and  
    alongside them  
towards a common goal

read the trc  
that's really easy  
open access to everyone  
most communities have  
friendship centres  
easiest place to start  
all kinds of programming  
open to the public

campus  
    university  
    college  
aboriginal student council  
doing really great things  
    invitations  
    roundtable discussions  
    just sit and listen  
    sit and learn something

stop  
in for a minute  
talk to someone  
show up  
grab a friend  
show up  
at least you're listening

take some time  
    read something  
    read a novel  
        by an Indigenous author  
all kinds of places to start

google  
    the Medicine Wheel  
    key teaching

i was contacted about

the Bear Clan<sup>7</sup>  
i'm not one of the organizers  
i am not an Indigenous person  
i was very clear with the media  
gave them contact information  
for the folks who were  
starting up Bear Clan  
and they *still*—you know—  
wanted to talk to me  
    for national media  
    to come and talk to me  
    i was just kind of like  
        i just really can't speak to that  
        i can only speak to safety in our city  
they still  
    put the Bear Clan spin on it  
    which made it seem  
    like i was  
    speaking on behalf  
    of the Bear Clan  
    as a non-Indigenous person  
        that is *not* what i wanted  
media really need to  
to check themselves  
  
as non-Indigenous folks  
we need to be careful  
    should i just have declined  
    to respond  
i really do try to be careful  
  
Elders  
knowledge keepers  
they need to give us direction  
we go from there  
  
it should always  
be an Indigenous person who's  
speaking to the media about  
any initiative  
we need to know our place

---

<sup>7</sup> Bear Clan Patrol is a community-based initiative aimed at building relationships in a non-judgmental and holistic way to prevent crime in places where there are populations of street-involved persons. The volunteers focus on Indigenous philosophies to assist those in need, especially youth. For more information see <https://www.bearclanpatrolinc.com/about-bear-clan>

we need to sit back  
just do the work  
work alongside  
Indigenous leaders

we're typically  
almost always  
invited

but  
we aren't  
invited to  
take over  
we're invited  
to take part  
there's big difference

really tried  
we don't have  
any Indigenous staff  
at the centre  
we do have board representative  
i've tried really hard  
in that position  
towards more culturally proficient  
space  
it's always ongoing

no matter  
what we do  
in anything  
we do  
it's ongoing  
there's always more  
to learn

just when i think  
that i've found something out  
that's—that can't be any more fascinating  
then i find out something else

i think  
we need to be lifelong  
learners and absorb  
information from other folks

it it's there

we need to take advantage of it

## brandy's emotion poem

i was racist  
myself  
when i was growing up  
there's a lot of  
guilt there for me  
to do something for myself  
reconcile that guilt  
i guess

i'm not that person anymore  
that's really important  
to me  
to grow

Walking with our Sisters  
that was probably  
the most  
emotional thing  
i've ever done  
i talked about  
the guilt that i have  
we did a closing ceremony  
i like just  
broke down  
into tears in front of everyone  
    i thought i was going to be okay  
    i wasn't okay

it was just really emotional  
for me  
often times  
it's emotional  
i reflect back on the person  
that i used to be  
the ways  
that i used to think  
but  
every time i go  
i feel more connected  
feel like

i'm hopefully going  
to be part of the  
solution

if i responded  
with my immediate reaction  
it would be with anger  
anger doesn't really get  
you anywhere  
especially when  
it's family or friends  
it kind of  
creates animosity

sometimes  
i don't say anything  
then i feel really guilty  
afterwards  
because  
i haven't said  
anything

i felt  
i still do  
feel guilty  
about  
speaking  
to the media  
i say i feel guilty  
because  
i think  
to myself  
should i just have  
declined

## brandy's social poem

i come from a really  
small  
town  
there's a lot  
of racism  
so  
coming to a city  
like brandon where  
there's still racism

but at least there's  
some  
like i was going to school  
with and working  
with  
aboriginal people

the majority of women  
who come  
into the centre  
are Indigenous women  
when it comes to  
social services  
they are typically  
more marginalized  
that just makes me think      why is that so

i grew up  
in a really  
small  
town  
racist small  
town  
married into  
Indigenous family  
how  
incredibly amazing their  
lifestyle can be  
most of my partner's family  
lives on reserve  
everything  
i had known about reserves  
prior to that  
was really awful  
stereotypically negative  
then  
i spent time on reserve  
spent time  
with family  
really opened my mind  
how much i have  
to learn

meeting  
the extended family  
now *my* family



treated  
i could see it  
on a personal level

i think  
it's really important  
non-Indigenous folks  
to realize  
whether we chose it or not  
we are part of the problem  
and we need to  
need to change the narrative

reconciliation to me means  
aboriginal and non-aboriginal  
folks  
working from their differences  
to come to  
a mutually beneficial place  
maybe  
reconciliation  
isn't the right word  
for the end goal  
but  
reconciliation  
i think  
is definitely  
the process to get there

Indigenous and non-Indigenous  
folks  
non-Indigenous folks  
i think  
learning from Indigenous folks  
both sides  
need to come  
together  
and talk about their  
experiences  
something to be said  
how we experience  
knowledge  
that we have about  
history  
older generations  
probably have more knowledge

because  
they were around  
at that time  
    what role the millennial  
    generation  
    has to play  
    we weren't around  
    during that time  
    so  
    why do we have  
    to care  
a lot of different  
pockets  
of information  
need to be understood  
it just means  
being honest with each other  
taking the time  
to learn  
to respect

reconciliation  
just mutual respect  
that's what  
we want  
at the end  
of each other  
learn from each other  
going forward together  
supporting  
not blaming

don't think  
we're at  
reconciliation  
yet  
don't think  
we're even  
close  
maybe  
at the grassroots level  
*getting* close  
but  
government systems  
i don't think  
close

backwards  
in a sense  
i don't like  
to say  
backwards  
grassroots are  
integral  
until government  
canada  
can admit genocide  
i don't  
think  
we're getting anywhere  
when people say  
we haven't reached  
truth  
i don't think  
we have

we can  
inter-organizations  
work together  
provide that stuff  
but  
before it comes down  
from some  
authority  
we're pushing against  
some  
bigger power  
i hate to say  
but  
that's the way  
our world works  
grassroots  
can only get so far  
    government  
        needs to step in  
            governments  
            school divisions  
            police force  
            people that have power

Indigenous folks are  
still heavily regulated  
so many hoops  
red tape

and everything  
to get anything done  
on reserve especially  
faults in the system  
n u m e r o u s

still pockets us and them  
still have work to do there  
Indigenous folks  
inviting entire community  
involving entire communities  
there's almost always  
a feast  
almost always  
food  
pretty much every community  
nearby neighbourhood  
Indigenous organization  
doing something

talking to people  
isn't easy  
for everyone

## craig's action poem

it's part of my faith  
to be in relationships  
people on the margins  
there is a call  
work for justice  
work  
serve  
my work as an ally  
is really bound up  
in the  
call

in 1986  
the united church  
issued its first apology  
to Indigenous peoples  
we apologized  
for our role in residential schools  
because words without action

mean very little  
our work in solidarity  
put legs to those apologies  
    live out that faith  
    we all feel called  
    to honour and live out

i'm from the states  
new to this context  
i've heard very similar  
language  
    that they're savages  
you hear                      you hear  
the same  
a different relationship  
but lots of similarities as well

we were living in arizona  
    Navajo              Hopi              Gila River              and others  
was involved  
was serving  
as we moved up here  
they were seeking to get  
truth and reconciliation commission  
    off the ground  
my first appointment  
was in oak lake              griswold  
just south of    Sioux Valley  
first experience stopping occasionally  
for gas  
    being aware  
    having a cursory view  
    of the living conditions there  
participated  
in a wedding  
heard conversations  
about changing nature of relationship  
between settler community  
and Sioux Valley

one leader  
asked me to go  
visit one of his neighbours  
in the healthcare centre  
    we see each other  
    on occasion

it's a wonderful connection  
she's the Chief's mother  
it's a nice connection to have

part of my role here  
has been as a professional  
learning about the united church's response  
relationship with  
Indigenous peoples  
some of it has been through reading  
i love to read  
reading fiction and non-fiction  
    joseph boyden  
    john ralston saul  
    Wab Kinew

i think  
i think that a lot  
of folks have a  
sense of dis-ease  
    be open  
    to learning  
    being mentored  
    being open  
seeing things  
in ways  
we may not have been able to see  
before  
because of our privilege  
    especially myself  
    as a white male  
    with a master's level  
    of education  
                you know  
    everything that comes with  
    that  
    coming from the states  
    a first-world context

a Cree woman  
currently training  
for ordained ministry  
encouraging me to get out  
    the powwow  
    a round dance  
    be engaged

get over to the IPC<sup>8</sup>  
a couple of trays of sandwiches  
here's some comfort food  
we're thinking about you

find ways to be in solidarity  
put up outside  
solidarity: Idle No More  
which quickly got us a negative remark  
they invited me  
and members of the congregation  
i remember being amazed  
it was so cold  
we should've  
could've  
opened up our doors  
we weren't thinking about that  
i think 200 people participated  
it was a little hard to count

they very quickly got a sense  
they had power  
the ability to participate  
in a movement  
happening nationally  
to see the results  
on a local level  
gave them a sense  
of hope  
that got me tied in  
with the Indigenous Peoples' Centre

came and spoke  
talked a little bit  
seeking to repair our relationship  
talked about  
the need to seek peace  
through justice first  
remember thinking  
i may not identify myself  
as the source  
of the problem  
but

---

<sup>8</sup> Indigenous Peoples' Centre is a brandon university campus space open to everyone that provides academic, practical, and cultural support and programming.

i need to  
as a representative of the church  
be able to receive this  
and honour this  
criticism  
and this negativity in the hopes  
that  
that can be transformed  
we can receive that  
hear that  
then respond to it  
we were invited  
to a round dance  
things just sort of started to  
build

we invited  
members of the Student Council<sup>9</sup>  
their families and kids  
to come and have a meal  
almost all of them came  
i go over periodically  
check in with the IPC director  
provided food and volunteers  
Sisters in Spirit Walk

we say  
let us know if you need  
bodies or if  
you need some support  
we'll see what we can do  
if you need space  
use the kitchen  
bannock making  
we don't charge rent  
supportive but not obtrusive  
don't want  
to give them any sense that  
we're trying to recruit them  
for the church  
but letting them know  
that we're supportive

---

<sup>9</sup> brandon university Aboriginal Student Council



i kind of served  
as the emcee  
for the opening of the  
    brandon residential school learning centre  
we did a ceremony that day  
to honour the children  
that didn't come home  
    a member of Peguis First Nation  
    attended the school  
    attended knox<sup>10</sup> while she  
    was at the school  
    a letter from her  
    asking  
    to hold a ceremony  
    to remember the children  
    so we did that  
went to ask an Elder  
wanted to ask  
    is it appropriate for us  
    to hold this  
    on church grounds  
he was affirming about that  
the need to do that  
then asking him  
would he be willing to do a smudge  
participate  
sharing his story  
knowing  
that what i'm asking  
is for a survivor to  
once again  
bear a lot of responsibility  
for leading us in healing  
knowing  
that this would be difficult—  
survivors relive  
a lot of the pain of the experience  
we want to be very aware  
that people can be  
re-traumatized  
  
we're seeking  
    to do truth-telling  
    to educate

---

<sup>10</sup> knox united church in brandon, mb

to name what happened  
and that's a good thing  
but it comes with a cost

we give thanks  
for these opportunities to dance together  
usually simply try  
and do active listening  
just raise questions  
try and lift up other viewpoints  
other ways of seeing things  
    until someone's ready  
    there's not a whole lot i can say  
the most transformative thing  
has been personal storytelling  
try and create  
opportunities  
chose poems and writings  
from Indigenous peoples  
so that they could speak  
in their own words  
and tell their own story

we just hosted  
a sharing circle here  
found it to be  
transforming when  
people engage personally with  
people in a circle  
those awful stereotypes  
are out there—  
how are we going to have this conversation  
i think  
it happens through  
building relationships  
it happens through  
storytelling  
it happens through  
education

sometimes  
it's just  
give them a cue  
    well, i think we need  
    to let Elder so-and-so speak  
or     i heard so-and-so say

they want to be able to honour this  
kind of giving a cue to give people  
a chance to step back  
just  
naming things for people

## craig's emotion poem

we're in this period  
of apology  
we're in this period  
of truth-telling  
truth isn't always easy to receive

i was really surprised  
very appreciative  
that they would come  
that they would thank the congregation  
in that way  
both overwhelmed and delighted  
with the response that they had

work with students  
that's very fulfilling work  
it can also be  
you could be struck with  
a deep sense of sadness  
having a student say  
i wish i could get out of  
my brown skin  
i wish i could just be white  
for a day  
i wish my kids didn't  
have to deal with that  
that breaks your heart

but you also have  
this great sense of hope  
some of them  
they'll be the first ones  
within their family  
to receive a degree  
many of them  
do a tremendous amount

of volunteering  
that's really heartening  
and while the church  
receives kudos  
the church has been  
a significant source of pain  
and oppression  
and sometimes you're  
identified with that

i remember going into that meeting  
palms being a little sweaty  
because here i am asking  
someone who self-identifies as a survivor  
leading us in healing  
knowing this would be difficult  
it comes at a cost  
i'm always a bit pensive  
just say nervous  
where i'm asked to do these things  
when i have to—when i'm in those  
situations

i was you know  
honoured with a star blanket  
that feels a bit overwhelming  
i don't feel very deserving  
of all that  
it was a wonderful gift

things like the indian act  
and other regulations  
are inherently racist  
but on an individual level  
do i feel like i have the  
ability to change that  
that can feel disempowering  
i'm really hopeful  
but more hopeful  
about things like these  
sharing circles  
so that we're not these  
parallel peoples  
any more: aware of each other  
but really having relationships  
without any kind of depth

or understanding

you see people that  
sometimes are acting  
out of their own ego needs  
their own needs for  
affirmation  
to buoy their self-worth  
but as soon as  
it's about me  
and not about the community i'm  
serving, then  
          things get out        of  
          balance

what a real honour it is to be  
considered an ally  
i mean  
it makes my life richer  
in being able to participate  
in this work  
feel like we're transforming  
our shared history

that's a good place to be

## craig's social poem

it's kind of a dynamic relationship  
fairly good and strong and  
interactive in the fifties and sixties  
Sioux Valley children  
were in griswold schools  
so there was some interaction  
then the community created a school  
that changed the dynamic  
people are aware of  
a crisis around  
          health  
          substance abuse  
          housing concerns  
          lack of jobs  
a source of a kind of unease  
for people

cause for concern  
sometimes very judgmental

not a lot of consideration  
of intergenerational trauma  
the effects of colonization  
just a real sense that something's wrong

why don't they do something about it

my sense is  
here in brandon  
we live as parallel peoples  
there isn't necessarily  
a lot of interaction  
so there has to be a  
willingness  
to make a mistake  
maybe to say the wrong thing

a church supper  
i'm self-conscious about the fact  
that coming onto a church site  
is problematic for some Indigenous people  
and understandably so  
just not even going to want to  
step foot on church grounds  
but  
they were very glad  
and had great conversations with members

we've had guest speakers  
come in and do treaty education  
education about residential schools  
we now have a group that volunteer  
at graduation powwow every year

that relationship just kinda grew  
students that come when they're  
here in town  
they come for worship  
and are engaged in the community

let them know that if they need  
a partner in the community  
we've partnered

we partnered with  
Walking with our Sisters  
we *did* participate in residential schools  
now we want to see a *different*  
way of supporting education

what we always want  
to be clear about  
is that we are responding to  
what we are asked for  
it's so easy for us to go in  
and say

why don't we do this  
and why don't we do that  
which is another form of colonialism  
we have to

be open  
be able to respond affirmatively  
but then to sit back  
and allow our Indigenous sisters and brothers  
to take the lead  
then be in conversation  
as we do that together  
it's a bit of a dance  
and that's a good thing  
the more you dance  
the more comfortable you feel  
with your partner

folks who were—that are  
Mono from california  
she and her parents were mentors of mine  
they're kind of astounded at how  
much is happening here in canada  
'cause they're just so behind in the states  
i've gained a lot of support  
and encouragement from them  
on that level

in brandon  
it certainly has affected  
my relationship with parishioners  
members of the congregation  
there's a small minority  
of folks who take issue  
we do an acknowledgement of territory

still a few people  
who are very uncomfortable with that  
there were a few folks  
who said  
    why are we spending so much  
    time on this  
their idea of reconciliation:  
    we've apologized  
    we've named our complicity  
    we just need to move on  
    it's a thing of the past  
so reconciliation means *forgetting*  
and me saying:  
    as long as survivors feel the need  
    to talk  
    as members of the institution  
    that participated in this  
    need to be able to listen  
    as painful as it is  
    as hard as it is  
    not because we need to feel guilty  
    or shamed  
    because we need to take ownership  
    be educated  
    so the relationships can  
    be transformed  
    and we don't re-traumatize  
    or oppress people once again  
    with the same mindset  
    same attitudes  
    same way of doing work together

a note  
slipped under my door  
anonymously  
this past sunday  
with a little rewriting  
of our acknowledgement of territory

    For thousands of years Indigenous  
    peoples lived on this land  
    in ~~their own~~ God's country.  
we've had probably a couple of people  
that have left because of the focus that  
we've had on right relations



we have to have  
an understanding  
that we work out of  
our own cultural identity  
if we're not aware  
that a certain way of doing things  
is rooted in that cultural identity  
and that there are other ways  
of doing things  
and that we don't  
we're not going to say  
                    this is the *right* way  
                    this is the *wrong* way  
no      this Indigenous way is different  
it's a different way  
western ideals often value  
very different things  
our modes of operation  
what we value  
what we prioritize  
comes out of our ethno-cultural identity

to be able to say  
well    that seems really important to you  
and if that that one thing  
not being done your way  
makes you uncomfortable  
to such an extent  
that you can't participate  
well    then maybe  
this isn't the project for you

in our western society  
we value conflict and confrontation  
and that's how we prove ourselves  
we become a little bit  
boisterous    even posture a bit  
that's still affirmed  
you know    who's got the biggest  
brain in the room

i could tell  
by the dynamics in the room  
something  
something was off and  
something wasn't being talked about

that gets a little uncomfortable for me  
'cause i like to get the cards  
out on the table  
if you're lucky  
you have enough intuitive sense  
to step back  
and think      okay  
there's something going on here  
that i'm not aware of  
i'm just going to wait and see  
then afterwards one of the Elders  
takes me aside and says

        okay    here's what's going on  
        and     here's what we're going to see  
        how it plays out  
        and     there's difference of opinion between  
        this Elder and that Elder  
        and we're not going to choose  
        one over the other  
        we're simply going to let that be  
        because we don't want to make  
        judgment  
        this is this Elder's wisdom  
        and this is this Elder's wisdom  
        we'll let the community figure out  
        which way they want to go  
        as we do this together

you know  
and i think  
so much of the time  
we're about  
winners and losers  
picking the winning and losing side  
it's a worldview  
a culture  
that's quite different

reconciliation  
means identifying the areas  
in which injustice continues  
to be the nature of the day  
systems that are oppressive  
ways of relating that are oppressive  
institutions that are oppressive  
policies  
identifying those things

being able to do the hard work  
of relationship building  
seeking understanding  
willing to be honest and vulnerable  
to take responsibility for  
our own prejudice      our own racism  
that we're often unwilling to identify  
i'm a bit bamboozled  
by how many people  
these days want to be  
able to talk as if we live  
in some kid of  
post-racial society  
people who want to say  
    i don't see colour

education  
more on the positive side  
    Indigenous wisdom  
    Indigenous spirituality  
    cultures  
    diversity  
being willing to expose ourselves to stories  
stories like  
    Night Spirits<sup>11</sup>  
it's a hard   awful   painful story

as people who benefit  
    from the system  
as people who benefit  
    from the land  
    that was taken  
we need to be open to hearing  
those stories

i think it is about  
new relationships  
relationships built on    trust  
                                  mutuality  
                                  respect  
                                  justice

cornel west says  
    justice is what love looks like in public

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<sup>11</sup> *Night Spirits: The Story of the Relocation of the Sayisi Dene*

## diane's action poem

i grew up  
noticed the reaction  
some of my peers  
less than        positive

i couldn't understand  
what was the big deal

would volunteer inside  
the penitentiary  
sometimes

we went to a northern reserve  
lived and worked there  
took our own children  
went to the band school  
lived the life

ended up working in the school  
got to learn  
details  
of the belief system  
it has slowly become  
a part of my own

work with  
aboriginal students  
just picking things up  
i really appreciated about culture  
seeing some  
of the struggles  
wanting to help  
through my job  
make that path a little bit easier

i worked

something that i learned  
just observing her  
as a mentor  
you think about it  
      you know

i'm just living life

taking classes  
being a student teacher  
encourage anyone  
    who will listen  
incorporate aboriginal content  
i think  
    throw in a poem  
    Richard Wagamese  
    Sherman Alexie  
just appreciate  
the artistry  
    doesn't mean i'm not  
    teaching shakespeare  
changing people's minds  
about  
what aboriginal culture looks like  
today  
inclusion of aboriginal content  
giving  
children of any ancestry  
new immigrants  
naturalized canadians  
the *whole* view of canada

you had to be wise  
within the community  
be wise  
as a woman  
i went  
or i went alone  
there were restrictions  
just on that level  
    it would've been easy  
    to just stay  
    and go between  
        the teacherage  
        the school  
        the store  
there were people who chose  
to live that way  
but  
    we're here to learn and to experience

started a community gym night  
community members coming  
to us

and using  
their equipment  
    had to have staff members  
    to be able to  
    have access  
    to  
    it  
we played volleyball  
we played floor hockey, broom ball  
we just  
    had fun

you can choose  
    become involved      or not

i definitely sometimes have  
more liberal ideas  
i feel free  
to voice them

i can help  
just by  
bringing awareness  
watching a newscast  
with someone saying  
    you know, i know a lot  
    of aboriginal people  
    and they're not like  
    that  
    you know, what you're seeing  
    on the media is specific  
    specifically chosen  
    to draw you in as a viewer  
giving non-aboriginal people  
some tools  
look at things  
    a  
        little  
            differently

i honestly think  
my biggest contribution  
help aboriginal youth  
become empowered  
go to school  
and hear

fantastic  
amazing  
mind-blowing  
things aboriginal people have done  
and are still doing

i was student teaching  
in the curriculum  
this little add-on  
talk about the french  
the aboriginal

—if you want to—  
optional yes  
well not in my class  
i showed the Gladys Cook story  
documentary  
lady from Sioux Valley  
residential school  
where she ended up  
in life  
her attitude  
counselling  
healing

we viewed it

i said

i want you guys to feel  
free to ask questions  
say things  
go over all the terms  
what are some of the terms  
you've heard for aboriginal people  
wrote them  
on the board  
explained the definitions  
explained when  
appropriate to use  
which term  
kids  
they're like  
oh okay—yeah  
i never knew what fnmi meant  
they still use indian?  
that's the legal term  
still on the books  
only place to use it  
is if you're talking about

a legal document

i can make suggestions  
i don't feel  
i can make decisions  
unless  
that's given  
to me  
outright

who can be an ally  
    it's the person who says  
        this is my friend

and they live that

## diane's emotion poem

it resonated with my soul

not many      if any  
still doing traditional practices  
that was disappointing  
found that very disturbing  
would've hoped that they  
would've found a way

my nature isn't  
to be very forceful  
but  
that doesn't mean  
i don't hold  
my position  
or state  
my position  
but  
i don't proselytize  
what i believe  
is  
my truth  
but  
i think  
everybody's at  
a different  
place



in their personal development  
and that  
change  
comes  
when they're ready for it

i find  
resistance  
more  
at the personal level  
they're like  
(eye roll)  
c'mon, *again*  
not to the point  
where i would feel discouraged  
i mean  
people believe things for a reason

soft heart  
for children  
i see  
something happening  
to a child youth  
visceral reaction  
but  
then again  
an adult friend  
stereotyped  
a retail store  
equally strong reaction  
i'm not surprised when it happens  
moderate my emotional response  
it's almost expected

definitely a passion  
to counteract whatever's  
going on

my own reactions  
beliefs  
constantly challenged  
never arrived  
at being  
completely free of  
stereotypes  
prejudices

myself yet

good to have it brought up  
authentic quest is absolutely  
vital

admitting  
recognizing  
because  
i'm part of the reconciliation process

if i tell somebody  
it's second-hand information  
not as good as  
the direct source

could be very intimidating  
for some people

growing up in stony mountain  
penitentiary there  
there were powwows  
as a child  
i was afraid i thought the indians are gonna come and scalp me because in the movies

you can go to the internet  
even if you're afraid  
go to Dakota Ojibway  
every community has  
a website now  
every  
see  
i'm getting passionate

fear  
of being  
politically correct  
definitely out there  
better to be wrong  
and apologize  
that  
not to talk  
not to stay  
in that  
stasis

## diane's social poem

when i was in grade 7  
aboriginal girl foster child  
attending school  
i remember  
    simply  
oh—new kid  
reaction of some peers  
less than  
positive  
based on her race  
i couldn't understand  
the big deal

the reception we got  
so welcoming  
incorrect to say  
we didn't experience  
any racism  
    while we were there  
generosity  
kindness  
    outweighed negativity

Louis Riel  
was a traitor  
to the government  
    people  
of canada  
    and  
possibly insane

aboriginal people  
very historic  
no discussion of culture today  
living  
vibrant  
different  
    from what happened in the past  
we were taught  
eurocentric

racist ideas that i've seen  
    i could  
    i'd have to be fair

aboriginal and non-aboriginal  
perspective  
but specifically  
non-aboriginals against aboriginals  
amongst youth  
name calling  
generalizing  
not questioning  
the hollywood or media version

i remember  
a camping trip  
as a class  
i don't know how  
my mother found out  
didn't have  
the money  
really  
really  
wanted to go  
it wasn't even a question  
in my mom's mind  
all kids should go  
very quietly took care  
of that  
we didn't have a lot

as people  
citizens  
what happens to aboriginal people  
happens to us  
there's that phrase  
out there  
we're all treaty people  
kind of cliché  
however

it's true

i didn't  
sign a treaty  
but  
my ancestor did  
i chose  
i choose  
to continue to be  
a citizen

academically  
politically  
correct  
there is a  
strong push  
to include  
aboriginal  
perspectives  
in public school

i don't get any resistance  
i hope that never changes

if  
i'm talking to  
someone  
had farm equipment stolen  
well  
i understand  
even  
if  
i don't agree

to me  
theft happens  
for socioeconomic reasons

not race

i can see why

i'll battle that  
but gently

a little more truth  
white privilege is real  
and  
unless  
non-aboriginal people  
realize  
make changes  
then  
i don't think  
reconciliation process  
can go forth

aboriginal youth  
proud of their identity  
our future is bright  
    as a nation  
    as two nations  
    as *multiple* nations

our youth  
our aboriginal youth  
our aboriginal comm—there—see  
    (indicates awareness of using a colonizing possessive pronoun)

if your only exposure  
for the risk of sounding rude  
    the-drunk-sleeping-on-the-street—you know  
get to *know* some aboriginal people  
the friendship centre  
mission statement  
here for *all* people  
that's a great place to go

that's part of being  
privileged  
    you can stay  
    in that state  
    of inertia  
minority groups don't have that choice

approach reconciliation  
i'm going to do *this* for *them*  
continuing the colonial  
    racist ideas

if  
you don't have a  
pre-existing relationship with  
the people  
    you're in trouble

aboriginal people  
already moving forward  
they appreciate  
our help  
but  
they don't need us

we need  
to be  
a part of the process  
for it to be more complete  
more healthy

but  
the leaders need to be  
aboriginal

if i'm asked  
to do  
something  
hundred percent

a lot of great things happen  
when non-aboriginal people can release  
that need for power  
we can do things  
because of privilege  
yeah  
i'd use that

it was humbling  
where we were the minority  
i feel like  
if  
i could give everyone  
that experience  
a lot would  
change  
because  
until you live that  
you can't  
really understand

## joanne's action poem

i started attending  
first started to be involved  
was living in i'd have to go back

i was living in bc  
running this old heritage house          onward ranch

discovered it  
going down back roads  
came over a hillside  
i want to live there  
ended up moving in  
moved in there           tore out everything  
doing quite well  
running an art gallery   music shows

started reading  
started to read it  
wanted to spend time with them  
went  
i would go with them

i got attracted to the family setting  
would go  
could gravitate  
had my group of friends

met a woman  
met some people  
Xeni Gwet'in people  
we were sitting there

there used to be a room over there   i remember the priest took me  
in there and sat me down

he shared his story

something changed for me  
had been clean and sober  
for quite a while  
relapsed

couldn't be in the house  
just walked away  
left everything there  
moved out to Nemiah Valley

was with one of the men  
we were together  
got to know the family  
i was drinking  
had put the drugs aside  
the relationship was abusive



i moved  
i'd started to go to sweat lodges

i moved in with Cecile  
helped her through two hip surgeries  
they paid me

i helped  
    sober her up  
    get her healthy  
she taught me so much  
learned how to  
    tan hides  
    do a little bit of beading  
    how to fish with nets

i think  
i was still connected  
my girlfriend  
she'd gone to a Medicine Man at Sagkeeng First Nation

i went to the social worker  
i was doing sweats  
we brought Ronald Swampy out

got my name  
got my spirit name  
didn't know very much  
still don't know very much  
    had taken raw rice  
    rice and raisins to get your name      as an offering  
i just brought a bowl with some minute rice  
    with some raisins in it  
    it was years later that i realize i had done that

just started going  
came down for his funeral  
i think this was my twentieth Sundance

went through my wannabe stage  
totally turned away from my own family  
learned what family meant  
learned what it meant  
    you won't know any of us until you know  
    how we're all connected

i made a point of knowing everybody in the valley  
how they were related  
how they were connected

reconciled with my own family  
was doing well

emotionally  
physically  
spiritually

had gotten rid of the  
drugs and alcohol  
and that kinda thing

made a lot of mistakes  
made a lot of mistakes initially  
but i learned from them

came back  
got into mental health  
saw one of my roles as being a bridge  
to be that bridge  
to be able to break down some of those stereotypes  
on both sides

my motivation is to give back  
a little bit  
of what settler culture has taken away

found out  
we are all just helpers for creator  
we all have gifts  
it's pretty simple we're just here to help each other

i got that  
just kept coming back  
got a good life now i pass it back

the motivation to go to ceremony  
was always for my own healing  
so i could be a better helper for the people

i wasn't influenced in a negative way  
left home at 15  
got to influence myself at an early age



sharing what i've been told

the work i do is intergenerational effects  
reviewed some of the material with my teachers  
is this good?  
Is this what I should be letting them know?  
been kind of told  
you've got to trust yourself  
can't always be second-guessing

i could just pray  
i think i'm ally building

going to start working  
always wanted to work  
in the justice system  
don't have any degrees  
sometimes it's been tricky  
going to be writing pre-sentencing reports  
will be an ally there  
will use my big strong white voice  
use love  
respect  
regard  
to say  
enough is enough  
want to put a little more of the  
gladue report stuff  
back on the judges

preparing now to be an ally

used to take to the streets and march against things  
was told  
when i got my name not to be political  
i'm a witness  
i'm a witness and an advocate

all about taking responsibility  
had to step back  
not going to change them  
always go to the teachings  
just had to go to another level of self-respect

i don't jump out as much as i used to  
would you like me to teach about?  
used to do a thing  
now i'll suggest it  
i stop for a minute  
and find out  
where's that person at  
'cause they might not be  
*prepared* to take in this information  
right?

i'm learning to listen  
really focused on reconciliation  
been involved as a participant  
just know  
always focus on my healing first  
first have to do it myself  
before i can show anybody else how to do it

i did it  
i just danced

## joanne's emotion poem

something about the culture attracted me  
that connectedness that i would feel  
that i didn't feel anywhere else  
always felt different  
not connected to humans  
and not of this world  
so i found a place to belong

and acceptance  
well sort of  
you're never really accepted  
it's never about acceptance  
'cause our job is to learn to accept ourselves

i know that somehow there was something  
to do with my purpose  
was always very spiritual  
even as a kid very spiritual nature based

just sort of unfolded in this      sort of  
   beautiful way  
and kind of like it was meant to be

there's such a loving kindness  
   respect  
goes way beyond acceptance  
that i experienced

don't know if i would've been ready here  
   in my own self  
to be able to  
to be able to  
   do it in a kind and gentle way  
learned i can be pretty judge-y

i'm okay  
because i'm white  
and creator wants me to be white  
so whatever work      i do  
   i do as an ally  
it has to come through who i am

in the big picture  
in the small picture  
doing my own healing  
able to pass it on  
the healthier we all are collectively  
the better the world's gonna be

sometimes i felt  
i was being used for it  
in my workplace  
tried to resign  
from being, you know  
the resident expert  
tried to, said  
   okay, i'm not doing it  
felt like i was being used  
could approach it from that place of self-respect  
from that respectful place

you gotta kinda forgive yourself a bit  
because when you start into it

that can happen

it's gonna be uncomfortable  
we think differently  
we interact with the world  
differently

it's	way	at
a	of	things
different	looking	

we can find common ground

but i'm *never* going to think  
like an aboriginal person  
may be influenced  
by the teachings to shift  
my way of thinking  
to look  
a little differently  
but  
it's different

leave your judgment at the door  
and just have fun  
just have fun

## joanne's social poem

in my family  
there was never an outright  
sort of prejudice talk  
    it was sort of typical  
    back then  
my dad was a musician  
he would sell guitars  
to some of the aboriginal men in town  
or the Métis men  
always heard  
        you know, he always comes in and pays his bill  
that sort of thing  
  
there was always

standard stereotypes  
and prejudiced statements that you heard  
back then

when i was on the other side  
the unhealthy side  
we'd be downtown drinking  
and the police would come along  
and they'd drag off my friends  
and i'd say  
well i'm checking in the morning  
and if he's got any marks on him  
so i really saw early on  
the influence  
because of the colour  
of my skin  
to advocate  
so i'd be like  
oh, you're taking me with you  
that kind of thing

when i was moving more to the red road  
to the healthy road  
i'd be in save-on foods  
in williams lake  
shopping  
and there'd be this certain experience

and then  
i'd go with my Tsilhqo'tin family  
that i'd spend all of my time with  
and there would be a totally  
different experience

you could just see it

over and over and over and over  
again

i had a dream  
i was in this room  
there was this old blanket hanging there  
somebody opened the blanket  
and there was a long line of old people



aboriginal people  
    women           men  
so somebody walked me down  
the line  
they all shook my hand  
    you're Anishinaabe now  
    you're Anishinaabe now  
the word for Ojibway people  
and then  
at the very end  
this old lady  
says to me  
    you're welcome here  
    you're a welcome guest here  
  
    don't change the furniture  
    don't sleep in anybody's bed

the judges  
they are to understand  
the effects of this history  
and colonization  
first contact

residential school is only  
the exclamation mark

as rupert ross says  
    it's not the beginning of the problems  
    it was the first moment of contact

so in the western world  
we put ourselves on top  
then we have the other things  
    kind of subservient to us  
in the Indigenous cultures  
    first    it's mother earth  
    then   it's plant life  
    then   it's the animal life  
    *then*   it's us  
and we're all connected

at first it was like  
my family were

what are you doing?  
but as they saw my life get great  
then it became more acceptable  
now it's sort of  
oh, you're going to the Sundance  
they don't really know what it is  
my dad, my 87-year-old dad  
he just knows that it's really good for me

i have that respect  
for this life  
for the life i'm living  
as an ally  
i get asked a lot of questions  
i'm a resource for the people  
for the people who are non-aboriginal  
i'm a kind of resource for them  
the bridging idea

when i'm in certain crowds of people  
sometimes i'm vocal  
and sometimes  
just sit there quietly  
'cause i can also make prayers for people  
don't always have to challenge  
sometimes  
when you're still with people  
who don't understand  
they just don't understand  
it gets presented as racism and prejudice  
all that kind of thing  
but the bottom line  
is they just don't understand

and it happens on both sides  
it happens on both sides

i always encourage people  
if you want to be involved  
in reconciliation  
you've gotta know  
the story  
of

how we got to a place  
where we even *needed* reconciliation

yeah  
think about this  
you're on somebody's land  
and you won't even  
let them go  
pick medicines  
on  
it

i've taken a lot of people to sweats  
more and more and more and more  
it seems to come from the spiritual part  
that's what i find is missing  
in western culture  
in our systems for sure  
afm<sup>12</sup> recently has added spiritual to their mandate  
but in the mental health system  
that one  
little  
tiny  
box  
in the assessment form  
is rarely even checked NO  
never mind YES  
do they have any spiritual needs  
most of the people i'm working with now  
non-aboriginal people  
it's through the spiritual that they're  
most drawn  
all of the ceremonies are open to everybody  
sharing circles  
i'm passing out that information to the clients

open and willing to experience

there's a word for that            expropriation  
cultural expropriation  
definitely happens

---

<sup>12</sup> the addictions foundation of manitoba

you'll get called on it  
unless you're doing it outside of the community  
any non-aboriginal people  
i see that come into the community  
or come into the circle  
it's always a little awkward  
you're going to do some of that  
but it's okay  
that's sometimes how we learn  
if you get corrected  
pick up that people are not liking what you're doing  
then find out why  
forgive yourself  
but there is a line  
there is a line, for sure

don't steal designs  
sacred symbols  
run it down  
the runways of milan

one of the things  
that white people have  
that's one of our gifts  
is eagerness  
sometimes  
that eagerness  
translated into  
another culture  
especially aboriginal culture  
can be seen  
as not  
that great

it can make us do things that  
make us look kind of silly  
they tried to give me a jingle dress  
    all we need is another  
white person hopping out  
of step at the powwow  
i did it  
i did it  
    for four years  
    just danced behind the really old ladies

and stayed in step

it's better to try  
and step over the line  
and then learn where the line is  
and step back  
    than never to try because of fear  
of being inappropriate or  
being  
doing  
something wrong

there is no right or wrong  
trust me  
how many times  
i stepped over lines  
i didn't know  
    i'm still there

what do you need  
what do we want  
from the culture  
is it personal healing  
or because you want to understand about the people  
you're never *really* gonna understand

do you want to have friends  
who have varied ways  
of looking at the world  
that's good too

why is it i want to have that  
what can i share within it  
all kinds of things happen—they're going  
to be a little bit uncomfortable

## katherine's action poem

doing my undergrad  
taking  
    intro to First Nations studies  
doing  
    forensic anthropology

taking those two classes  
at the same time  
realized  
    we had a residential school  
    here  
    in brandon

consider doing this as a project  
get a meeting with the Chief and Council  
asked them  
a study  
to look for the cemeteries  
to look for the unmarked graves  
identify the names  
of the students  
they said  
    we want you to do that  
that's how it all got started

i think  
important to have  
Chief and Council's permission  
before the onset of any sort of research

it wasn't until  
i took a university course  
that I under—started to understand

i went to school with her  
she was aboriginal  
she was my friend  
i didn't learn very much  
or know very many Indigenous peoples  
i went to french immersion  
    just a bunch of white kids

my education  
going to do my master's  
was just a means to an end  
i don't know  
if i would've done my master's  
if i hadn't had this project  
the community asked me to kind  
of take on this work  
i wanted to take it on too

did non-invasive work  
didn't do any digging  
we detected anomalies  
we use ground-penetrating radar  
and em38  
we didn't disturb remains

went and did my ph d  
need that credibility  
also have the university resources  
faculty  
went to simon fraser  
because of Dr. Eldon Yellowhorn  
worked on truth and reconciliation commission  
and helped with missing children (and unmarked burials) project  
working with him  
will help me on one individual project  
he was working on it  
on a national level

working with Sioux Valley  
trying to address their needs  
in the ways that i know how  
i'm just a forensic anthropologist  
not a trained counsellor

they've asked me to come and present  
let them know what's been  
going on

i don't know if reconciliation  
is the right word *yet*—  
i think we are still working on truth

trying to find out where the children are  
how many  
things like that  
spoke to survivors  
and they families  
spoken at two events  
they asked me to speak there  
Elders from Sioux Valley Dakota Nation  
are there

when i'm in the field working  
it's mostly just me

and a small group of colleagues  
touching base  
driven by  
Chief and Council

whenever we went out to do work  
i always sent them an email  
sometimes they wouldn't respond  
i knew they got the emails  
they knew what was going on

at the beginning of the season  
we would have an Elder  
come out and do smudges  
a ceremony

we have each other's cell phones  
so we can text each other  
they can message me  
email a lot  
constantly talking to them  
informing them  
updating them

i worked specifically with one community

use the skills and techniques  
that you've learned  
apply them in ways  
that you can  
to help with reconciliation  
i'm helping  
looking for unmarked graves  
someone else, who might be a counsellor  
or someone who's a teacher  
instead of teaching a novel  
that you've taught all the time  
look  
and see  
if you can find an Indigenous novel

there's no right way  
to do it  
there's no one else  
to follow  
do what you can where you are



i don't know  
if i would consider myself  
a leader  
i am more in a position  
to assist the community  
and create networks for them  
i was able to put Sioux Valley  
in touch with the united church  
i think where i'm situated is  
i can facilitate these  
right relationships  
i wouldn't consider it  
a leadership role  
i was able to facilitate that

took on more  
than i initially planned  
was just going  
to look at the cemetery  
    look at unmarked graves  
    try and identify them  
we ended up adding—looking  
    outside the cemetery  
they didn't think the fence was big enough

survivors  
know of places  
behind the school  
they asked me  
to look for photos  
of the students  
    being flexible  
    knowing to create meaningful research  
    you have to engage with  
    the community  
    and incorporate their goals  
    community-based research at its heart

never charged Sioux Valley  
for anything i did  
we did lots  
lots of research  
through partnership  
worked with the rcmp  
they wanted to try out their new equipment

get field time and practice  
able to collaborate with  
a consulting company  
people come out and help  
for free  
only way to do this research  
i didn't have any funding

when you tell people  
i'm looking for missing children  
in unmarked graves  
they tend to drop everything  
and come help

also want to  
thank the survivors  
lots of collaborations  
networking  
community-base

i think that's how allies are—how it happens

## katherine's emotion poem

she did tell us  
that making bannock  
was from the heart

they're trying to heal  
and move forward

i was pretty young and nervous  
was beyond pleased

nervousness especially  
the first time i met the Chief  
we have a fairly good relationship now  
i always joke about how nervous i was  
he used to be RCMP

i really psyched myself up for it  
i'm very caring  
it's a difficult topic  
a sensitive topic  
it's complicated

i think patience is a big virtue

you don't know where to start  
you're scared to start  
i know that some are scared  
because of what parents might say  
it's hard to break those  
comfort zones

very grateful  
grateful for the Sioux Valley Dakota Nation  
for blessing this project

## katherine's social poem

i'm very much a white settler  
(laughs)

through collaboration with the community  
through a network of professors and colleagues  
and people in the Sioux Valley Dakota Nation

there were people here before us  
that was completely omitted from  
my childhood education

one of my friends  
that i went to school with  
aboriginal  
she didn't share that much  
about her culture and identity

it was very much  
just a bunch of white kids  
your understanding  
of Indigenous peoples in canada  
the extent to which  
there been systematic  
discrimination and racism  
that's pretty much been  
a post-secondary experience

our collective awareness  
is starting to realize  
the impact

of colonization  
it was sort of just like  
a collective forgetting  
or not wanting to remember

Sioux Valley needed this work  
to be done  
                                needed to know  
where these unmarked graves were  
for the survivors  
                                sense of closure in the families

Sioux Valley  
would like to build  
a healing lodge on the property  
they want to know  
                                which areas to avoid  
                                which areas to protect

two things that i've been invited to  
an open event                        anyone could come  
people from the united church there  
federal and provincial representatives  
talk about the healing lodge

i think that's a big part  
of fostering relationships  
research relationships  
with Indigenous groups  
you have to be constantly  
talking to them

it's such a rare opportunity  
that a community even agrees to  
meet with you  
you want to try to appease everyone  
but you'll never be able to do that  
because some people think  
that you should  
leave the remains alone  
and other people want confirmation  
a fine line  
you're walking  
between  
                        Elders  
                        Council  
                        Chief

it's not just Sioux Valley's children  
that are there  
it's a larger issue

letting the community  
try and determine  
the best ways forward

it's a unique opportunity  
to have such a good relationship  
at the onset

i think really it's about  
connections  
knowing people  
having a project  
that's flexible and easy  
to accommodate  
the concerns  
and the needs  
of the community

lots of hot topics  
about pipelines  
talking about how  
that impacts communities out there  
and they're not necessarily  
treaty they're unceded territories  
so that makes things more complicated

definitely  
there's racism  
structural racism  
systemic racism  
why don't they just get over it  
just forget about it  
let's turn the page

comments like that mean  
they don't fully understand  
the history  
therefore are not compassionate  
or understanding  
quick to dismiss  
that history  
turning the page  
let's forget about it

let's move on

your traumas  
you're exhibiting  
now  
or that you're feeling  
now  
shouldn't have  
anything  
to do  
with those  
past things

it's sort of this disconnect

day-to-day issues  
with racism  
people won't say it directly  
it's implied  
but once you're aware of it—you can see it everywhere  
even in brandon  
friends feel like  
they get unequal  
treatment at retail stores  
hospitals  
no one will come out and say it

if you put your community  
at the forefront of research  
then you can start  
building these relationships back  
because  
there's been a long history  
of researchers  
going in and doing research  
*on* aboriginal communities  
instead of *with* and *for*  
it's still happening today  
it's disheartening  
as researchers  
trying to do this work  
battling legacy of bad research  
trying to build this up  
if you have a positive relationship  
with this community  
you're starting towards  
reconciliation

it ties specifically with truth and reconciliation commission work  
trying to identify the children  
who went missing  
and are buried  
at the brandon residential school  
is particularly tied to that issue

i know that sounds so basic  
but you've really got to  
go out  
not be afraid  
to go to the powwow  
    have a bison burger  
    redo curriculum  
    have outreach groups

the whole country is starting  
to tackle these issues  
see what the other provinces are doing  
but at the same time  
i think it's just grassroots

i always worried about  
being a white researcher  
how i would contribute  
or if  
i would be taking away  
from the movement  
trying to decolonize

showing these relationships  
being a model  
really helps

decolonization is  
let's have Indigenous students do archaeology  
so they can dig up their own past  
reconnect  
that way  
relearn history  
i don't have the answer to the decolonizing

united church fundraised  
travelling photo exhibit  
    to educate people  
    to create awareness

but also  
    if someone recognizes a student  
                                  in a photo  
they want to take that anonymity away  
identify these children

it is essential to know  
where you came from  
                                  to know  
what sort of place of privilege  
you come from  
that you have a position piece

i don't know  
if groups would come together  
i don't know  
if Sioux Valley and the united church  
would've come together  
on their own

## kelly's action poem

i can ask

i've got the stereotypical white person thinking  
i have a lot of questions  
i can talk to her

you see a different perspective  
you hear their background  
you talk about the fur trades

taking a course  
it talked about residential schools  
i think  
i never got it  
i grew up  
there was nothing

i think  
you look at the textbook  
you look at  
you go to a museum  
you're reading



reading about the Dene that got moved

we didn't follow through

i didn't get that

i think hearing

looking more

becoming

i think just

becoming educated

you realize

you start looking

you start looking

you start being more critical

i think

i'm doing now

i wanted to teach

i said

so i tried and tried and

i get to teach

i'm already looking in

and thinking

i can have my influence

encourage them to think differently

not just take things for granted

to research

i'm wanting to do

i had a Louis Riel poster

i kind of took them under my wing

i just thought

i just thought

i put the symbols up

i'm really looking forward

trying to help

we always go

we volunteered

i'm with the family

i have to remember

i fit in

you realize  
if i can contribute, i can just sit back  
take it all in  
take it all in  
try and remember it

you can't tell who's Métis  
i fit in

i used to think that  
i used to  
used to  
when i was growing up

we were going  
we go  
i went  
i forgot  
i thought  
i know how that felt  
i thought

you answer  
it's become  
i know a little

i think you've got to start  
you've got to start  
i think it's got to be  
i think  
i think just by standing up  
clarify or correct  
i'm an ally now—i think

i shared

i don't know  
i know for me  
when i hear comments  
an ally is somebody who is *beside*

i think  
i think  
i think  
would i step up? i think

i come out and say  
i'm willing to help you fight  
i'm willing to help you

i should be trying  
i think i shared  
my eyes have been opened

you're aware  
what are you going to do?

i can get into the schools  
i can get these younger kids thinking differently  
i think  
i know the government  
i think it's the government

i'm not too sure  
i totally get it  
i think  
i don't know how

i don't care about macdonald<sup>13</sup>  
i want to present to the kids now  
i don't know how i'm going to approach that

i definitely will give them a different angle  
i will definitely cause them to *think*  
i'm leaving the textbook

i think i understand

## kelly's emotion poem

empathize  
it was awkward

never felt rejected  
turned away  
pushed  
or anything

---

<sup>13</sup> sir john a. macdonald

there's a wall—  
like a slap in the face

it's hurtful  
i know it cut me

positive  
been positive  
been good

i was so sad

i'm just shocked  
that totally impacted me  
i was, like, wow

what are you afraid of  
me not having my facts right

i'm tired of this  
i've been totally, like, wow  
there's way more to this  
than signing a treaty

## kelly's social poem

a one-day session  
there's a university prof from u of m  
specifically for treaties and Indigenous people  
she talked about an hour  
treaty number one  
treaty number two

this is what happened

the handshake was how they sealed the deal

how would you feel  
    only four white men  
    only two chiefs  
you're not speaking the same language

did that really happen?

it was always

they sat down  
they met  
they had a chance  
they could've said no

did you understand the language?

there's twenty of them  
and three of you

intimidation? i don't know

i wanted to teach

i wanted to, the last couple of years  
an Indigenous—

there's a curriculum there  
to teach for the high school  
and kinda that was shut down

we don't need it here

we don't have anyone Métis  
we don't have anybody

i said—

it's not *for* the Métis  
it's not *for* the Indigenous  
it's for the white people  
like, the white people

they don't want it

we were going down in custar park

we were going through a house  
a bunch of people there

we go into this room

there's a picture of an aboriginal  
on the wall

one of the people

part of the tour says—

one of the quotes custar, er, somebody famous said was, the only good indian is

a dead indian

and he said it out loud

wow

i'm not Métis

i'm not Indigenous

i'm not ab—

and i know how that felt to me

i thought how

how do people  
when you don't  
you can't see their  
how do you feel  
when you hear  
comments like that  
how can you just  
you gotta

it's just hurtful

i don't even know how to say  
to me it was  
i'm not even there  
i'm just in a relationship with somebody  
and i know how it cut me

the curriculum's there

just have to pick it up

the rubbermaid box

we got truth and reconciliation

great awesome ideas—resources

100-150 dollars' worth of stuff

box resources all in there

K-6 7-12

at our school

it's at our school

been there 2 years now

nobody's opened it

in 2 years

K-6 in a teacher's room

at the very bottom

everything's packed on top of it

didn't even have to pay for it

nobody

so i took it home  
'cause now i'm teaching

i got a bunch of novels  
aboriginal, you know, characters  
i took two boxes  
i thought  
i'll take them to the school, right?  
for the library  
free

and the librarian had it there for a couple of days—  
for another 2 days—  
nah, you can take them back  
are you serious?  
you're getting free material  
aboriginal authors  
about their lifestyles

i was so sad

## kelsey's action poem

i was a very young professional  
so really young  
there were some people  
that i worked with  
really strong allies

connected with them  
their beliefs  
introduced me to  
some dynamic  
parts  
Indigenous culture

found a government document  
from 1994  
talking about residential school  
experiences

had all these little bits  
colliding  
in my early twenties

i think  
i don't mind  
asking hard questions  
really invasive questions  
sometimes  
because of my role

i like hearing the history  
    what's your community like  
i get excited  
because i don't get  
to spend a lot of  
time  
on First Nations communities  
when i was growing up  
i'm curious  
    what's it like  
    what's the landscape like  
i want to picture this place  
in my mind  
i'm a curious person  
    how's it being away from there  
understand that connection  
people have to the land  
their landscape

i think  
it's like regular old conversation  
    are you going to the sweat  
    on saturday  
someone will have been unwell  
    have you been to a sweat  
    lately  
spiritual aspects are  
common conversational pieces  
i'll ask  
i don't mind asking  
if someone practices  
    traditional  
    non-traditional  
i enjoy



these conversations  
learning about people's traditions  
whatever culture they're from  
i'll get  
excited to hear  
about it  
there's a group  
we get together  
every six months or so  
we read a book  
or a couple of books  
we discuss  
how that book  
impacts us  
usually something  
very spiritual

we picked  
the way of the warrior  
different books like that  
there's only  
one  
or two  
non-Indigenous ladies  
we hang out  
i've got a lot  
of very close friends

i do have high levels  
of connection  
very connected  
to Indigenous communities  
spiritual work

i do that  
i hang out  
just do casual chill things  
like go for coffee  
friend things  
hang out  
socialize  
building relationship  
connection

there is some activism  
in my old workplace

it used to be a struggle  
this is important  
    to be welcoming  
    to all people  
    everyone  
    in this culture  
    is valuable here  
maybe  
    we should push this culture  
    a bit    or a lot  
    we have a lot  
    of people coming  
    to our workplace  
    who  
    identify as Indigenous  
    we want them  
    to feel extremely  
    welcome  
        d cor  
        language  
    that was quite an argument

educating  
about the spiritual practices  
that need to be available  
and are necessary  
for some people to feel  
    content  
    happy  
    connected  
there is some advocacy  
in making that  
available  
not hidden  
vital to what i do  
as a professional  
but also  
in my home

i think that my job  
helped a lot  
i've worked with  
people  
who've experienced trauma  
i've worked with  
a lot of Indigenous communities

went to a lot of  
Indigenous communities  
then i go home  
tell my friends and family  
    i learned this thing  
    about history  
    that i don't think  
    any of us  
    knew  
    the impacts on  
    groups of people  
    that live two miles away  
    from us

i think my job  
is  
to hear  
to really feel  
    passing that on  
    to people  
    that are in my world

i think i've been able  
to help  
    with *some* of that  
as a non-Indigenous person  
who can see their experience  
and say  
    yeah, that was not okay

i was honoured  
to go  
sit  
with someone  
during their hearing  
i was honoured  
to go  
support  
    but that process hurt  
        process was hard  
it was painful  
    made things  
    worse  
their truth was  
    not heard  
    not heard

a smile  
say hi  
be curious  
be open  
to meeting  
people  
kindness and compassion  
go a long way  
hey how are you  
people  
are  
people  
they exist  
you can't just  
walk  
past somebody  
you say  
hi

some of the complicated recommendations  
i like them

Indigenous history in schools  
making mandatory classes

i like those ideas a lot

but

on the micro level

making your space

welcoming  
to everybody  
your presence  
a welcoming  
place to be

i think

is this even appropriate  
can i even be here  
think this way  
do this thing

i don't know

did i take over  
when someone else could be doing this

there's someone more qualified  
and more appropriate  
to do this

i can sit alongside i can hang out

i can be a very eager person  
and then it's not my place  
so  
i like to be invited  
usually wait to be invited  
it's an offer of support  
    willingness to listen  
    wait to be guided  
by someone that i really respect too  
    they can say  
        you need to sit here  
        you need to hold tight  
they're able to say that to me  
and i'm able to hear it

i'm confused a lot  
by my role  
    too much  
    too little  
don't want to be  
on either end  
of the spectrum

it's not my journey  
reconciliation  
my half of the reconciliation journey  
that i'm trying to do

but there's another  
side of the street too  
i think there's lots  
of capable people  
    i don't need to do that too  
    i can do my side  
    my side's enough

## kelsey's emotion poem

culture  
truly respected  
really spoke to me

the culture  
speaks to me personally

traditional ways really  
speak to me  
when someone speaks  
about a traditional way  
i wonder  
if  
my face changes  
i think  
i know what that's like  
being introduced to a  
traditional way later in life  
i get what that feels like

i'll shoot a look  
or a comment  
or something  
if i don't feel that  
the space is welcoming  
or something  
has been done or said  
i try not to be too *big* about it  
but i make it very obvious

i don't get it  
it was really annoying  
to watch people treat  
him differently  
really pissed me off

some people  
i feel quite comfortable  
if i know the person quite well  
i might  
    this is maybe like something  
    you might want to check out—  
    a resource or whatever—  
but with some people  
i don't know if it's like  
stepping on toes a little bit  
i don't want to say *my* responsibility  
i feel like  
    there's so many people  
    who are Indigenous who are  
    have  
    very good loud voices  
    who can share what needs

to be shared  
am i stepping on  
anyone's toes  
by saying things  
that  
as someone who is not identified  
as  
Indigenous  
should say  
or  
should i wait  
and let someone  
who is much more  
educated about this  
or experienced  
say something  
so i don't  
sometimes i'm torn  
*should i*  
is this what i should do  
or is this taking away  
power again

## kelsey's social poem

some really strong allies  
introduced me to speakers who  
shared historical pieces with me  
i didn't receive  
any education  
about residential schools  
Indigenous people  
colonialism  
they didn't teach me that  
in school  
i learned it later on  
in my professional life  
going to university  
took a native studies course  
it spoke about  
residential schools  
and i'm like—what is this  
there was a lot of stuff  
that was happening  
in our country

i didn't know anything about  
i had all these friends  
Indigenous  
i didn't know  
that was part of  
their history  
we never talked about it  
'cause i didn't know  
and they didn't know  
that i didn't know

we didn't learn  
anything  
about colonization  
we learned about  
kenya  
i remember learning  
about  
kenya  
in grade 5

they used to seat us  
by our last names  
our lockers next to  
people's whose last name  
was the same letter  
was next to yours  
child who i grew up with  
his last name was a  
different letter than mine  
but we were always together  
and he was Indigenous  
he grew up in an adopted family  
that was not Indigenous  
    we always sat together  
    our lockers were together  
he was just that really tall guy  
that always looked after me  
he was treated a lot differently  
we were tight  
i'd be like—i don't get it  
he was treated  
differently  
    by our teachers  
    some of the students  
    not all           but some



he's a fantastic athlete  
he seemed to earn respect  
and through being an athlete  
and got treated  
differently  
a little bit  
at that point  
but not by everybody  
i thought  
they treated him different  
because he was hard of hearing  
as i aged i realized  
it wasn't his  
his hearing that was the issue  
it was probably his race

anyone  
who looked like  
this person would  
maybe experience the  
same thing perhaps  
i would see a little of it  
at the mall  
different places a little bit  
but when you're young  
you don't have a lot of power to change anything

i learned the politics  
white paper  
indian act  
that actual pieces of paper  
that dictated  
how racism infiltrated  
everything  
it made sense then  
how people felt

my school  
my little school  
primarily caucasian people  
so  
anyone who came from  
a different culture  
i think it was a struggle  
for them to feel accepted  
i think  
it was a

fairly racist  
kind of environment  
sounds horrible

having that historic foundation  
of how canada worked  
is still very relevant  
even today  
old history  
but it's still relevant  
very current  
last one just closed in the 90s

awareness of the impacts of  
generations of colonialism  
it's generations  
we're talking *generations*  
impact on how people  
develop as little people  
into grownups  
into people in our community

he didn't know  
anything  
about colonialism  
we'd get into these big  
conversations—  
and i sometimes i felt  
a little hopeless about  
    am i just wasting my breath here  
and then  
one day  
we were chatting about something  
and he was like  
    you know this was because of residential schools right  
what  
    there's been generations of trauma      there's been  
he said  
    i've been talking to some of the guys about this  
    i've been trying to tell them  
it was amazing  
they wanted some resources  
to be educated  
about  
their clientele  
they were seeing

some people certain times  
and  
repetitiveness of some things  
why some people  
struggling to heal  
what was initially  
maybe a little uncomfortable  
has really turned a corner  
and it's just conversation

i think  
some of the people i know  
think  
that their community all see that  
but  
can anyone else outside of the community  
see that

i remember when  
Judge Sinclair gave his talk  
we were all at work  
i booked the day to watch it  
online when it was live  
i went out to get  
a coffee           worked at a place where  
a lot of people were  
very transient

                            didn't have tvs computers

i said  
                            you know that Judge Sinclair  
                            is on in my office  
                            do you guys want to come hang out

it was such an honour  
that they would come  
and watch with me  
about something  
so personal  
it was hitting all of them  
so hard

i was just  
                            'kay you wouldn't have been able  
                            to watch this just because  
                            no one invited you to watch it  
                            and we're all watching it  
                            in our offices

it was just such a powerful moment

that they let me see  
that piece of their lives  
to watch these men  
experience what this was like  
it was older men        they never  
thought this would ever happen  
    they let me hang out with them  
    and watch it  
    but  
    they thought that i was letting them  
    hang out with me  
    but really  
    i was getting to hang out with *them*  
        it was their moment

that was a really hard process  
when people were going through  
that was a really hard time  
for my friends anyway

there's a lot to be done yet  
i don't think i can assess that

lots of non-Indigenous people  
have appropriated so much culture  
    i'm one of them    right  
    who've taken pieces of culture  
    this fits for me  
    and it wasn't mine  
i've already appropriated it  
then i'm confused about  
acceptability of that  
it's an internal dilemma  
    so i asked an Elder about it  
they say  
    no        this is meant for everybody

## leanne's action poem

i have been lucky  
it's been an honour  
i started working  
influenced by Elders  
sharing their stories  
i worked

always work side-by-side

took me off to a whole different journey  
became a psychiatric nurse  
i went to school  
i never had to deal with white people  
working in our systems that are, you know  
colonized

i've always been separate  
i've always been kind of sheltered  
i think

i grew up, like, early '80s  
i remember growing up  
i too was sharing similar experiences  
with poverty  
we connected  
my experience  
my experiences have been  
i was going through at home  
i left that world  
i spent a lot of time  
listening  
attending  
attending                      you get a whole different experience

you find yourself working  
it comes from the heart  
i have  
i was told  
there's spiritual reasons why i am the way i am

when i look back  
i came from  
i've done  
i've seen  
i'm thinking  
i just think to myself  
i was pretty blessed  
i didn't even at the family level  
have a lot of overt racism  
so i was pretty lucky

i contribute  
i'm a spiritual person  
we come together  
you have certain jobs  
you meet certain people  
i just happen to have  
a lot of First Nations teachers

you gotta take in everything  
i think  
walking with  
you have to walk with everything

i just know growing up  
i just knew  
when i was young  
i knew it  
i knew it  
you could just see it  
you especially know  
you could just see it  
you could just see it

i just knew  
i had a knowing  
listening  
watching  
observing  
you knew it was racism

i don't think it's changed  
i think  
i think  
we were just talking  
we were talking about racial profiling  
nobody says anything talk to an aboriginal person

i involve myself  
i'm solution focused  
i try to come with a good heart  
with respect  
knowing  
knowing that

i will never understand  
i attend  
i help out  
i know my place            i know that i know my place

i wouldn't take it upon myself  
i'm a helper  
i know better i know  
i know my place  
i've been able to have a place  
i think that's kind of a big            knowing

we're helpers  
we're equal  
but it's a place of respect  
to know where i stand and know my place

my work matters  
my work matters  
to come there with a good heart  
                  an open heart, a respectful heart  
                  not just speak  
we have to listen  
i'm a human being  
i think that's the key

we gotta quit blaming  
it really doesn't work for anybody  
i think we gotta quit blaming  
we gotta quit blaming

i know what my place is  
i'm a helper  
i walk, i walk  
i try to walk  
i participate  
i'm aware  
i know, i'm aware  
i'm aware  
i take that into my work            i try to

we are so far behind  
we should be so ashamed

we have to fight  
 we have to fight  
     we have to justify  
 we have to fight  
     we have to fight to smudge  
 we have to fight for that

we're the front-line providers  
 we're the ones  
   in the mental health system  
   working in addictions  
   in crisis  
     where we find aboriginal people  
 i graduated    i heard  
   but there was nothing

i can't speak for other education programs  
 i know for nursing  
 i know  
 i could tell you  
 i know  
 we talk about it  
 we have professionals  
     they don't have a hot clue

i think i would walk away sometimes  
 we push comes to shove  
 i have stood up and said things

you stay away from them  
 you stay away from them  
 i don't want to be associated  
 i'm a person that is standing up  
 i want reconciliation  
 i want the same things  
 i probably want it more

i think  
 i know that it is very complicated in certain ways  
 we have to start talking about it you know?  
 i know it's a cliché  
   to say it  
 but i think love  
   love is the key



respect is the key  
it always is

you're an ally if they say you're an ally  
i am who you say i am

## leanne's emotion poem

i always felt good  
there's spiritual reasons why i am  
the way i am

the hurt the disrespect  
i would get picked on  
i'd get called indian lover

i will never ever understand  
mom, you don't understand  
no, you don't  
so she even put me in my place  
we'll never understand completely

i just feel super i just feel great  
i feel like what we're  
what i'm doing is worthwhile  
it's meaningful  
i feel hopeful  
i could get pretty hopeless  
i could get pretty jaded  
i've seen so much negativity

i choose not to  
i feel it gives me hope  
for humanity  
we really don't know what it means to work together

terrible  
terrible  
pathetic

that's so disgraceful

i feel like  
personally it's easier than professionally

i feel like  
when i go to gatherings  
and community gatherings  
it's just me there

i feel like  
they are family  
they are!

it's been hard and challenging  
i'm not witty  
i'm not a witty person  
i can't snap back with fast answers

i feel sickened  
i think sometimes  
i still get shocked  
i still get shocked  
i really do  
i don't know if  
i'm still pretty naïve  
or i'm optimistic  
i feel pretty sickened

i don't feel sorry for aboriginal people  
i feel pride  
i feel honour  
i feel like  
holy shit, they've come through  
i see a prideful people  
i don't feel sorry for them  
i don't feel sorry for white people either

as white people we just  
we have to know everything  
if we don't know everything  
we're stupid  
we have to know everything

we don't have to know everything  
we can let that go

## leanne's social poem

my own kids are First Nations  
    mom, you don't understand  
the shopping thing  
i said, i understand  
she said, no you don't  
her point was  
    you're not a First Nations woman  
she put me in my place

professionals working with aboriginal people  
they don't have a hot clue  
when people don't know they're not confident  
they want to recluse  
they put their hands up and say  
    i don't know  
    i don't know how to do this  
    i'm scared and i don't know how to ask  
so they do nothing

they become a part of the problem  
ignorance can only take you so far  
they're not comfortable  
    protocols  
    culture pieces  
    history  
they don't have the confidence  
so nothing gets done

i look back at my mom  
    she's caucasian  
    she's white  
she knows what i'm doing  
what i'm doing  
how i'm living  
    to a certain extent  
she may not  
    i think  
not know me totally  
when i think about it  
i'm not close to my family all the time  
    it creates a separateness  
    it does create a separateness

whereas

some of the community gatherings and ceremonies

people have their aunts, uncles, cousins, sisters, brothers, moms

and i'm just sitting there

when i worked in brandon

the racism was like a hierarchy

white people

aboriginal people

immigrants

you could just see it

you could just see it

you take people to task

get a little bit more respect

or people come away from me

you gotta go back and work with the same people

i've gotten into

altercations

a few altercations

heated discussions

i have stood up and said things

i've had to take on a few racist people

about anybody that wasn't white

i remember talking

a co-worker

who was just

out there

outspoken

racist as all get out

i just looked at her

you better watch what you say

i was more of her supervisor

i have to kind of watch that

i have to maintain myself in a supervisory role

we're not talking about this

and i don't want to hear about it

maintaining our work relationship

i tell you

i'm thinking

i thought

i can't

i can't work like this

if you're in any place of power  
a nurse  
a teacher  
a police officer

if you have power over people's lives  
or influence  
and you really feel that way  
that just makes me sick  
i guess if you're joe blow  
you don't have much  
if you have power over people's lives  
at some point  
or influence  
that just makes me sick

all these lies  
of colonization  
we've all bought into  
'cause we're all colonized  
all of us are colonized  
everybody has to get decolonized  
colonization in a spirit  
to me it's like an evil spirit  
that we all got  
we all bought into those lies  
aboriginal people never bought into  
those lies

that's why they're still here  
that's what they're trying to teach us  
that's their gift to us  
decolonization

and that's why  
that's why they're here  
you know  
so we all have to get decolonized

my daughter influenced a lot of her friends  
my kids have a mixture  
of a lot of friends  
they walk in a lot of worlds  
white friends  
aboriginal friends  
they know who they are

a woman  
a Cree man  
they know their culture's intact for them

they get tired of teaching people  
it starts with conversations  
just between people  
because it's not the government that's gonna fix everything  
it's love  
it's relationships  
    we need our relationships to be strong  
    at an equal playing field  
    not where we're the provider  
    and aboriginal people are the clients all the time  
when we have more  
    aboriginal instructors at our universities, high schools  
    just everyday people at our workplaces  
    community events  
that's where we'll learn

it's not the government  
we're going to decolonize  
we're gonna do the work  
    at a relationship level  
    at a love level  
    at a respect level  
quit putting that onus on the government  
they have systems that will feed that  
it's your project  
    putting a voice to that  
    having safe spaces to talk

white guilt  
big hearts  
they want to learn

they don't feel that way  
but they have some sort of guilt  
attached to their      what our ancestors did  
we don't have to have that guilt  
but we still have a responsibility  
it still doesn't give us a way out  
    locked in to not moving forward  
    this white guilt

guilt turns into defence  
    well, it's not me that did that   it wasn't my dad that put you  
    in residential school            it was my grandfather or great grandfather  
colonization is in our dna  
it's passed down  
we still have responsibility for it

you're only an ally if they say you're an ally

## lyndon's action poem

working alongside  
been with the Friendship Centre  
ran a school program

i can remember  
having a book  
    tribes of north america  
watched  
    the lone ranger  
and his sidekick tonto

visited canada  
remember meeting  
    Chief Pale Moon

i think  
i realized  
    oh, these people are still around

i think  
    common concept in england  
    these people were something in the past

worked  
worked alongside  
non-denominational  
nonetheless  
    had all these catholic overtones  
    totally foreign to me

rapidly adapt  
work alongside it  
or  
within it

never really worked  
in what

my own culture  
where i was raised

learned mostly  
in recent years  
working  
gradually  
become more aware

do remember learning  
next-door neighbour  
First Nations  
her dad wanted her to go there  
early 1980s  
not quite what we—the horrors  
that we heard of  
she had positive experiences  
there  
not  
to say that those things  
happened everywhere  
happened in significant numbers  
that's for sure

my job  
is as a teacher  
will teach whoever  
we are aboriginal focused  
but  
certainly not aboriginal specific  
upgrading programs  
bit of a revolving door  
of people  
i've seen an awful lot  
of people

really don't care  
who my students are  
in that sense  
i'll teach  
whomsoever  
i really don't care  
part of Friendship Centre  
or not  
do the best  
i think i can



provide service  
people who are my customers  
i do see our students  
as customers  
nobody's forced  
to be here

always want to be  
respectful  
of anybody's culture  
doing things  
benefit most  
the class moves on  
day-by-day  
upgrading  
also  
making sure lives are  
in a position where they  
can attend  
do our best  
work with peoples'  
cultural backgrounds  
but  
at the end of the day  
preparing people to  
pass  
english          math          other courses

try  
to treat  
people as people  
in class or outside of the class  
hope  
people  
see me as lyndon  
not as that white man

people first  
that's my approach  
not as a culture or as a label

i'm not  
one that goes out to  
cultural festivals  
that's kind of not  
the person i am

if things  
come up in conversation  
sometimes  
feel in the role  
of needing to  
correct some things  
people are saying  
or  
put some information out  
    not be aware of  
    not knowing  
        how receptive  
people may be  
    are two different things

i can challenge it  
if people's knowledge  
    or  
what they think is knowledge  
    or  
their viewpoint is based  
on their own experience  
that's fairly tough to challenge      to be honest

doesn't mean i'm not going to challenge it  
but it's a tough one

had been playing in a band  
get married  
you have to leave the band  
i agreed  
had to leave  
we wound up on welfare  
*income assistance*  
as it is now gloriously called  
    i'm grateful  
    having gone through that  
    thankfully it didn't last  
    don't be judging  
at least i've had  
a little insight  
know how easily  
that can happen to someone  
it does help me  
at least on some level

relate

i think

i think in some small way  
as a non-Indigenous person  
can actually educate in a sense  
how white people are  
or  
how white people can be  
people may have a picture  
wow, didn't realize that  
that could ever happen to someone who's  
(white)

we can't go  
and change the world  
we can change  
our little bit of it  
i think sometimes  
people get too carried away  
trying to do big things  
in fact  
if you do little things  
do little things *properly*  
this would be a lot different world

have to be careful  
my training  
that i'm not too much  
doing things for people  
as opposed to  
letting them do it

was working as an ea<sup>14</sup>  
saw  
the canadian approach  
if it was a british classroom  
if i'd come here  
to the Friendship Centre adult education  
with that kind of attitude  
i'd've been in big trouble  
that's not what people need

this is a bit of a sweeping generalization

---

<sup>14</sup> educational assistant

Indigenous people  
Indigenous learners  
are sensitive people  
especially sensitive  
because of bad things  
that have happened  
you do have to be very careful  
don't want to

upset people  
make people mad  
make people sad  
miserable  
whatever

at the end of the day  
want people to think

yeah  
i liked my day there  
it was fine  
i'm coming back  
tomorrow

there may be the need  
for a bit of extra sensitivity there  
many people  
have gone through awful things  
in their own lives  
or it's intergenerational

remember attending  
a workshop  
Dr. Martin Brokenleg  
he spoke of  
sociological theory  
it's just that ripple effect, i guess  
suddenly realized  
that makes sense to me that does make sense  
if  
we don't make change  
for ourselves  
don't care  
who you are  
if  
you're not prepared  
to make changes  
for yourself  
and for others like you  
then it's not going to happen

if  
you wait  
for another group  
of people  
to do things  
for you  
and make things wonderful  
that's not going to happen

## lyndon's emotion poem

it goes back that far  
i suppose  
feelings around  
needs to advocate  
and so forth  
my change over time

the odd student who's  
you know  
already been at university  
unfortunately  
clearly should have never been  
anywhere near a university  
with their level of skills  
but they did  
and they felt  
like a schmuck  
which  
i think  
is really tragic  
to be honest

i think  
there is a part of me  
that does feel  
a bit protective  
do feel  
i'm with them  
on things  
because  
i do feel  
other people don't always understand  
the struggles

my colleague

struggles  
on the one hand a traditional person  
but also  
training to be a church minister  
her frustration  
people saying  
they want to do something  
to make things better  
or improve

saying it  
actually doing things meaningfully  
are two totally different things

feel it's personal  
all i can do  
is  
just try to relate  
to people  
as people  
in some small way  
maybe that's a positive  
a positive thing that  
maybe  
has spinoff effects  
i don't know

just think  
that if we all  
all of us  
i don't care who  
we  
are  
if  
all of us  
just treated each other  
a lot better  
treated each other  
as people  
not preconceived notions  
then  
the world  
would be a lot  
better place

it makes me  
unfortunately

it does make me  
angry  
and i have to be careful  
with that one

i have a very close friendship  
actually originally a student  
who has become  
one of  
the most valued friends i have  
in the whole world  
is First Nations

being made to walk along  
the coloured lines  
to go to the next person  
you had to go and see  
a totally humiliating experience

## lyndon's social poem

short-term place  
child welfare services  
bottleneck  
only meant to be there three months  
maximum  
some of them were there  
two years probably  
they tended to come  
to the one-room classroom  
couldn't attend school within the division

school education was in england  
can still sort of picture it  
Navajo people            what they did  
Apaches                    what they did  
Sioux people  
but probably most people  
would never've heard of  
Ojibway people  
Cree people  
they're more familiar  
through american history  
through movies

let's face it  
you know

the hollywood version

everyone knows about  
    little bighorn  
    wounded knee  
oh yeah  
    then everyone went home  
    and it was almost like  
there weren't any more  
of these people  
    common misconceptions  
    red indians  
    north ~~american~~ indians  
    some sort of magical quality to them

the Friendship Centre  
has many resources  
available to Indigenous people  
and *non-Indigenous* people  
    come to that

majority of people  
who come through our program  
getting ready to move on  
higher levels of education  
other programs where  
    some level of sympathy  
    towards Indigenous peoples' experiences  
    nonetheless  
        gonna have to do  
        meet those criteria  
        obtain whatever kind  
        of certification

the adult collegiate  
has a huge dropout rate

you know  
the government  
thinking it can  
apologize  
and that's it  
and thank you  
    what's the action  
    that needs to  
    follow from that



on holidays with some friends  
from the uk  
conversation one night  
my friend actually said  
    of course the europeans did this  
    when they came upon an inferior  
    culture

i said  
    well, that's not actually what  
    the situation was

my friend  
who made that comment  
is a very kind person  
someone who would  
do anything for anybody  
but that was a notion that he had  
    not know any different  
    he's younger than me  
    he would've learned  
    history in school  
    very much the same  
    as i learned it  
    very much the  
    eurocentric view  
    on north america  
    not how Indigenous people  
    would see history

that's always a challenge  
for people  
not just assume  
because this is the way  
you learn something  
that that's the way  
things really were

in our little corner  
of the world  
here in manitoba  
non-aboriginal people  
need to have a much greater  
understanding  
of the past  
need to get rid of  
assumptions  
that's also a challenge  
for First Nations peoples as well

First Nations people also have many  
assumptions  
about non-Indigenous people  
that are just sweeping  
generalizations  
    you know  
    in other words  
    we're all guilty

it is sometimes based  
on experience as well  
some people  
that live near us  
out in the country  
who worked in the north  
in First Nations communities  
they said to me

no    no    you've got it wrong  
you don't know  
you've never lived there  
this is how it *really* is  
kind of thing

it's like  
it's kind of difficult to  
you know  
i can challenge it

yeah    you work with the *good* ones  
you haven't seen  
what *we've* seen

remember one occasion  
he had no idea that  
Dakota people  
Cree people  
Ojibway people  
are as different  
if you like  
as i am

as an english person  
    from a scottish person  
    from an irish  
        you know what i mean?  
    don't ever accuse a scottish person  
        of being english  
people from european culture  
tend to lump aboriginal people together

i have sometimes had  
the possibly ridiculous thought  
that maybe  
maybe  
regardless of how many generations  
people have been here  
maybe we  
should somehow just go back to europa  
i don't see how  
it could ever happen  
    i'm a first-generation immigrant  
    my wife's family are Métis on one side  
like pressing a rewind button  
and start again

here's a little aside  
karl may  
heavily influenced german people's ideas  
this set of stories  
by a guy  
by my understanding  
he never set foot in north america  
but gave this  
very idealized view of  
aboriginal culture  
which is why  
people in germany  
set up aboriginal villages  
    have powwows  
i think it was Wab Kinew one time  
    he'd been over there  
    had the distinct idea  
    that if he'd tried to say  
        this isn't quite how it is  
    they would've said  
        oh thank you very much  
        we've got this under control  
        this is how you do it

there is an assumption  
on the part of aboriginal people  
who don't know their own history  
    before the europeans came here  
    everything was absolutely fine  
    in fact much  
        warring

fighting  
for territory  
sacred grounds  
different nations

yes  
they existed in a way  
that had worked relatively well  
for many thousands of years  
but  
they weren't quite the way  
sometimes people wanted to paint things

if you push that rewind button  
i'm not sure  
that life would go back  
to the way that people think  
it might be

how  
otherwise  
do you decolonize

if they're going to wait  
for the government  
that's probably not going to happen  
start doing things  
because it's a good thing to do  
not because  
hopefully then  
the government would  
chip in  
reliance on  
or demand  
that the government

do this  
do that  
do this

people can't be at this standstill position

limbo

it's not really to do with ethnicity  
it's to do with poverty  
the same issues

crime  
violence  
all the rest of it

the common factor is poverty

it's whoever is at  
the bottom  
of the money pile

health issues  
crime issues  
drug issues  
all the rest of it

sort of despair  
problems are common  
people who are in  
poverty

i think  
Indigenous people

                  leaders  
have to be much clearer  
what they want in order  
to move forward  
assumption:

if we keep talking about  
all the horrible things that  
happened in the past  
people will  
magically  
figure out this is  
what we need to do now  
what each is prepared to do  
and want the other side       i hate to use that but  
what the other side wants us to do

racial tensions have been going on  
for thousands of years  
in other places  
here in north america  
this is recent history

                  we're all amazed that we can't fix it  
things can go on for thousands of years  
and people still can't agree  
you know

                  people want good things  
to happen

aspects of racism  
people feel keenly  
it's strange in a way  
white people feel that

they can be racially targeted  
by Indigenous people  
but it's clearly  
very much the case  
Indigenous people  
feel very much            looked on  
every time they go in a store  
they're                    looked at  
how much is real  
how much is perceived  
doesn't really matter  
because it's how they feel

here's a funny thing  
the british national party—the bnp  
the nazi party in britain            or was at the time  
they were putting leaflets  
through everybody's door  
          if you are not from this country  
          and we get elected  
          we will help you return  
                          pleasantly worded  
they're going to kick us out  
          i'm born in england, part french  
          my wife is Métis and irish  
                          the Métis part is part english  
          my boys are a mixture  
                          all of the above  
where would you return us to?

people can't expect  
that if they keep doing things  
the same way that  
anything will change  
          that's a problem  
          it goes on  
                          in schools  
                          in churches  
keep doing it the same way  
eventually we'll get the right answer  
          well    no    you won't

aboriginal people have to  
start doing things for  
themselves  
not waiting for

you know  
not waiting for  
    some government agency  
    to do it for them  
those days of government agencies  
doing *for* you  
were part of the terrible past  
are you going to get any different results

probably  
not

## mitchell's action poem

the bulk of  
the activism i do  
climate justice movement  
working with Indigenous people  
learning first-hand  
learning from my mistakes  
figuring out what is most useful  
    especially feminist-informed resources online

was in french immersion  
big focus on Louis Riel  
don't remember talking about  
    pemmican proclamation  
talking about  
    lord selkirk  
                    really awful stuff  
                    land theft  
                    colonialism  
                    really aggressive oppression

not learning about  
                    decolonization  
just wrote a paper on the Métis  
contextualizing it  
                    into oppression  
    it wasn't really there

did a lot of community work  
focused more internationally  
aren't organizations      particularly critical  
very liberal                abstract notions  
    like                      these communities are poor  
                                let's help them

not like these communities are poor  
because of centuries of colonization  
by white countries

starting to read things

reading online  
books  
taking university classes  
context start to happen  
really ramping up  
political science courses

try to do it

pretty actively

conception of allyship

being is not something that you  
it's not like a title that you  
gain and then hold  
forever  
it's a commitment that  
you're making every day  
you're earning that every day

being conscious of

do i need to contribute right now

can i take a step back

let someone

who has newer to the table  
who isn't white and male

contribute their own voice

being conscious of

knowledge i have to offer  
logistical information to share  
not taking up too much space  
not taking up any more

being conscious of

the kinds of roles i take on

focusing more on the back end

nitty gritty

time consuming

not very public work

more than in front of the camera

end up getting in front of the camera

on the news

end up being the lead

but i try to avoid it



try to pass  
whenever i can  
thinking about the way  
making sure  
paying close

i speak  
conduct myself  
that is respectful  
and aware  
attention  
to linguistic conventions

i was writing a paper and i messaged my friend asking if *Indigeneity* is capitalized because it's hard like if Indigenous is capitalized in north america does that give it specific meaning those really minute details

just got this tattoo  
didn't just  
assume it would be automatically  
chill  
to get Indigenous art  
put on my body  
there is definitely  
a process  
you know—check  
    who drew this  
    did they give this design  
    away consensually  
the money—is going to Standing Rock  
it's for a good cause  
being done with consent  
of that community  
asked my friend  
if there are  
Anishinaabe protocols around tattooing  
protocols  
different  
depending on the region  
thinking through small things  
and larger things

there's a paper  
that i wish i'd finish  
reading  
    decolonization is not a metaphor  
talks about  
how decolonization  
is often used as this  
buzzword

to soothe the minds  
of people  
who are liberal enough  
and  
but not  
willing enough

to know about it  
care about this issue

to make the necessary  
sacrifices to heal

in the same way that  
cultural genocide was  
rooted in the desire  
to erase  
the indian problem  
so is  
this idea of buzzword reconciliation  
they just want this  
to not be a problem  
they have to deal with anymore  
a guilt that they carry

i think  
it's just  
leading by example  
at the end of the day  
people across the board  
leading by example  
making space for leaders  
who aren't white men  
to come forward  
the more  
that happens  
the more  
it's normalized  
the more  
we don't even need to have these conversations anymore

it's constant  
you can't take a vacation from it

## mitchell's emotion poem

spend a lot of time  
worrying about  
the best way  
to support this work

it can be hard  
sometimes  
voluntarily moving  
yourself down  
in a hierarchy  
of an organization  
taking  
a bit of a

backseat  
it doesn't always feel good  
in the immediate term  
i'm a very immediate term person  
i have a limbic system

this big  
and then a prefrontal  
cortex  
the  
size  
of  
a  
pea

sometimes  
making decisions  
don't feel  
amazing  
in the short term  
ultimately very rewarding satisfying  
i don't ever  
at the end of the day  
feel bad  
about decisions  
i make  
in these capacities

that's something i'm  
working on  
being more assertive in person

there's an idea  
around allyship and reconciliation  
that it can be

like  
easy  
and it's like

no      no                      it can't

it's a lot of work  
a lot of introspection  
really thinking about  
how you function in groups  
                    and in spaces

this idea  
that reconciliation  
is just this thing  
we can put on a stamp  
on our letters from the city  
and be like  
                                    it's done<sup>15</sup>

there's this idea that it's  
this easy thing  
and it's like  
                                    no  
it's really a huge substantial  
commitment  
                    it takes real      emotional  
  intellectual  
  spiritual work  
we really need to commit to it

that the same as being an ally  
you need to be really in it  
                    in it for the right reasons  
actually knowing what are  
the injustices  
i am trying to correct  
by adopting  
this set of behaviours  
having that understanding  
i think  
is really crucial

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<sup>15</sup> The city of winnipeg declared 2016 to be the year of reconciliation, and this claim was emblazoned on outgoing letters as a postmark applied by canada post to cancelled postage stamps. (information provided by interviewee)

## mitchell's social poem

Indigenous leaders  
role models in that movement  
being able  
to work closely  
take cues  
learn how best  
to support their work  
has been easy to do  
just by doing it

involved in student politics  
what can i bring to this  
can someone else  
who maybe isn't quite as experienced  
whose representation would be more meaningful  
                  who are underrepresented  
                  is that going to matter more  
than the small difference  
in experience that we have  
thinking through the identity dimensions  
                  of political representation  
                  capacity to do a job dimensions

it doesn't matter  
a whole ton  
in the student association  
but it does matter  
well it does matter  
but mps, mlas<sup>16</sup>  
*that's* where, like it really matters  
if you have a sea of white dudes  
in parliament versus  
a truly diverse house  
that makes a tangible difference  
inhabit the identity  
and reproduce it

on a passive level  
it affects a lot  
informs who i am friends with  
a lot of friends j have made  
through movement work

---

<sup>16</sup> members of parliament and members of the legislative assembly

i have those friends

non-Indigenous peers  
there's definitely a bit  
of a bubble  
in terms of  
people are generally  
fairly respectful  
you don't have to  
alienate yourself  
from your friends  
to stick up for anti-racism

people usually respond pretty quickly  
to a call-out

oh shoot, that was not intentional  
we're trying to build  
in the activist community  
*calling in* as opposed to *calling out*  
messaging someone privately  
or speaking to them in person

hey, you might not realize it,  
but this is actually really insensitive,  
here is the way  
you should probably delete that post  
probably apologize  
reduce the amount of shaming that happens

it becomes easier  
to stick up for those things  
without losing friends  
'cause you're doing it  
in a way that doesn't  
make people feel bad  
or ashamed

a british comedian  
wrote a whole book  
about public shaming  
on social media  
trying to avoid that  
really helpful in  
maintaining relationships

i'm far from perfect  
sometimes i just don't say anything  
if it's a work situation

it's not worth getting

eight dudes pissed off at me  
'cause the places i've worked  
they're all kitchens  
instead of      you know  
hipster university students  
it's just  
    late twenties guys  
    don't really have  
    any exposure to  
    sort of  
critical left  
    culture and theory  
and are casual and carefree  
there's not that level of awareness  
i think sometimes  
it's easier with people  
who have a basic level  
of awareness  
fine tune that  
whereas  
someone who doesn't have  
the basic level of awareness  
    or who chooses not to have it

in my group of friends  
a Métis woman  
an Indigenous man  
they will often lack the  
emotional energy  
to explain to a white person  
who is really aggressive  
on facebook  
about why they're getting shitty  
    they will tag me  
    or my friends into  
    the conversation  
    to explain to this  
    other white person  
    what they are doing  
    wrong  
putting into practice  
the idea that  
people who experience oppression  
shouldn't

shouldn't have to  
explain their oppression  
to their oppressor  
it should be a peer-to-peer conversation

there are different conceptions  
of reconciliation  
a very piecemeal kind  
of reconciliation  
changing individual attitudes  
towards groups  
we need to work  
to eradicate prejudice  
by alleviating the kinds of things  
that create stereotypes  
    stereotypes  
are all results  
of colonialism  
and extensions  
of residential schools  
direct consequences  
of the genocide committed  
by the canadian government  
    doing that education  
    starting that process  
        of decolonization

reverse those stereotypes  
repatriating land  
allowing for self-government  
full embrace of ceremony  
so much healing  
    to be done for addiction  
        through ceremony

reconciliation needs to be  
a very tangible real thing  
that is not subtle at all  
federal government  
is in a  
year  
of reconciliation  
right now  
but  
they just approved two pipelines  
that don't even have



majority consent from the  
Indigenous communities  
whose land  
they run through  
like that's not meaningful

actual reconciliation means an open  
conversation letting the cmhr<sup>17</sup>  
talk about genocide  
part of the cultural identity  
of canada

    this happened in our past  
    now we're overcoming it  
    not denying it

being very open  
in elementary school  
showing       The Secret Path  
reading       Wenjack  
telling those stories

any downplaying of it  
then you can't reconcile  
truth and reconciliation  
the words are in that order for a reason

i think there is still  
a long of denial  
about the realisms  
a lot of wanting  
everything to be okay  
right away

there aren't memorials  
to the extent that there are  
for wars  
hasn't really been  
meaningfully incorporated into  
curriculum yet especially in universities  
much more learning  
before  
reconciliation can be  
an extremely potent force  
conversations about  
    reversing       colonization

---

<sup>17</sup> canadian museum for human rights

granting            land claims  
changing           political geography  
reinstating        funding  
funding            the cultural resurgence

not telling Indigenous people  
what that has to look like  
not forcing Indigenous children  
to participate in public education  
if they'd rather participate in land-based education

i don't think  
the culture  
was ever demolished  
it was just driven  
underground  
someone who knows  
how to trap and hunt and store food  
and prepare it  
care for a community in a sustainable way  
that should be as valuable as  
a bachelor's degree  
a master's degree  
a lifetime of learning right there  
isn't really acknowledged as  
being valuable right now

there is  
sense of entitlement  
to leadership positions  
very much part of the  
culture in north america  
start practicing rotational  
leadership putting the community  
before themselves  
room to put those narratives  
into    into classrooms  
          hypervaluing the most public person  
          in an organization  
          the most competent or best  
          that's not true  
everything within our society  
is so hierarchical  
it feels like  
you have to be at the top  
          everyone has a role  
          everyone has something to contribute

that's a healthier understanding  
men and women aren't--  
neither is more important than the other  
roles overlap  
roles change

learning about societal organization  
historic Indigenous committees  
historically women made all  
of the economic decisions  
if something came into the community  
they would be the ones who  
divided that up          fair for everyone  
very key role  
recognized and respected          men stayed  
   out of their way

there's been a bit of a shift  
away from that  
just needs to go back

just used this friend's quote  
found in the paper  
i remember it  
                                 decolonization does not go unnoticed  
it has to be huge societal changes  
because  
foundationally  
                 settler colonial societies  
                 are resting  
                 on these huge pillars of injustice  
we need to completely demolish them