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Art as Cultural Practice: Voices of Kainai Nation Educators on Students' School Engagement and Wellness following a Community-led Art Workshop

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Art as Cultural Practice: Voices of Kainai Nation Educators on Students' School Engagement
and Wellness following a Community-led Art Workshop

by

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A THESIS

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Abstract

This thesis examines the role of an art workshop in releasing Indigenous youth's creativity and connecting them to school in a culturally appropriate way. My research questions consider how cultural and artistic engagement address student wellness and educational engagement in order to consider how pedagogy and curriculum can be adapted to better serve Blackfoot students.

Following research conversations with school personnel, Storywork analysis was used to explore the importance of art-as-therapy, self-representation, art as a voice, traditional examples of art in culture, and contemporary Indigenous art politics. This study found that art connected youth to their culture, their peers and their school. Art was also described as a method for rediscovering voice, empowering students, and developing a positive identity. The findings are intended to support schools' capacities to respond to Indigenous student wellness and educational needs.

Findings will support a larger initiative that seeks to articulate a framework that other Indigenous communities and schools may draw upon.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Personal and Community Contexts

This thesis describes the process of engaging in community research with the Blackfoot people of Kainai Nation. Through a community orientation and a decolonizing approach, the intention of this research was to support the Kainai Board of Education (KBE) during the implementation and evaluation of a culturally rooted intervention. KBE partnered with local Blackfoot artists to implement a community-led, traditional and contemporary art workshop. The purposes of the art workshop were to Indigenize education, focus on youth wellness, and promote positive cultural identity. My role in this process was to support KBE's evaluation of the intervention by collecting narrative, reflective data from school personnel, namely teachers. These interviews focused on Indigenous student wellness and educational needs.

In carrying out this research, it was my intention to collaborate with the local community to highlight community voice and autonomy by creating a space for dialogue. Finally, in contrast to the deficit framework that dominates discourse about Indigenous people, I approached this study from a strength-based perspective to better understand the experiences, positive personal and social context of Blackfoot youth in the Kainai community. This first chapter serves to outline the rationale for the study by situating the current project and highlighting my role as the researcher.

Situating the current project. This research was a collaborative effort that arose through the initiatives of Kainai Board of Education (KBE) and the University of Calgary. KBE seeks to offer students a valuable education that merges 21st century skills with traditional teachings that follow spirit guidance (Kainai Board of Education, 2011). In partnership with my co-supervisor, Dr. Karlee Fellner, and Blackfoot artist Lauren Monroe Jr., KBE initiated an art

workshop to encourage traditional teachings and connection to culture. My engagement with the arts workshop marked my entry to the community. In early 2018, I began attending community events. As I made connections and built relations in the local community, I negotiated with members of the KBE for my master's thesis research. Within this research project, I set out to explore community-based approaches to wellness in the classroom, and this objective was rendered important by the community. This thesis was designed to investigate how Indigenous youth utilized an arts workshop for well-being and classroom engagement. I also investigate how traditional and contemporary Indigenous art can interrupt dominant education frameworks and better serve Indigenous youth.

Reflections on Research as an Ally

As a non-Indigenous researcher, I begin by locating myself and acknowledging my biases. Absolon and Willett (2005) suggest that, "Identifying, at the outset, the location from which the voice of the researcher emanates is an Aboriginal way of ensuring that those who study, write, and participate in knowledge creation are accountable for their own positionality" (p. 97).

To begin, I am of European heritage with Dutch, German, and Belgium ancestry. I grew up in central Alberta and was aware of Indigenous people in the surrounding area. My understandings came from two sources: What I was taught in school and comments of peers and acquaintances. While I was taught general knowledge on colonization and the current state of reconciliation, I was ignorant to the depth of these events. My lack of conscientiousness was in part affected by the messages and stereotypes I heard from the general public. These same comments, however, came to fuel my passion for social justice. As I educated myself on how intergenerational trauma and social contexts have played a part in Indigenous peoples' well-

being, I recognized that the stereotypes of Indigenous communities did not match my own observations. Discrimination is a constant reality for Indigenous people and is a factor contributing to the current consequences of colonialism (Smith, 2012). Another factor is systemic racism which has been engrained in many societal institutions (Toulouse, 2013). As I began to educate myself on these realities, I wanted to conduct my research from a community-based and social justice-oriented framework.

As I embarked on this work, I reflected on my western ways of knowing and strived to keep them separate from this work. I approached every aspect of this research study with caution, in part because of the previous damage done by insensitive, non-Indigenous researchers (Archibald, 2008; Smith, 2012). I consistently had to remind myself to remove my western orientation towards research. As I tried to navigate the two perspectives, I was greatly impressed by a framework that included the proposition of two-eyed seeing (Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2012). Two-eyed seeing is a framework that appreciates and combines both Indigenous and Western knowledge systems. Through the strengths of Indigenous knowledge and Western knowledge, both eyes are used together for the benefit of all. Two-eyed seeing was developed by Albert Marshall, an Elder in Eskasoni First Nation in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. When Elder Marshall brought forward the concept of two-eyed seeing, he referred to it as a guiding principle for integrative science provided that it honors relationships and collaboration. Through respectful relationships, there is room for cross-cultural collaboration and mutual benefit. Elder Marshall does not ask that people abandon their way of knowing, but rather that they draw on the strengths of others. Two-eyed seeing asks each collaborator to always be looking for another perspective in order to find a better way of doing things. In the absence of two-eyed seeing, Elder Marshall states, “When you force people to abandon their ways of knowing, their ways of seeing the

world, you literally destroy their spirit and once that spirit is destroyed it is very, very difficult to embrace anything [...] This is what we truly believe, [...] that no one being is greater than the next, that we are part and parcel of the whole, we are equal” (Bartlett, Marshall, Marshall, & Iwama, 2012, p. 296)

Holding a framework that honored both forms of knowledge (western and Indigenous), allowed me to work as an ally and collaborator. In further honoring my role as an ally, I acknowledged the traumatic history of colonization, numerous injustices and acts of inequality that have been perpetrated by Western researchers. Knowledge for the sake of knowledge itself is not a justifiable reason to be researching Indigenous communities. This history of inquiry exemplifies why Linda Smith states that “research is one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world’s vocabulary” (Smith, 2012, p. 1). Though a harsh criticism of research, she goes on to articulate a path for scholars to decolonize their methods so that work is produced in accord with the interests of the community. Of additional value in placing myself in this research was Shawn Wilson’s (2007) book “Research is Ceremony.” Upon reflection, his stance is not who undertakes the work, but how it is undertaken, and he further discusses an Indigenous paradigm and shows that its foundation is relationships. Therefore, if I can become an ally with this Indigenous community, I can honor this community by building relationships and recognizing that the research belongs to them.

As my research unfolded, my intentions were to work with a community in a collaborative and participatory manner. I wanted to seek the voice of this community and support an initiative that was important to them. This approach to research allowed me to begin to implement a decolonizing methodology, an approach I will further discuss in Chapter 3. As a non-Indigenous person, it was imperative I did not let my Western bias control the methods of

this work. My involvement was merely to explore and project Indigenous voices by accurately reporting research findings. According to Aboriginal scholar Alfred (2005): “If non-Indigenous readers are capable of listening, they will learn from these shared words [between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples], and they will discover that while we are envisioning a new relationship. . .we are at the same time offering a decolonized alternative to the Settler society by inviting them to share our vision of respect and peaceful coexistence” (p. 35).

Throughout the research I committed myself to the role as an ally and collaborator. I worked to create a safe space for dialogue by listening without judgment or imposition of my own beliefs and culture. Through voice and agency, this research supports Indigenous self-determination as it reflects the communities needs and perspectives. Below is an excerpt from my journal to detail the emotions I was experiencing when I began this work:

Seeking to conduct this research in good relation, I begin by locating myself. I am a 23-year-old Caucasian female from central Alberta. I grew up in a middle-class family with a mother, father and 3 brothers. I am fortunate to be a part of a loving family and to have grown up in a community relatively free from harm. My family is Christian and I continue to hold to that belief system without fear that I will be forced to give it up my spirituality like so many Indigenous people were.

My white skin has afforded me privileges that I know others do not experience. However, provided my upbringing in a safe and monocultural neighborhood, I was naïve to my privilege. I recall learning about the residential school experience and I remember feeling angry that people had the capacity to enact and sustain such beliefs. I was also sad that so many children were not able to experience a loving home like the one I grew up in, and that so many mothers and fathers had the right to parent their own child taken away from them. My family relations and my

spirituality are a large part of my identity, and thus I am sorrowed by Canada's history of colonization.

The feelings of anger and sadness have motivated my social justice orientation and I now find myself in a place where I may be able to enact research that is with and for the people. I therefore must also locate my professional identity. As a researcher in psychology, I am learning about methods. My orientation has been Eurocentric so I am new to the process of Indigenous research. I recognize how my upbringing and my identity color my perspective of the world. While I cannot remove my inherent bias, I can be transparent and acknowledge that it will guide my perspectives and understandings.

Indigenous Identity

Indigenous is a global term that includes persons of Inuit, Metis, and First Nation descent (Canadian Tri-Council, 2014). Other collective terms in use include 'First Peoples,' 'Native Peoples,' 'People of the Land,' or 'Aboriginals; however, since the term Indigenous was used in the *Constitution Act* of 1982, it has been deemed a globally representative term and will be used throughout this thesis (Indigenous Services Canada, 2018). Generally, identity is based on shared characteristics and origins with another person or group (Weaver, 2001). The term Indigenous is inclusive to those who are the first inhabitants of Canada, but there is need to recognize the distinct history and context of each community. Diversity within and among communities can include unique heritages, languages, and spiritual beliefs (Canadian Tri-Council, 2014). In recognizing the diversity among Indigenous groups, a brief review of the Kainai Nation is provided.

Kainai Nation: Land and Stories. Kainai First Nation, conventionally known as the Blood Tribe, is a member of the Siksikaitsitapi (Blackfoot confederacy) along with their allies

the Piikani (North and South) and Siksika Nation (Blackfoot; Bastien, 2004). They are considered the oldest residents of the western prairie region, with traditional territory being bordered in northern Alberta by the North Saskatchewan River, in the south by the Yellowstone River, in the west by the Rocky Mountains, and in the east by the Sand Hills of Saskatchewan (Bastien, 2004).

Historians have described Blackfoot people as self-reliant and self-sufficient (Bastien, 2004). Their traditional territory was rich in natural resources, and their social and political systems had a strong foundation (Bastien, 2004). In the 1870s, the confederacy signed to Treaty No.7 with both the United States and Canada. Southern Piikani Nation settled in Montana while Siksika, Kainai and Northern Piikani established reserves in Southern Alberta. Signatory was a means of peaceful coexistence, as they exchanged land for annuities of food and medical aid (Bastien, 2004). However, assimilationist policies did occur but despite them, Kainai Nation held onto pride for their identity and was able to retain traditional language and culture (Bastien, 2004). Overcoming the colonial powers of the European government and churches is a significant historical event from which the Blood Tribe continues to draw strength (Bastien, 2004).

Research Objectives

From this orientation, the main objectives of this research are as follows: 1) To explore teachers' reflections on students' experience in traditional and contemporary Blackfoot cultural and artistic engagement as a means to address student wellness and educational engagement; 2) To describe how engagement in traditional and contemporary Blackfoot culture and art can benefit Blackfoot students; and 3) To understand how traditional and contemporary Blackfoot

cultural and artistic engagement can be included in pedagogy and curriculum to better serve Blackfoot students.

Organization of Chapters

This thesis is comprised of five chapters that will describe the process and results of engaging with Kainai Nation educators to accomplish the above-noted objectives. This introductory chapter is followed by a literature review that is comprised of two major sections: The history of Indigenous peoples' connection with the West, and a presentation of the extant literature on Indigenous youth well-being and school engagement. Before embarking on this study, an understanding of the history of colonization and the impact it is having on communities today was necessary. It was also imperative to examine the history of research in various communities to understand how I can work from a decolonizing approach. Thus, this first section serves to provide context for the research topic and an overview of the study methodology. In the second major section of the literature review, I explore culture as a means for youth wellness and for school engagement. In chapter three, I discuss community-based research methods and Indigenous perspectives on research, both of which have informed the methodology used in this study. In chapter four, the findings of this project are presented. Finally, chapter five will focus on the implications and limitations of this project.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Part One: The Indigenous Context: Shadows of Colonization

Indigenous peoples of Canada have varying experiences in mainstream North American society. While some people and groups remain rich in culture and language, others are struggling to regain their identities following the residential school experience and other acts of colonization and forced assimilation (Adams, 1999; Partridge, 2010). The relationship between Indigenous people and European settlers has shifted greatly since it was first established in the 1500's (INAC, 2014). During the 1500's, colonial settlers entered the "new world" of Canada and acquired the assistance of Indigenous people to learn hunting skills and export goods through trade routes (INAC, 2014). This relationship also extended to military alliances during European power struggles (INAC, 2014). However, with an increase in European settlers, there was a shift towards British ideals (INAC, 2014; 2015).

The 1800's were characterized by settlers pushing for ownership of Indigenous lands, creating initiatives for "civilization" and assimilating Indigenous people towards a Christian and agrarian society (INAC, 2014). Legislation and programs, including the Indian Act in 1876, adopted assimilationist policies aimed at creating a non-Indigenous society (INAC, 2012). The Indian Act was a series of laws that gave the government power over Indigenous people (INAC, 2012). Such laws included the creation of reserves, the need for a pass to leave the reserve, the introduction of residential schools and the prohibition of traditional language, religion or cultural customs (Joseph, 2018). The primary vehicle for assimilation was residential schools, which became compulsory during the 1900's. Residential schools were often built away from Indigenous land, thus requiring children to be removed from their families. The schools are documented to have been rife with coercion and abuse. Indigenous children were forced to

abandon their traditional ways of life, including their traditional names, language, dress, and ceremonies.

Significant social disparities were further perpetuated by what has become known as the Sixties Scoop (Sinclair, 2007). In 1951, an amendment to the Indian Act gave welfare agencies the power to place Indigenous children in out-of-home care (foster care, group care) or adoption (Sinclair, 2007). The sixties scoop appeared to substitute the residential school system as children were predominantly placed in non-Indigenous environments without the consent of families or band councils (Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Sinclair, 2007). The number of Indigenous children placed in care was significant, and data suggests Indigenous children were, and continue to be, significantly overrepresented in comparison to non-Indigenous children. For example, during the 1970s, statistics show approximately one in three Indigenous children were placed in-care (Sinclair, 2007). Indigenous youth were disproportionately apprehended throughout Canada, and in the 1980s, approximately 44% were placed in care in Alberta, 51% in Saskatchewan, and 60% in Manitoba (McKenzie & Hudson, 1985).

In Canada, Indigenous people's discontent with child welfare practices were increasingly vocalized (Sinclair, 2007). A monumental and impactful judicial review was led in 1985 by Justice Edward Kimelman. This review on the state of Indigenous youth adoption was fueled by the growing unrest of communities. Justice Kimelman criticized child welfare agencies for their practices and he concluded that "cultural genocide has taken place in a systematic, routine manner" (Kimelman, 1985, p. 51). By 1999, Indigenous youth in Manitoba represented approximately 68% of the youth in-care (INAC, 2015). In Canadian Incidence studies (CIS), Indigenous youth have been over-represented in-care throughout the years (Trocmé, et al., 2001).

Despite making up 5% of the population in 1998, they comprised 25% of the children admitted to care.

During the Sixties Scoop, the placement of children in residential schools was still occurring. In Canada, compelling evidence suggests that a cycle of trauma was occurring (Fournier & Crey, 1997; Elias, Mignone, Hall, Hong, Hart, & Sareen, 2012). Attempts to re-socialize and Christianize Indigenous youth loosened the bond between children and their parents, cultural, spiritual roots, language, and respect for self and others (Elias, Mignone, Hall, Hong, Hart, & Sareen, 2012; RCAP, 1996). Upon release from the schools, the violence and abuse led many survivors to drugs, alcohol, gambling, and other addictive behaviours as a means to cope with the trauma. Suicide rates among Indigenous populations also began to increase in comparison to their non-Indigenous counterparts (Adelson, 2005).

To explore the link between residential schools and trauma, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) released a final report in 1996 recommending a public investigation into the violence and abuse at residential schools (INAC, 2015). In 1996, the last official residential school closed, and in 2008 a public apology was offered to those affected by the residential school. The apology was followed by an agenda to correct the wrongs and revitalize Canada's relationship with Indigenous people. These events mark the reconciliation era. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) led a public investigation to reveal the hidden experiences of residential school survivors. Following six years of gathering more than 6,000 stories, the truth of the residential schools laid the foundation for reconciliation. However, achieving reconciliation remains difficult. While policies were created to reconceptualize rights and support communities' health and well-being, the trauma Indigenous people experienced is still present today.

Canada's long history of colonization continues to impact a communities' health, social, and economic statuses (Henry & Tator, 2012). Intergenerational trauma is the term used to encompass the socio-psychological detriments across generations of people with a shared identity (Gone, 2013). In contrast to individual experiences of trauma, historical trauma is collective, cumulative, and intergenerational (Gone, 2013; Sotero, 2006). For Indigenous peoples, the collective trauma of colonization is exemplified by the forceful removal of children from their families during the residential school era and the sixties scoop. Having being taken from their families, their land, and their cultural customs, the trauma has affected generations.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples reported in 1996 that Indigenous youth are suffering from their relatives' experience in residential schools (RCAP, 1996). These concerns have continued to grow as the rate of illness, mental health concerns, and morbidity for Indigenous people exceed that of the general population (Frohlich, Ross, & Richmond, 2006). Recent research has shown that, at a national level, there continues to be health and social inequalities among Indigenous people compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts (Blackstock, 2007; Ly & Crowshoe, 2015). Disparities perpetuated by colonialism include suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, school drop-out, and unemployment (Findlay & Janz, 2012; Oliver, Peters, & Kohen, 2012). Further, Indigenous youth are more likely to experience chronic illness (Smylie & Adomako, 2009), lower food security (Rudolph & McLachlan, 2013), and unstable housing (Ralph & Ryan, 2017). Colonialism has exposed Indigenous youth to a variety of wellness challenges (the physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional dimensions of one's life) and has impacted their knowledge of culture and cultural identity (Adams, 2002; Pulla, 2013; RCAP, 2008).

Part Two: Spaces for Wellness: Culturally Appropriate Responses

Strength-based research. While statistics on Indigenous mental health and wellness may serve to highlight growing concerns, such research does little to improve quality of life or to highlight the strengths and resilience of Indigenous communities (Stewart, Riecken, Scott, Tanaka, & Ricken, 2008). Generally, resilience is defined as “bouncing back” (Lopez, Pedrotti, & Snyder, 2015, p. 106) from a significant adverse experience. What an individual may “bounce back” to is subjective, since an individual acquires a baseline (i.e., normal) functioning in accordance to prior experiences and behaviours (Lopez, Pedrotti, & Snyder, 2015). Long-standing trauma from systemic colonization presents a unique factor that may alter how resilience is brought about in Indigenous communities (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008). Research on resilience in Canadian Indigenous youth finds that engagement in culture, positive peer and family relationships, and a positive self-identity to be key factors (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008). Engagement in culture may include land-based activities, traditional language use, or ceremonies (Wexler, 2014). Connection to community and culture leads to a positive cultural identity and holistic model of resilience (Wexler, 2014).

A resilience-based framework from applied developmental science is known as positive youth development (PYD; Lopez, Pedrotti, & Snyder, 2015). PYD is a model that generally provides youth with resources to enhance their psychological and physical assets by highlighting positive strengths and assets in youth (Lopez et al., 2015; Lopez, Pedrotti, & Snyder, 2015). Using PYD, effective programs will focus on the strengths of youth as opposed to pathology and delinquency (Smith, 2007). Specific to Indigenous communities, research that only reports on trauma, suicide, and health indicators, makes it challenging for Indigenous people to develop a healthy, cultural identity void of the negative statistics and stereotypes (Hudson, 2016; Stewart et

al., 2008). Further, deficit-based measures do not identify Indigenous world-views of well-being; Western definitions of well-being consider socio-economic indicators and biomedical status to account for the health and safety of individuals (Kingsley et al., 2013). However, Indigenous constructs of well-being are more complex, as they include the contextual and spiritual dimensions of one's life.

Indigenous worldviews are holistic, alive, spiritual, and everything is believed to be in relation to one another (Simpson, 2000). Based on traditional medicine wheel teachings, wellbeing occurs when human relationships and relations with the natural and spiritual world are in balance with one another (Rountree & Smith, 2016). Indeed, the extant research largely neglects the unique cultural factors that contribute to Indigenous well-being (Toombs, Kowatch, & Mushquash, 2016). Indicators of Indigenous well-being include the health and safety of immediate and extended family members (Boulton & Gifford, 2014), land use, and cultural connection (Kant, Vertinsky, Zheng, & Smith, 2013), and harmony between mind, body, spirit, and land (McCubbin et al., 2013). Relationships, cultural values, and a positive cultural identity appear to have a stronger link to Indigenous well-being than economic security or physical health (Roundtree & Smith, 2016).

Indicators of well-being take the focus from deficit- to strength-based perspectives. Strength-based approaches to wellbeing are increasingly being utilized in the helping profession (e.g., psychology, social work, and nursing) as they are seen to empower the patient or client (Cederbaum, & Klusaritz, 2009; Saleebey, 1996; Smith, 2006; Tayyab & Ostermann, 2009). By focusing on inherent strengths rather than problems, research can provide a more complete report on Indigenous youth development (Roundtree & Smith, 2016). Adopting a strength-based and culturally informed approach to work with Indigenous youth is foundational in supporting

Indigenous youth development. In contrast to mainstream therapeutic approaches, the notion of “culture as treatment” has been suggested to foster strength (Gone, 2013, p. 688). Indigenous people have survived generations of attempted genocide, suggesting that they already possess the knowledge and skills to thrive in the face of hardship (Wexler, 2014).

Engaging students in the classroom. Adopting a “culture as treatment” mindset in the education system may help Indigenous youth thrive and begin to overcome the achievement gap. Indigenous students’ high school and post-secondary school achievement is significantly lower than their non-Indigenous counterparts (Chapman, Laird, Ifill, & KewalRamani, 2011). A 2006 Statistics Canada report showed that approximately 33% of Indigenous people, aged 25 to 64, had less than a high school education, while 13% of non-Indigenous people had no certificate, diploma, or degree (Statistics Canada, 2018). This 20% gap is alarming, as job opportunities exist but Indigenous youth may be prevented from acquiring them without higher education (Barnard, 2015).

Literature on Indigenous youth and education has grown from a body of scholarship on multicultural education and students of color (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). Generally, students of color and those of low socioeconomic status perform lower than their peers (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). Responding to the achievement gap, educators have suggested that schooling be designed in accordance with the students’ culture (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Gay, 2000). Culturally responsive education (CRE) is commonly utilized in the field of multicultural education, and more recently it has been found in literature on Indigenous education (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). The term CRE is dynamic and “suggests the ability to acknowledge the unique needs of diverse students, take action to address those needs, and adapt approaches as student needs and demographics change over time” (Klump & McNeir, 2005, p. 4). The method

reveres students' by utilizing their culture to engender optimal learning environments (Banks, 2007; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Gay, 2000).

CRE is believed to be efficacious as it engages students through culture and shifts the deficit approach to strength-based. To engage youth in school, identities must be celebrated and students should be engaged in shaping their own educational futures. Enacting CRE, teachers must be flexible and culture should be integrated into pedagogy. It is expected that such an approach will contribute to safe classrooms and schools, enhance self-esteem, and thus motivate learners (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Gay, 2000).

Supporting Indigenous students in school is critical in light of the history of residential schools and the current education gap. Historically, education for Indigenous people was a means to Christianize and civilize them by prohibiting traditional language and cultural practices (RCAP, 1996). The forceful removal of Indigenous children from their families, and placement in an abuse system exemplifies why many indigenous people distrust educational institutions. To continue with Eurocentric learning environments that are void of Indigenous interests further perpetuates distrust. While the integration of CRE by way of Indigenous language and cultural practices is promising, Castagno and Brayboy (2008) call for continued research on the implications of CRE as the current body of literature is inconclusive. Although more research on CRE is necessary, building a safe learning environment through the use of culture seems significant for Indigenous people.

As research continues and policies are developed, three criteria for culturally responsive Indigenous education should be considered, (a) teachings should be holistic (Lewthwaite, et al., 2015; b) relationships should be valued (Moje & Hinchman, 2004; c) and teachings should hold to the seminal concepts of respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility (Archibald, Pidgeon,

& Hawkey, 2009). A commonly acknowledged difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of knowing is holism (Wilson, 2008). Indigenous worldviews of holism place emphasis on the bigger picture, stating that parts do not exist without the whole (Wilson, 2008). A second acknowledged difference is the value of relationships (Wilson, 2008). In the school setting, this can be enacted by school staff developing personal relationships with their students (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). Finally, the four R's of respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility are principles that ensure work with Indigenous communities will be ethical (Wilson, 2008; Archibald, 2008).

In regards to the first principle of respect, it is recognized that Indigenous people experience a lack of respect, not just as individuals, but more fundamentally as people (Ragoonaden & Mueller, 2017). Educational institutions should work to counter this by bringing in cultural knowledge, traditions and values; these elements should not just be incorporated, they should be highly regarded and respected. Further, to make the content relevant, a general scan of cultural traditions and values is not enough. Policies, practices, and curricula is made respectful and relevant by including Indigenous knowledge and skills. Schools engage with Indigenous students when they commit to developing inclusive, culturally-responsive practices that embrace students strengths (Ragoonaden & Mueller, 2017). This is concurrent with the work of Roundtree and Smith (2016) who advocated that formal educational practices be decolonized by moving beyond the deficit perspective to build students strengths.

To bring reciprocity into education, an emphasis may need to be put on making teaching and learning a two-way process. The reciprocal relationship of learning about one another's worldviews will help establish balance between western and Indigenous knowledge systems (Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2012; Wilson, 2008). Educators, policy makers, and institutional

leaders must try to understand the cultural backgrounds of their students, and in turn the students reciprocate by understanding the institution which they are in. Finally, there is a need for education systems to help Indigenous students exercise responsibility over their own lives. While institutions typically are seen as powerful and in control, handing over responsibility is a means to reaffirm Indigenous rights to self-determination and respect (Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2012; Michell, 2013).

In building culturally responsive education through Indigenous value systems, an important step is to support Indigenous students in reclaiming voice (Antone, 2000; McCarty, Micholas, 2017). As an example of a strength-based approach, Pennisi (2013) designed a research project to counter the resistance and apathy in middle school students. The project was predicated on critical pedagogy as its philosophy is to empower students to be reflective, thoughtful, and actively engaged in society. To enact critical pedagogy, students are encouraged to partake in decisions that directly impact them. Consequently, Pennisi's (2013) used participatory action research to engage students' perspectives while minimizing teacher talk. Understanding that students' educational involvement can extend to decision-making on pedagogical strategies helped create a new classroom environment. Engaging students in the classroom is paramount in promoting a sense of belonging (Taylor, 2015). Allowing students to co-construct their classroom seems a promising method for engagement, but it is likely that this is not feasible for all teachers; given classroom time constraints and personnel to student ratio, many teachers may experience exhaustion. Alternative theories for promoting classroom belonging includes assigning projects that are both strength-based and empower youth voices (Antone, 2000; McCarty & Micholas, 2017).

Art and healing. Strength-based approaches to Indigenous health research are promising. The focus on protective factors, namely the role of culture in wellness, has increasingly surfaced in the literature (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Pulla, 2013). Protective factors are those elements that strengthen the likelihood of positive development by enhancing one's ability to handle risk-filled situations (Masten & Reed, 2002). Traditional values and cultural engagement appear to be protective factors that support Indigenous youth through wellness challenges (i.e., physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional dimensions of one's life; Pulla, 2013). Creative arts are an integral part of Indigenous culture, and examples include visual art, beading and sewing, singing, drumming, dancing, theatre, writing, and storytelling (Archibald & Dewar, 2010). Through interviews with therapists, healers, and counselors, Archibald and Dewar (2010) found that the creative arts are a component of holistic healing. Art was found to connect people to culture, spirituality, and have a positive influence on identity (Archibald & Dewar, 2010). Indigenous worldviews are holistic, and thus culture, spirituality, and art are not separate from healing (Archibald, Dewar, Reid, & Stevens 2010). Archibald and colleagues (2010) discovered in their focus groups that the spirit can be awakened through art. Further, participants found art to be a holistic form of healing as it activates the physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental aspects of self (Archibald, Dewar, Reid, & Stevens 2010).

In general, the benefit that creative engagement can have on psychosocial problems includes decreased anxiety, stress, and mood disturbances (Stuckey & Nobel, 2010). In the literature, art has been used in various forms of therapy and with various populations. For example, art was used as a form of expressive therapy with lower-SES Latino women to help them establish their cultural roots (Ciornai, 1983). Art has also been incorporated into mindfulness practice, namely mindfulness-based art therapy (MBAT), and been shown to have

positive effects on the self-perception of women with cancer diagnoses (Monti et al 2015). Art as therapy can take on many forms and has been shown to be effective in reducing adverse psychosocial experiences. Tapping into the arts seems a value method for wellbeing and may be integral in the classroom.

From problematizing to partnership. Recovering Indigenous identity and sovereignty continues to be a challenge, as racism, discrimination, colonialism, and oppression plague communities who are seeking self-determination (Castagno & McKinley, 2008). These forms of “othering” perpetuate a discourse on the “Indigenous problem” (Smith, 2012). The “Indigenous problem” is a term representing policies and research initiatives that are hostile and conceptualize Indigenous peoples as *the* problem (Smith, 2012). For example, when Europeans entered Indigenous territory, the results were considered “a problem of the natives” (Smith, 2012, p. 95). Further, in Western research it is common to begin a project by stating a research problem. For Indigenous peoples, their entire existence appears to be a question or a research problem for scholars. Smith argues that, “problematizing the Indigenous is a Western obsession” (Smith, 1999, p. 91), often framed as, “the ... (insert name of Indigenous group) problem” or “the ... (insert name of Indigenous group) question” (Smith, 1999, p. 90).

From an Indigenous perspective, research itself has become a form of colonialism (Ormiston, 2010; Smith, 2012). Researcher’s investigations of Indigenous communities’ health, social, and economic under achievements fail to include the wider social, economic, and political contexts in which communities exist (Smith, 2012). Indigenous people have rightly become wary of Western institutions, including research (Smith, 2012). Research produced without input from Indigenous people is often not helpful and could be considered harmful, as it is formulated from a Western framework (Ormiston, 2010). Howell and colleagues coined the term “knowledge

nullification” in response to the policies and procedures that devalue Indigenous knowledge (Howell et al., 2016). The Indigenous people have survived generations of genocide and epidemics, suggesting that they already possess the knowledge and skills to thrive in the face of hardship (Wexler, 2014). As stated by Smith (2012), the survival of Indigenous people has come from their knowledge of context and environment: “We had to know to survive. We had to work out ways of knowing, we had to predict, to learn and reflect, we had to preserve and protect, we had to defend and attack, we had to be mobile, we had to have social systems which enabled us to do these things. We still have to do these things” (Smith, 2012, p. 13).

In sum, the health of Indigenous people has intrigued researchers, but efforts at exploring the presence of health and wellness have not always been helpful. The imbalances within research and the historical problematizing of Indigenous communities begs the question of how “two knowledge systems can work together in an ethical manner from a place where both traditions are respected?” (Styres, & Zinga, 2013, p. 287). Seeking to answer this question, Styres and Zinga (2013) suggest that solution-oriented, strength-based approaches and community-led research should be the focus.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada (2015) calls for meaningful supports for Indigenous youth in schools. Meaningful supports that advance Indigenous education may occur by centering wellness in Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. Promising research on culturally appropriate representations of student wellness has occurred but communities and school districts are not homogeneous and the implementation of such interventions are likely to differ. Further, cultural engagement does not typically extend to the arts, but for the purposes of the present study, it was deemed valuable by the Kainai Board of

Education, and thus, this study aims to support the implementation and evaluation of traditional and contemporary cultural and artistic engagement for students.

The Current Study

The history of Indigenous research is defined largely by Western approaches and work imposed on communities with a deficit-based approach (Craven et al., 2016). This thesis seeks to move beyond deficit-based approaches and address the need for community-led interventions by supporting the implementation and evaluation of a cultural and artistic student workshop. Despite some promising interventions for Indigenous youth, each community is distinct in its needs and assets. Operationalizing this approach, Dr. Fellner, Blackfoot artist Lauren Monroe Jr., and members of the members of the Kainai Board of Education collaborated to create various cultural and artistic engagement opportunities for students. It is important to acknowledge that this thesis takes place in the wake of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC, 2015a), and that this community-based, Indigenous approach is made possible within this context. Reconciliation is the process of rebuilding relationships with Indigenous people. Individually and collectively, Canadians must work toward meaningful change (TRC, 2015a). Meaningful change may occur by addressing the TRC's Calls to Action (TRC, 2015b). The TRC has mandated that "educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians" be eliminated (TRC, 2015b). One method to advocate for this change in education and employment is research (Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008).

Niitsitipii Art Installation: The current study took place through the University of Calgary, which is situated on the traditional territories of the people of Treaty 7. Treaty 7 includes Tsuut'ina First Nation, Stoney Nakoda, and the Blackfoot Confederacy comprising Siksika, Piikani (Northern and Southern) and Kainai Nations. Under the direction of Dr. Karlee

Fellner, Lauren Monroe Jr. (Amskapi Piikani), and the Kainai Board of Education, a series of community-led interventions were designed to Indigenize education and engage students in traditional and contemporary culture and art. The community-led interventions included a film workshop, culture camps, and a visual art installation. The visual art installation is the focus of the current study.

The art installation was a two-day event held at Tatsikiisaapo'p Middle School for students from the four tribes of the Blackfoot confederacy. Under the direction and guidance of 15 Indigenous artists (all Blackfoot except one Cree/Métis artist), approximately 120 students attended the event. The art workshops included ledger art, drum making, photography, hip-hop, mixed media, t-shirt making, leather work, jewelry-making, beadwork, acrylic painting, and traditional craft work. The students chose which session they wanted to participate in and completed a full day of art creation. On the second day, the students put their art on display for the community and attended an artist panel with some of the professional Blackfoot artists, where they had the opportunity to learn about art, culture, and wellness, and ask questions. Questions included the use of art as therapy and pursuing a career in the arts.

Overview and Rationale. This research focuses on a two-day visual art workshop and installation in which local Blackfoot artists and a local Cree/Métis artist facilitated various workshops with middle school students. This event was designed to: 1) Focus on youth wellness by engaging youth in activities that are strength-based and promote a positive sense of self and culture; 2) Explore art-as-therapy, voice through art, and traditional and contemporary examples of art; and 3) Decolonize and Indigenize education. While advances have been made, the impact that traditional and contemporary art and culture can have on Indigenous youth in the classroom remains largely unknown. The proposed research seeks to answer three main questions:

1. What are educator's reflections on students' experience in traditional and contemporary Blackfoot cultural and artistic engagement as a means to address student wellness and educational engagement?
2. How does engagement in traditional and contemporary Blackfoot culture and art benefit Blackfoot students?
3. How can traditional and contemporary Blackfoot cultural and artistic engagement be included in pedagogy and curriculum to better serve Blackfoot students?

The current study seeks to contribute to the field of knowledge by using Indigenous approaches to community-based research to explore avenues for culturally appropriate education and school engagement. Literature repeats itself in showing that Indigeneity serves as a protective factor. Therefore, this study seeks to explore how Indigeneity can be expressed through art, and how Blackfoot art can serve to Indigenize education. This research will prioritize community voices, producing research with a decolonizing aim.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Theory and Design

Chapter two served to highlight the need for culturally-rooted research and interventions. As discussed, art is a form of Indigenous culture that may promote wellness and healing. The present study sought to further explore culturally-based artistic expression, and the purpose of the current chapter is to outline the methods used in the current study. The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of a culturally rooted art workshop. To meet this goal, I intentionally drew on Indigenous methods and culturally appropriate methodologies to ensure the voices of the Kainai community were heard. In this chapter, a description of community-based research and Indigenous paradigms are presented. I then lead into how I used research conversations to collect data and how storywork analysis was used to understand these conversations.

Community-Based Research. Increasingly, communities are fighting for research that is action-orientated and participatory (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008). The diverse cultural contexts within and between communities makes efficacious research difficult to conduct without insight from the communities themselves. Specific to Indigenous communities, a collaborative approach to research is advantageous for reducing the distress that researchers have caused in the past, and contributing to research that has a meaningful, beneficial impact (Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008).

Community-based research (CBR) is a strengths-based, action-oriented, and partnership approach to research that breaks down the barriers between the researcher and participants (Minkler, 2004). The three principles that comprise the orientation include: Community-driven, participatory, and action-oriented (Ochocka & Janzen, 2014). Community-driven means striving for research that is of practical relevance to the community. Participatory means that participants are invited to be partners in the research project. Community members and researchers share

decision making on the research design, implementation and dissemination process. Lastly, action-oriented involves research that promotes positive social change. Taken together, research that rests on the aforementioned principles is considered throughout community-based research. To achieve these three pillars of community-based research, common steps include supervision by a research advisory committee, collaborating with the community to generate research questions, and engaging with stakeholders throughout the project (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008; Wallerstein & Duran, 2006). This approach showcases how community partners can be invited into all aspects of the research.

Researchers have a responsibility to do no harm (Cochran, et al., 2011). Provided that CBR is a collaborative orientation and reduces power dynamics, it is an appropriate orientation when working with Indigenous communities (Tremblay et al., 2018). Recognizing Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination, it is important that researchers engage community members in all stages of the research, from conception to dissemination. CBR begins when researchers ask the community what they see as relevant and of need (Minkler, 2004). This beginning step sets the stage for a participatory approach in which the researcher hands over the role of the "expert" and empowers community. CBR can be empowering for communities and can improve social conditions while reducing disparities (Minkler, 2004; Wallerstein, & Duran, 2006). The empowerment that is likely to occur reduces dependency on professionals such that the outcomes of the research are sustainable (Wallerstein & Duran, 2006). The benefits of using CBR in Indigenous communities was exemplified by Castleden, Garvin, and Huu-ay-aht (2008), who found that the orientation fostered trust, built a sense of community ownership and capacity, and balanced power differential between the researcher and community.

Conducting research using a collaborative and action-oriented design is essential when working with Indigenous communities (Kovach, 2009). The history of non-Indigenous researchers entering communities and using methods that are invasive, controlling, and disempowering have contributed to communities' distrust in academic institutions. Despite this history, Smith (2012) states that there is a space for non-Indigenous researchers, but it has to be on the terms of the community. To be a trusted non-Indigenous researcher, one must work with the community and include them as co-researchers. (Smith, 2012). Conducting research in Indigenous communities requires the use of an approach that does better than accommodate the knowledge and practices of Indigenous worldviews (Gabel, Pace, Ryan, 2016); research with Indigenous groups should be guided by an Indigenous paradigm and should be used to design the methodology (Wilson, 2008). The interplay between Indigenous paradigms and methods is instrumental to a culturally appropriate and community centered approach that ensures research with Indigenous peoples is carried out in an ethical, respectful, and beneficial fashion (Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008).

At its core, an Indigenous methodology is about establishing respectful relationships and honoring the community through reciprocity (Wilson, 2008). Relationships to land, community, self, and spirit are the foundations of Indigenous reality (Wilson, 2008). Psychologists should be cognizant of these values when engaging in work with Indigenous populations and seek to honor the relationships they build. Indigenous research is as much about developing relationships as it is about producing research outcomes (Iseke & Moore, 2011). By establishing respectful relationships with community members, researchers gain trust that enables collaboration. Relational accountability can be enacted by collaborating with community members from

implementation to dissemination. Community members are experts on their culture, needs, and assets; therefore, their voice should be privileged throughout the project (Wilson, 2008).

Indigenous paradigm. From an Indigenous worldview, Cree scholar Shawn Wilson (2008) conceptualized an Indigenous paradigm. A paradigm is “a set of beliefs about the world and about gaining knowledge that goes together to guide people’s actions as to how they are going to go about doing their research” (Wilson, 2000, p. 175). Wilson’s (2008) research paradigm was characterized through Indigenous ontology, epistemology, methodology and axiology. Ontology refers to beliefs about the nature of reality, epistemology refers to how we come to have knowledge, methodology refers to how knowledge is gained or how one will use epistemology to gain more knowledge about reality, and finally, an axiology is the ethics or morals that guide what information is worthy of searching for and how research should be conducted (Wilson, 2008).

Ontology is similar to worldview in that both operationally refer to one’s understanding of what exists (Hart, 2010). From an Indigenous perspective, the spiritual realm is interconnected with the physical realm; therefore, reality is the combination of them. Further, there is the belief in relationality; all life is connected, all things have spirit, and all beings should practice reciprocity. As such, reality is constructed through relationships. In coming to know, an Indigenous epistemology is derived from relations with the natural and the cosmic world. Knowledge is generated via interrelationships and encoded and disseminated through storytelling. In reference to storytelling, Indigenous knowledge is considered fluid as it is passed to each generation through stories and legends (Iseke & Brennus, 2011; McKeough et al., 2008). The process of storytelling connects one to their natural relations but is always a way to connect with the cosmic realm (Wilson, 2008). According to Bastien (2004), prayer and meditation are

the root of knowledge acquisition. The Indigenous belief that human beings are interconnected, with both each other and the spiritual realm, suggests that one comes to knowledge by engaging in ceremonies and experiencing wholeness in all relations (Hart, 2010; Bastien, 2004). With an Indigenous ontology and epistemology being rooted in relationships, the process of an Indigenous methodology requires one to continue to honor those relationships through relational accountability. The belief that knowledge is gained through relationships requires researchers to engage and collaborate throughout all aspects of a research project (Wilson, 2008). Finally, the ethics and morals to consider for an Indigenous axiology include respect between research partners, consideration for control over research, reciprocity, and non-judgmental listening (Hart, 2010). To exemplify how the components of an Indigenous paradigm work together, Wilson (2008) states that methods with inherent relationality, such as a talking circle, are good in theory, but only appropriate if the Indigenous axiology of relational accountability is maintained.

At the core of an Indigenous paradigm is relationality (Wilson, 2008). Indigenous ways of thinking, knowing, and being are rooted in the relationship one has with him/her self, community, land, and spirit (Craven, Ryan, Mooney, Valerand, Dillon, Blacklock, & Magson, 2016; Wilson, 2008). The concept of relationality weaves through the four components of an indigenous paradigm, and these components work together in a circular fashion (Wilson, 2008). The components cannot operate in isolation, as the sum is greater than each part (see *Figure 1*).

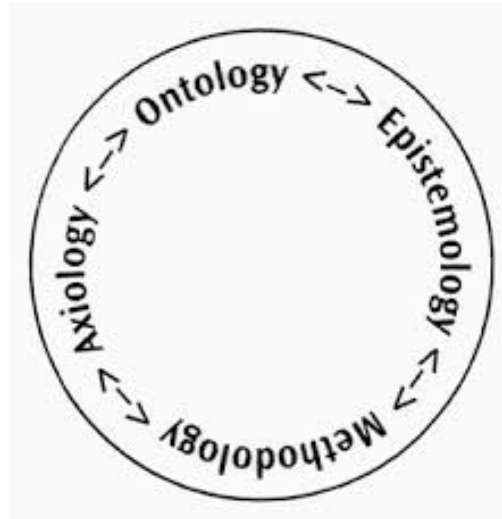


Figure 1. Indigenous paradigm from Wilson (2008)

Using an Indigenous paradigm, research should begin with Indigenous ethical protocols rather than theoretical topics (Kanaqluk, 2001). When one begins with ethical protocols, the research can be designed in a way that it serves the community. This is contrasted with research that begins with a theoretical topic and primarily serves to advance academic knowledge (Wilson, 2008). When the research is community-informed, the outcomes are more likely to be useful and contribute to community's self-determination. Indigenous research resists western power and control, making it a decolonizing process (Smith, 2012); "decolonization, once viewed as the formal process of handing over the instruments of government, is now recognized as a long-term process involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic and psychological divesting of colonial power" (Smith, 2012, p. 101). Decolonizing methods require that all aspects of the research (e.g., topic, research questions, methods) be grounded in community relations (Fellner, 2016).

As a non-Indigenous researcher, I acknowledge that I cannot implement an Indigenous paradigm, but I can enact a community-based paradigm that centers on the ways of knowing,

being, and doing of the community members. In the current research, the method employed to gather data were research conversations (Kovach, 2009), while the method for data analysis was Storywork (Archibald, 2000). Research conversations and Storywork will be further expanded on in this chapter.

Participants

To explore how traditional and contemporary art and cultural engagement impacts student wellness and student voice, and can be used to Indigenize education, a series of interviews were held. I recruited school personnel through formal letters of invitation (see Appendix B). Criteria to participate was that the individual was a school personnel or student present the day of the art workshop. These criteria were in place because participants were being asked to speak about the role of art in culture in youth wellness and the impact of the art workshop.

During the initial stages of this project, it was anticipated that teachers, school personnel, and students be asked to participate in conversations or talking circles. While letters of invitations and parental consent forms were distributed to youth, forms were not returned. Youth voice is valuable, and every effort was made to create a space for them. To adjust for students not being able to participate, school personnel were asked to share stories or conversations that they may have had with the youth. While school personnel articulate these perspectives, it offers a glimpse into the thoughts and experiences of the youth during the art event.

Ethics

Researchers have an ethical obligation to do no harm and to conduct their research in a responsible and respectful manner (Canadian Psychological Association, 2000). As the researcher, I took care to honor the community through respectful relationships and ensure

mutual benefit between myself and the community. Empowering both parties required trust, collaboration, and a methodology that respects the rights and dignity of the research partners. While the community was instrumental in the projects development, the project did not undergo any formal community review. The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Ethics Board formally approved this study.

Overall, the potential for harm was deemed very limited as school personnel were asked to speak about their experiences in the classroom and offer their perspectives on the role of art and culture in wellness. While the risks were not anticipated to be greater than those encountered in everyday life, given the history of unethical research, care was taken to follow culturally appropriate and ethically sound guidelines. The ethical considerations considered include the potential for discomfort, and preservation of cultural knowledge.

To reduce any potential discomfort that may ensue when sharing stories and experiences, open communication was practiced. Upon meeting with participants, I went through the informed consent process, and written consent was also obtained (see Appendix A). During informed consent, participants were informed of the details of the project and the intent of the interview. Participants were told that the interview was voluntary, allowing them to withdraw consent at any time or refuse to answer any questions. Participants were given the opportunity to participate in either a one-on-one research conversation or a talking circle. Participants were informed that if they choose to participate in a talking circle, or have the conversation in a group setting, others will be aware of their participation and confidentiality will be limited. During the dyadic conversation, both participants were reminded that information shared must be kept confidential. However, the research team could not guarantee that participants would keep

information confidential outside of the group. Should any participant ask to be identified by name, they will be associated with their story on any documents that come from this research.

Research protocols were carefully chosen so that the cultural identity of the Blackfoot people was preserved and protected (Brascoupe & Mann, 2001). For example, the conversational style was chosen with the intent to enhance the experiences of all participants. I acknowledge my limited understanding of Blackfoot culture and, therefore, I did not want to limit discussions by prescribing questions that may not be relevant. Finally, the findings of this research belong to the Kainai Nation. To protect their intellectual property, project participants were asked to review all transcripts and findings prior to dissemination (Panel on Research Ethics, 2018).

Procedure

The research sessions took place at Kainai's Tatsikiisaapo'p Middle School. When designing the procedure, I began by acknowledging the history of colonization, and thus, adopted a decolonizing approach. A decolonizing approach was implemented by (a) collaborating with research partners and participants, and (b) allowing flexibility in the interviews so that the participants could tell their own story. The interviews were flexible, in that they were open-ended and encouraged a conversational style with the participants. The conversational approach was chosen based on its principle of relationality, thus making it congruent with Indigenous paradigms (Wilson, 2008). From an Indigenous framework, research conversations serve the purpose of being relational, flexible, and collaborative (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). Research conversations also respect storytelling as a traditional form of knowledge translation (Smith, 2012). Therefore, this approach invokes qualities of an Indigenous epistemology and serves a decolonizing aim. Through the conversations, the school personal were able to discuss their perspectives of art and culture in student wellness (Perkins, 2007).

Consent. Teachers were invited to participate in either a one-on-one research conversation or a talking circle to discuss their experience and impression of the art workshop. Five of the participants asked to be interviewed in an individual conversation, while two asked to have joint conversation. Participants chose the time and location of the conversation. Participants were read the consent form, and if they chose to participate, they were asked to sign their names. All participants consented to being audio-recorded so that the conversation could be transcribed verbatim and reviewed for themes. Participants were also asked to indicate whether they would prefer to have a pseudo name or their given name used when quoting them. Overall, six participants asked that their given name be used, while one chose a pseudonym. When asked this question, one individual said that Indigenous people have had their voices taken from them for so long, they did not need this to continue in the research world.

Research Conversation. When consent was obtained, the interview began. Areas of discussion included thoughts and experiences regarding the art workshop, cultural and artistic engagement, and how the school can better serve their students. While I had guiding prompts (see Appendix C), I was careful not to interrupt the natural flow of conversation. Following the conversation, each participant was thanked and received a pouch of tobacco and a culturally appropriate gift that included either a scarf or a robe. These gifts show appreciation for the participants time and effort, thus honoring the value of reciprocity. The gifts were offered after the interview so that compensation was not the primary reason for involvement.

I met with two individuals on the first day of interviewing. These conversations felt distinctly different to me, and I worried about how to ask what I needed while still honoring the conversational approach I had chosen. In my journal I noted:

Yesterday I arrived in the Kainai community. I was fortunate to be able to speak with some of the teachers and school staff about my research and ask if any were interested in participating. Many of the teachers encouraged me to stop by their classroom the following day and they would be happy to sit with me. Some were hesitant when I said the conversation could take up to an hour as they had busy days. I stated that participation was voluntary and that they could stop the interview at any time. This gave them some comfort and I said goodbye for the day.

Today I arrived at the middle school excited to talk with the staff. The first individual I met with seemed nervous during the discussion. While she said a lot of positive things about the art event, I worry that I struggled to prompt her accordingly and ask questions that targeted my objective. I did not want to be leading nor did I want to interrupt her thoughts. As I walked to my next interview, I reviewed the research questions and interview prompts to ensure my mind was fresh. As the interview progressed, I noticed that this individual was focused on the coordination and facilitation of a future event. I tried to redirect the conversation to discussions such as art for youth identity and youth voice. However, I then felt that I was not truly holding to the conversational style that the interview was intended. I worried that my bias and preconceived notions were getting in the way of an authentic conversation. Her words were a true reflection of her thoughts and ideas, they had value and deserved to be heard without my interruptions and my own perception of what was important. Going into my next interviews, I will do a better job of giving my attention to the conversation at hand and letting it flow naturally.

After each interview, I continued to journal about what went well, what I could improve upon, and the themes of the conversations. I noticed that with each interview I was able to engage in a more natural conversation while staying on topic. My fourth interview was dyadic,

and this seemed to simulate rich conversation. The two individuals carried each other's thoughts and added examples that I do not believe would have occurred had the interview been one-on-one. I also noticed that the individuals comfort level significantly increased as their opinions and perspectives were being validated and reciprocated by the peer. I considered having subsequent conversations in a group setting but the remaining participants schedules did not align. For this reason, I completed the remaining two interviews one-on-one. A third interview was scheduled to occur, but consent was withdrawn. After the final two interviews, I was pleased that they had occurred one-on-one, as these conversations were rich in discussion. Here is an excerpt from my journal entry that day:

Today I held three individual interviews and a dyadic interview. I can already see themes emerging from the discussions. Each interview was unique and provided a fresh lens to the topic of art and culture. After having the group discussion, I had hoped the following interviews would be in group format. It seemed that the two individuals fed off each other's thoughts and ideas to allow for more depth and examples. However, following my last two individual interviews, I could not be happier with the rich discussions I was able to engage in. I am pleased that these two interviews felt like a conversation. The dialogue flowed so effortlessly and the two individuals were able to tell their story without sharing the mic. While these two conversations addressed a similar theme, they reached them from different vantage points. I do not think I would have had these rich discussions had the two individuals been interviewed together. It appears everything happened as it was meant to.

Data Analysis: The Storytelling Method

The conversations were transcribed verbatim and analyzed for themes using Indigenous storywork. Storywork is an analysis method designed by Coast Salish (Sto:lo) scholar, Dr. Jo-

Ann Archibald (Archibald, 2008). It was crafted to provide a lens through which researchers could better view participants stories and explore the various lessons in each story (Archibald, 2008). As the name implies, storywork is the process of making meaning through stories. Seven principles comprise storywork: Respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy (Archibald, 2008). The four R's (respect, responsibility, reverence and reciprocity) are traditional values practiced by the storyteller and the listener (Archibald, 2008). The other three principles, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy, are values that shape the learning process. Stories are formed, heard, and interpreted through relations with family, community, spirit, and the physical, emotional and intellectual aspects of self (Archibald, 2008). Storywork requires the researcher to practice relationality, as relationships are relevant for understanding the people and the places involved in research (Archibald, 2008).

The process requires active engagement from the listener (i.e., researcher; Archibald, 2008). As opposed to an individualistic and rational orientation, an Indigenous paradigm is a basis for interpreting the story (i.e., analyzing the data) in a contextual, holistic, community-oriented, and relationship-based manner (Archibald 2008). The role of the researcher is to first actively listen to the storyteller, and then to become a storyteller by sharing what they have learnt.

I chose to transcribe each of the interviews myself, as it gave me the opportunity to better familiarize myself with the data. Following transcription, I re-listened to the audio tapes twice before beginning to make notes about potential themes. According to Archibald (2008), storywork requires the researcher to reflect upon what he/she thinks the participant want him/her to learn. By re-listening to the recordings, I was able to value all that had been shared with me. Seeking to maintain good relations with the stories, I acknowledge that am a learner and not an

expert. The storytellers are the experts and I, as the listener, make meaning of them through my understandings and perspectives (Archibald, 2008).

Storywork is not simply re-telling the stories, but rather it is a process of co-creating them; it is the process of merging the storytellers' words with my understanding of them. Developing themes required me to review each story (i.e., transcript) and to find points of intersection among the storytellers (i.e., participants). The individuals were connected by school, community, nation, intellect, and spirit, all entities that are in reciprocal relation and allowed me to merge their stories. As I listened to the stories, I honor Archibald's (2008) requirement of respect for the storytellers and their stories. I will refer to participants as storytellers for the remainder of this thesis.

As I listened and reflected on the meaning of the stories, I acknowledged that multiple meanings were present, and that as a newcomer I may not have the framework to understanding the stories or deeply engage with them. To ensure reliability and present the findings accurately, I sent each storyteller a copy of my findings and asked them to correct any inaccurate interpretations I may have made. However, I did not hear back from the storytellers, so I interpreted their silence as agreement with my findings. Throughout the conversation, a series of both traditional stories and life-experience stories were shared that appear to capture themes of resilience, of overcoming problems, and making connections. These stories are holistic in that they help us learn, identify emotions, engaging in spirituality, and help us reflect upon our actions.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The following chapter presents the stories of the educators who participated in the Tatsikiisaapo’p Middle School and who observed the youth during the art workshop. Archibald (2008) states that stories are significant for “teaching, learning and healing” (p. 85). As I reflected on the storytellers’ words, considerations for students’ learning and healing emerged. The following excerpts are sections from the research conversations and are shared in the storytellers’ own words. The study engaged seven individuals, all who worked at the Tatsikiisaapo’p Middle School and were present the day of the art workshop. Storytellers included two males, a school counselor and occupational therapist, and five female teachers. Six out of seven participants asked that their full name be used in association with their stories while one asked to be referred to by a pseudonym. The individuals included Clarence Black Water (Rumpa), Deon Kruger, Sandra Many Feathers, Reesa Healy, Olivia Tail Feathers, Trina Eagle Tail Feathers, and the participant with a pseudonym referred to as Eva.

The conversations between myself and the seven educators focused on the following research questions:

1. What are educator’s reflections on students’ experience in traditional and contemporary Blackfoot cultural and artistic engagement as a means to address student wellness and educational engagement?
2. How does engagement in traditional and contemporary Blackfoot culture and art benefit Blackfoot students?
3. How can traditional and contemporary Blackfoot cultural and artistic engagement be included in pedagogy and curriculum to better serve Blackfoot students?

Engaging Youth in School

Before exploring the impact of art on student wellness, I begin with excerpts that describe a typical school day. The responses generated provide a reference point for understanding how the art event impacted students and teachers. Unfortunately, there was a consensus that student's engagement in the classroom is generally low. For example, Deon stated: *"There are kids we are losing to a lack of interest [...] and that shows in attendance."* Student engagement is a challenge that teachers are struggling with, and understanding what is not working for these students is complex and difficult to infer. Potential explanations that the storytellers cited for the varying levels of engagement include: Difficulties at home, ineffective modes of teaching, and inconsistency in school personnel and school routine.

Family related risk factors appear to be impacting many students' abilities to remain focused, attentive and involved in school. Deon shares, *"Children come here very distracted to start with. Many of them come from very difficult home environments. Their brains are so full, and then to have more serious textbook stuff thrown at them, is a very difficult transition."* The students appear to be displaying disaffection towards school because they are distracted by the chaos in their home environments. Sandra offers examples of how the difficulties at home are affecting the student's academics, *"They don't come from your typical home, where they go home and their in bed by 9, 10 o'clock at night. Some of them are staying up all night. All night long worried about their parents over dosing. Or they've been in a home where their parents have used all weekend and they haven't had any sleep or any food, so they come to us and were expecting them first thing in the morning to do your math, your science, you know your L.A. and we can't expect them to do that."*

Sandra's insights come from a place of empathy and deep understanding. As she recounted her own childhood experiences, she shared, *"I just remember my own pain. So that's what I give to the kids and stuff. Love that they, that I would have wanted or needed, but they don't often say 'I need love,' They show it through negative behavior. And it's hard to try to love them when they are swearing at you and running down the hall away from you."*

There is evidence to suggest that factors are affecting many students outside of the school environment, but it is likely that these are not acting in isolation. A second reason for disengagement may be that the children do not *"really find traction in regular textbook learning"* (Deon). Recognizing that the current mode of teaching may not meet all student's needs, challenges one to consider *"options for all children that [are] more inclusive"* (Deon).

A third reason offered for the disengagement is that *"there's a little bit of reluctance to work [may be] because of the inconstancy, [...] it's very important for students to have structure, constancy and routine"* (Trina). Trina had previously discussed the high turnover of art teachers and its impact on the students' abilities to trust her and engage in class. It appears that inconsistency in school personal and routine is difficult for the students and may be impacting willingness to engage in the classroom.

Disengagement from school is a reality for many students at Tatsikiisaapo'p Middle School. Difficulties connecting with academics may stem from institutional, intergenerational, and/or family-related factors. The youth that are struggling with student engagement are *"often engaging in undesired behaviors, or disruptive school behaviors"* (Deon). Off-task and disruptive behaviors negatively impact the school environment and are a unique challenge to address. The aforementioned concerns raise the question of how student engagement and disruptive classroom behaviors can be addressed.

Compared to typical school days, Deon said: *“On [the day of the art blitz], I saw most of the students quite engaged, quite focused and they just seemed to have found something they have a real interest in.”* However, Deon’s observations were not shared by everyone, while most of the youth appeared engaged, *“some of the kids seemed like they were there because either the class they had wanted to go to was full or they were just wandering. So, impression I got from the students was some of them were there because this is cool and I want to learn this but I didn't get that vibe from everybody, which was unfortunate”* (Eva).

Despite some youth’s potential disinterest in the art workshop, Sandra used incident reports to measure the effect art had on the school atmosphere. Sandra notes, *“throughout a typical day you have many instances where there’s an incidence, and sometimes the principal’s office is just overwhelmed, [...] the counsellors are busy, everyone’s busy but that day, what I observed was all the students were engaged in the different things that were going on in the classroom [...]. I didn't see any incidences that day. Kids were really engaged and involved in what they were doing.”*

The contrast in students’ behaviors between typical school days and the art blitz is evident. Reesa adds to the discussion by stating that as *“a staff, [she] actually engaged with the students. And they enjoyed themselves. [The most challenging thing as a teacher] is getting [the students] engaged into studies and everything. Sometimes it's a struggle, but that day was totally, it was not. It was easy, it was so laid back. So the kids must have been enjoying what they were doing. Cause the next day in school, the kids were always chatting about it.”* Reesa’s story highlights the struggle she has experienced engaging students in her classroom. However, during the art workshop, Reesa noticed that the students were relaxed and fully participating in the event. The difference Reesa saw in the youth was attributed to the art workshop.

The challenges that teachers face almost every day in school were not present the day of the art workshop. As opposed to the power struggles that typically occur, students were enjoying their learning experience which allowed students and teachers to engage in the work together. The effectiveness of the art workshop was evidenced by a reduction in incident reports: *“We had no incident reports that day because the students were engaged, they were creating something, they were putting themselves into their work”* (Trina).

Overall, it appears that student engagement is an ongoing, daily concern amongst the faculty, yet during the art workshop, students were actively partaking in the activities. My first research question which explored students experience in traditional and contemporary Blackfoot culture and art, generated similar themes on student engagement. In exploring what variables may have contributed to student engagement, the insightful voices of the Tatsikiisaapo’p Middle School staff share how a creative space can be mobilized for more culturally relevant pedagogy.

Hands-on Learning

Exploring why student engagement significantly improved the day of the art event, Deon provides some insight; *“[We need to] tap into their strengths versus seeing them lost and not being able to engage in tertiary learning simply because of their personal limitations. So it’s just nice to be able to open that up to every child and those group of children who need this project-based learning.”* Deon observed that hands-on activities and strength-based activities may have been fundamental to the success of the art-workshop. Validating Deon’s observations, Reesa adds that, *“the kids like the hands on. I think they enjoy the hands on more and not totally like always breathing over your shoulder and letting them do it.”*

It appears that the students are best motivated to learn through hands-on activities. Finding opportunities for students to design, create, and construct their ideas may be an exciting

learning avenue. *“If they can be enticed with their hands. Their concentration of going towards a finished project, because you learn the rhythm of it. Anything you learn, your hands will follow. They automatically learn after you develop your rhythm with it. I remember with bead work I would go in sequences of 4 cause that's a sacred number. Or sequences of 7 because of the 7 stars and so sometimes you can relate it to nature”* (Olivia).

Born to be Artists

Art has been demonstrated to be a powerful means for hands on learning. The power art has to engage youth is exceptional and requires further exploration. Throughout the stories, traditional and contemporary forms of art were described as meaningful forms of engagement because *“these students have aptitudes that lean towards creative activities”* (Deon). *“I guess they say sometimes that [Indigenous] people are natural artists, natural actors. [...] I know that music has always being a part of our life, as First Nations people, cause it's in our ceremony, morning songs, sunrise songs, lullabies, and so I felt like there was always a need to create”* (Olivia). *“We've always been artistic. Before that we use to use porcupine quills for decorating, and we had our own paints from the rocks, that we would mix. So painting isn't new to us.”* (Trina).

The integration and preservation of Indigenous culture through the arts has been shared throughout the stories. Indigenous art comes in many forms and is something the students appear to naturally gravitate towards. Sandra stated that the arts are nothing new to them, and through music, painting, or acting, the students may experience many benefits. Exploring the impact creative activities have on student's well-being, it was often described as a form of therapy.

Art as Therapy

Provided the aforementioned difficulties that many students experience at home, the art work was described as a healing process. *“Art may help them get some therapeutic value. Cause that's often what these kids need. They come here so stressed and their heads are so full of stuff that kids their age probably shouldn't be dealing with”* (Deon).

A story was shared about a boy who wanted to make a drum but when he was informed that the activity was full, he *“articulated that he needed the drum for his own healing. He said could I make a drum because it will help me with my healing”* (Trina). The youth are asking to partake in traditional cultural activities as they seem to experience a sense of peace through it. *“It's like art therapy, its healing, and you learn patience. It's what a lot of students don't have”* (Olivia). Art's therapeutic value may exist for four reasons: Youth voice, empowerment, identity formation, and connection to culture.

Rediscovering Voice. *“The spirit of your own creation is going to come to you. [...] So I do know it is very important to use our senses for the arts, [...] because we have to regain our voices again”* (Olivia). It can be difficult for adolescents to find the vocabulary to express themselves, but through art, youth may have a medium for expressing their thoughts and feelings. *“That is what art is. Its self-expression. And you can also transfer your own feelings into whatever your creating. And it helps you because its therapy. Art therapy”* (Sandra). *“It tells us everything, maybe someone's going through a tough time. It's going to express in the art. Maybe good things are going on in their life, or maybe dark things, but it is going to express in their art. And that's how we target our children who are crying out for help”* (Rumpa).

Empowerment. As noted above, it may be true that the students are experiencing low-esteem and low self-confidence. Finding an activity where the youth experience success can be

empowering. During the art event, Trina shared that, *“as the art teacher here, [she] saw a lot of self-confidence built up.”* The stories of student empowerment appear attributable to the fact that these students are natural artists. Given an activity that the students are instinctively good at, is important for student wellness. Deon detailed, *“[The art gave] them a sense of ownership because I know they were very proud of what they did, and it showed. [...] I think the confidence of doing well at that will be a good stepping stone to trying things that can be more challenging.”*

Identity Formation. *“The identity part, you can’t force it on them, so art is a good form of movement”* (Rumpa). Adolescence is an age of discovery. Through many avenues, youth learn who they are as individuals and who they are in relation to a collective group. The degree to which the youth in Kainai Nation experience a collative sense of Blackfoot identity is unknown, but Rumpa acknowledges that the youth cannot be forced to internalize that piece. If art is an important aspect of Indigenous culture, art may be a means for self-discovery and cultural engagement; *“A lot of the art also entails who we are [...] Because we are expressing who we are as people through this traditional, contemporary art”* (Olivia). Deon *“was really encouraged to see there’s a very strong cultural undertone, [because the students] have a great sense of wanting to connect to who they are as a people.”*

While traditional art forms, such as drum making, are more closely tied to traditional cultural practices, contemporary art forms may still be an avenue for identity development. For example, Eva states: *“Hip hop isn’t necessary traditional cultural, it’s just popular. Screen printing isn’t necessarily traditional culture. But it is away to speak to who you are.”*

Engagement in the arts appears a valuable way for youth to explore who they are both personally and collectively. Indigenous art as a means of cultural engagement gives the students *“something*

to say 'I made this, and this is cool. And this is part of my culture. And this says who I am.' That would be cool right?"

Concluding thoughts on Art as Therapy. Summarizing how the students' engagement in art can be therapeutic, give them a voice, raise their self-esteem, and connect them to culture, Olivia states, *"A lot of them already have natural talent so coming up with something for them to showcase is great. Their self-esteem rose a 100%, [...]. So I believe that the arts, they've always been a part of our life and we just need to get back there so we can instill pride in our students."*

Overall, it appears that engagement was beneficial because it gave the students a voice, was empowering, provided a means for identity expression, created a sense of collective identity, and connected them to their culture. Art offers the power of authorship and thus is a platform for the youth to share their truth. The public history of Indigenous people had allowed their experiences to be shaped and misrepresented by many. By utilizing art, a nostalgic space is created where youth can voice their beliefs, experiences, and feelings. In doing so they are connected to their peers and to their culture. Taken together, the process is therapeutic. The power art has on the students' well-being is well summarized by Deon; *"A lot of the behaviors we see come from the agitated individuals. And often it's attention seeking behaviors, and they're over whelmed by the extra intense activities were expecting. With the therapeutic nature of the activities you guys showcased here, it made it a lot easier to just, you know, allow themselves to let some air out. And just relax and engage and have fun."*

Integrating Art and Culture into the Classroom

The specific research questions were as follows: (1) What are educator's reflections on students' experience in traditional and contemporary Blackfoot cultural and artistic engagement as a means to address student wellness and educational engagement? (2) How does engagement

in traditional and contemporary Blackfoot culture and art benefit Blackfoot students? (3) How can traditional and contemporary Blackfoot cultural and artistic engagement be included in pedagogy and curriculum to better serve Blackfoot students? The views expressed by educators generated an overarching theme to decolonize the education system. As I reflected on the individual stories, I began to see art as a decolonizing tool because of its attention to otherwise silenced and oppressed voices and because of its power for self-expression. The education system is clearly rooted in Western ideology which can make a space for Indigenous learners difficult to find. Reimagining educational practices acknowledges the importance of Indigenous voices and respects their culture.

Considering steps for decolonizing, Sandra offers a meaningful and symbolic suggestion; *“Our principal went to Regina Saskatchewan recently and when he came back he was really excited about the program that they have there, you know there’s no bells, because were not institutionalizing their kid. [For example] eat when I’m hungry not because the bell says its 12 o’clock and I have to conform to this regiment. Because I think that’s just a continuation of residential school mentality. Make the program our program, and eliminate the bells, so that it’s like they’re not so regimented, and it’s not, you’re not institutionalizing the kids.”*

Policy changes to remove institutionalized colonialism is a means to a) transform the educational system, and b) to integrate culture into the classroom by teaching curriculum through the arts. Olivia and Trina both discussed the prospect of blending Indigenous and Western ways of knowing into teaching methods. When discussing the arts, it was shared that they involve mathematics, history and social studies; *“And it involves math too. To learn about math more, like the bead work. It would connect with other subjects, like history, social studies”* (Olivia). *We [teach] the history with the cultural arts”* (Trina). It appears that art engagement does not need

to be an after-school activity or even a separate class, art can be blended into the core curriculum.

Finally, it was suggested that educators use teachings from the land and from Indigenous knowledge to shape education. While cultural teachings have been integrated into the classroom, Sandra suggests that educators go a step further to incorporate land-based learning; *“We haven’t really gone to land based learning, so we haven’t really gone to our traditional sites where I think it would really give a foundation for the kids to learn upon. The cultural teachings that we have in the classroom. I think it would really just strengthen their beliefs in our ways of knowing. If they had that ability to go and see the traditional sites. For example, if they were to go out, if we did traditional games, and they were able to go out and pick their own willows and pick their own berries”* (Sandra).

In considering how the classrooms could be transformed, a significant theme was cultural engagement. Indigenous worldviews are reflected through the natural world. To create a culturally respectful space in the classroom, experiential and land-based activities are valuable. The educators offered various examples of how they are currently supporting youth wellness and decolonizing the classroom with culture-based learning. For example, Sandra stated that *“the kids were in their element this morning, some were beading, some were drawing.”* She resists education practices that are linear by recognizing student differences and validating cultural engagement. Further, attention is given to the physical space of the classroom. Recognizing diverse learning styles, Sandra’s classroom is *“set up so that you sit where you’re comfortable, if you look there’s rugs there, there’s a stand-up table here, there’s the bare floor if you want, there’s the window, the desks facing the windows. Wherever you feel comfortable in this room is where you’re going to sit. And I’ve had kids select their sacred space.”*

The reflections and perspectives shared by the Kainai educators are invaluable in understanding how wellness and educational engagement can be modified to best serve the Blackfoot students. Delving deeper into the factors that impact students is monumental in positively transforming educational programs.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Humans are wired to learn, to create, and to curiously explore their environment. Formal education can be a critical source for learning, but learning can occur through various forums. Conventional teaching lectures are valuable ways of learning for some, but experiential learning is a process that others gravitate towards (Powell & Wells, 2002; Malott, 2009). Currently, provincial education systems mandate curriculum that requires students time, attention, and energy. While the process of learning these concepts is intended to be stimulating, some Indigenous youth are finding it hard to engage (Bird, 2011). Disengagement in school is an unfortunate reality for many children living on reserve (Findlay & Janz, 2012; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Oliver, Peters, & Kohen, 2012).

As discussed by the storytellers, the youth are facing a number of risk factors that may be impeding their ability to focus in the classroom. In addition to disengagement, the youth are displaying numerous problem behaviors at school. The challenges faced by students are impeding student wellness, and educators are concerned for their social, emotional and academic well-being. Despite challenges, the Kainai youth possess many strengths and appear to be leveraging those strengths for positive development. The purpose of this study was to explore how a culturally-rooted art workshop was reported by educators to impact student wellness, educational engagement, as well as how art and culture can be included in pedagogy and curriculum. Upon inviting school personnel to provide insight into the current education system, avenues for student success were explored. The discourse presented unique findings and themes related to art, wellness and pedagogy.

Holistic Wellness

An objective of this research was to explore educators' reflections on the role and benefit of traditional and contemporary Blackfoot cultural and artistic engagement for students.

Following the art workshop, the educators discussed in length the potential art has for student's self-discovery, wellness, and peer relations.

Overall, the art workshop appeared to help foster a supportive environment for personal and artistic growth. The students were observed using art for self-exploration and identity development. The students were reportedly able to channel their thoughts and feelings through pictures, songs, photographs and other art mediums. The students used art to explore their feelings, foster self-awareness, and develop interpersonal abilities, namely self-confidence. Educators provided many descriptions of students' increased confidence in their artistic abilities. These findings seem to support the work of Worrall (2007) who found that creativity is a personal strength as it allows one to gain a sense of personal mastery, to increase their self-esteem, and to build resiliency. Specific to Indigenous youth, Hudson's (2016) research showcased how the youth used art to actively declare their unheard voices and share their knowledge, which in turn fostered empowerment and confidence.

While the storytellers did not mention the possible significance of the artists being Blackfoot (with one Cree/Métis), it is likely that the students were encouraged and inspired by the artists. The artists included a number of successful, renowned Blackfoot artists, and thus, they may have encouraged student's personal empowerment. The students were able to connect with people who they can identify with while developing valuable skills.

In addition to empowerment, the students were reported to harness the creative process, the result of which was reported to reduce anxiety and improve their well-being. Amidst the

uncertainty and unpredictability in many of these student's lives, they were expected to attend school and participate in all academic areas. However, it is recognized that many students are facing personal challenges, and in response, the teachers extend compassion. The storytellers stated that participation in art seemed to have been useful in helping the students work through inner conflicts. Vocalizing struggles is difficult, but if art can be used to break through the silence, creative production may be an ideal activity for students. Art is said to contribute to "healing the spiritual scars of Indigenous people and give a sense of pride" (Kimba Thompson in Message Stick Online in Edmonds, 2007, p. 246). Expressing voice through art can be healing as it allows youth to re-examine themselves in a positive context and build their own identity (Edmonds, 2007, p. 62). Indigenous youth have been said to enjoy learning through art because it engages their voices (Jackson & Hodge, 2009; Flicker et al., 2014).

During interview conversations, storytellers discussed how students bonded over their engagement in mutually enjoyable projects. Establishing relations with peers constitutes a significant developmental task of childhood (Poulin & Chan, 2010). Friendship has a salient role in developing personal competence, identity, and adjustment to developmental stages (Poulin & Chan, 2010). Additionally, social relations are essential to the development of social skills, attitudes, and behaviors; therefore, friends can have positive or negative influences on development. For example, McDougall and Hymel (2007) asked children to list qualities they found important in a friendship. Frequently, children described friendship as the sharing of common activities and helping one another. Specific to Indigenous youth, the research of Hudson (2016) examined how photography and hip hop was used to express social identity and Indigeneity. In the present study, art was identified as an avenue for finding a space of belonging with like-minded individuals.

Overall, this research found engagement in art to be described as an avenue for wellness and self-expression. Rumpa stated that art was “*a form of expression. For wellness.*” Olivia stated that “*A lot of the art also entails who we are [...] Because we are expressing who we are as people through this traditional, contemporary art.*” In accordance with previous research, it is suggested that educational institutions support student wellness by validating students emotional and psychological needs through culturally appropriate means (Gallop, 2016). Devaluing identity development, peer bonding, and social-emotional needs excludes learners who cannot engage due to wellness concerns. To separate social and emotional needs from academic development does a disservice to youth, who despite their best efforts, have become indifferent to education.

“I’ve had some students in our classroom say, I’m so happy to be here, but they’re tired and then I’ll be like ok well if you need to rest take a few minutes to rest. So having that understanding because some of our children come from homes that, they might be kept awake all night because they’re afraid, because of things going on in the house, because I’ve had a few students come, so you know to have that compassion, like ok I’ll give you a few minutes. So they’ll take it and then they’ll come and work. You know. So if they know they have that, then they’ll work with it, we work with them” (Trina).

Developing inclusive practices that give students a voice, celebrate their strengths, and support them holistically may increase students success in schools.

Towards a Decolonized Classroom

Understanding how Blackfoot culture and art can be included in pedagogy and curriculum was a central objective of this research. Utilizing students cultural frame of reference, and infusing Indigenous paradigms, curricula can be made meaningful and engaging. The educators stated that they need to make the classroom their own, and offered examples such as

eliminating the bells, incorporating land-based learning, and altering the physical space. Cultural discontinuity occurs when there is a disconnect between a student's culture and the culture of the school. The storytellers shared how they would increase the presence of Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing in their classroom, thus working towards a decolonized classroom. To better conceptualize decolonization, Smith (2016) defined decolonization as a process of engaging the mind and spirit in new ways of thinking (Smith, 2016). Further, Little Bear (2000) stated, "no matter how dominant a worldview is, there are always other ways of interpreting the world" (p. 77). To dismantle dominant Eurocentric frameworks in the education system, we must first decolonize the mind (Smith, 2016). Educators and policy makers must challenge their thinking and flexibly engage other forms of knowing.

The storytellers discussed how culture could be brought into the classroom through art and land-based learning as these are traditional means of holistic education. Examples of land-based learning through art included making traditional paints or making music by listening to songs in nature. In addition to art, the storytellers talked broadly about incorporating culture through land-based activities such as culture camps or traditional games. To better understanding the complexities of decolonizing through art and land-based learning, Simpson (2011) similarly concluded that decolonization includes reclaiming techniques outside of Eurocentrism, namely by focusing on land, Indigenous knowledge, and culturally relevant pedagogies. Land pedagogies may be a means to reclaim education, "where we return to the land and begin to center education from the most intimate ground we could ever imagine, to honor, the land as both context and process" (Simpson, 2014, p. 70). Incorporating land-based learning was important for the storytellers to truly engage with their students from a cultural standpoint. Although it may be difficult to conceptualize the land-based learning as formal education

revolves around structure classroom, Smith (2016) states that decolonizing cannot occur without an open mind. The storytellers passion for educating students through culturally relevant ways is echoed by other scholars (Roundtree & Smith, 2016; Simpson, 2011), and perhaps through land-based learning, the voices of Indigenous people in curriculum will be legitimized.

Amongst discussion of art and land-based learning, the storytellers acknowledged the value of provincial curriculum but offered examples for how it could be decolonized. For example, it was suggested that history be taught through art, as many Indigenous people used art to share their historical experiences. Exclusive use of Eurocentric knowledge and methods is oppressive and fails to recognize the local knowledge of Indigenous people. The approach offered by the storytellers echoes the work of Klump and McNeir, (2005) who integrated traditional knowledge with academic standards to incorporate culture into the classroom. Using the academic benchmarks of science, health, and personal/social skills, students were asked to identify five types of berries, study traditional harvesting, and then make traditional food (Klump & McNeir, 2005). Following this traditional cultural task, the students demonstrated their learning through written assignments and a PowerPoint presentation (Klump & McNeir, 2005). The approach Klump and McNeir (2005) employed to teach curriculum and traditional knowledge through culture had a positive effect on enrollment rates and the connection between students, teachers, and elders (Klump & McNeir, 2005). Mitchell (2013) offers a second example of how Indigenous knowledge and western approaches can share space. Mitchell encouraged educators to teach the biology and chemistry behind traditional medicine or the history and physics of animal traps, snowshoes and traditional buildings (Michell, 2013).

Placing Indigenous knowledge into Eurocentric frameworks seems challenging, but the storytellers in the present study discussed many methods for transmitting their knowledge. As

shown by Klump and McNeir (2005), Indigenous students benefited from the integration of traditional knowledge. Although the findings of this study speak only to the efficacy of creative engagement, the storytellers in the present study were passionate about cultural engagement through both art and land-based learning. In general, experiential learning is a positive experience for youth and encourages community engagement (Malott, 2009). Decolonizing education through new pedagogical strategies is important to the community and research has demonstrated its benefit.

The storytellers shared decolonizing strategies when they highlighted students' strengths and offered suggestions that would contribute to students personal and collective sense of identity. This is concurrent with the work of Roundtree and Smith (2016) who advocated that formal educational practices be decolonized by moving beyond the deficit perspective to build students strengths. Educators have a responsibility to look after the social, emotional and academic well-being of today's generation and the generations to come (Ragoonaden, 2017; Wilson, 2008). Educators must prepare to work in a manner that is culturally appropriate. The storytellers alluded to this when they suggested art and culture be used to teach core curriculum (i.e., math, history, language arts, science). Using cultural wealth and knowledge as a form of hands on learning to teach academic benchmarks seems an efficacious strategy for engaging students in the classroom.

The purpose of this research was to explore best practices for decolonizing and Indigenizing education. The storytellers described how song, artwork, and land-based practices could be integrated into the classroom. Engagement in these practices is a means for Indigenous people to reclaim the education system. The findings of this research suggested that although the Kainai students are struggling to engage with school, they respond well to cultural activities. The

storytellers discussed the process of decolonizing education by recovering student voices through the arts. Many policy and practices can be enacted to Indigenizing the education system, but it cannot occur without a decolonized mind. Meaningful and active resistance against colonialist policies and practices is foundational for centering students' educational needs in an Indigenous worldview.

Strengths and Limitations

The current study has several strengths that should be noted. First, this study highlights the importance of community-based approaches to research. By collaborating with the Kainai community, the research topic was culturally relevant and contributed to literature on best-practices. Further, the research was action-oriented, allowing for a more valid and relevant study. While carrying out this research as an ally to Indigenous communities, I was mindful to practice two-eyed seeing by honoring the strength of the community. The Kainai Board of Education is committed to serving students' wellness and educational needs. By partnering with KBE, the research offered insight into how culture and art can be integrated into the classroom. The findings inform KBE's practices, and may inform professionals such as counsellors. Ongoing research is necessary for sustainable, culturally relevant best practices.

In light of the current study, several limitations should be considered. These limitations include research as an outsider, time constraints, the storytellers not being able to provide feedback, and lack of student perspective. As noted earlier, I am a white, female Masters student conducting research with an Indigenous community. Having not previously worked with the Kainai community, I was as an outsider. Although I was uncertain as to whether or not I would be accepted by the community, the community was welcoming, and insider-outsider tension did not occur. I was able to establish myself as an ally and support the community. However, as a

newcomer and outsider to Indigenous worldviews, my positionality limits my interpretations of the stories. While a researcher must maintain some outsider status to validly interpret data, analysis through an Indigenous paradigm requires relationality. Therefore, as a newcomer, limited relationality may have inhibited my interpretations. To adjust for this, the storytellers were asked to review my interpretations and correct any misunderstandings. Although the findings of this study were emailed to all storytellers, no response was received. Therefore, the findings of this study are limited because the storytellers could not verify my interpretations.

Finally, this study is limited in that the students' perspectives were not gathered. Gathering student input on school classroom engagement, student wellness and the impact of the art workshop would have elevated the findings of the current study. Involving youth may have provided different descriptions on the benefits of the art workshop, such as the impact of being guided by successful Blackfoot artists. Including youth voice in the discussion of classroom engagement may have exposed alternative sources of disengagement such as school policies, school climate, classroom management or peer relations. It is suggested that future researchers include youth voice and consider the impact youth voice may have in designing more responsive services.

Provided that relationships are central to doing good work with Indigenous communities, future researchers should continue to become allies and should spend time engaging in relations. While I was able to attend several community events and make relations prior to research proceedings, I did not have time to develop personal relationships with the participants. Regarding time, the timeline of this thesis required meetings, the event and data collection to occur at a rate beyond genuine collaboration. Further, while research conversations were held at the participants' convenience, the conversations often ended quickly or were interrupted by bells,

students or other individuals. For future research, it would be beneficial to hold to conversations after school in a quiet place. Finally, as a newcomer to conversational interviews, I was limited in my ability to converse about their stories and relate it to life experience. Initially I treated the conversations like interviews, which may have impacted relational development during the interview.

Future Directions

This research explored art, wellness, and school engagement among Indigenous youth who partook in a two-day Blackfoot art workshop. The study does not speak to the experiences of all Indigenous youth in Canada, but it is an expression of the views of seven school personnel at Tatsikiisaapo’p Middle School. Future research should adopt and adjust the art workshop to explore its impact in other communities. Research should incorporate the views of the students and Blackfoot artists in addition to teachers in order to fully elucidate the perceived impact of traditional and contemporary artistic engagement. Researchers should also explore how other forms of cultural engagement impact wellness and educational engagement for Indigenous youth. It is recommended that future research explore wellness from a strength-based perspective. Educators, health practitioners, and researchers who use holistic concepts of wellness will support the construction of health literacy from the worldview of Indigenous people (Stewart, Ricken, Scott, Tanaka, Riecken, 2008).

Future researchers are encouraged to honor the Indigenous voice and maintain connections and relationships. Following analysis, participants should be invited to review findings, provide feedback, and be invited to partake in the dissemination process. An aspect of long-term contact is continued collaboration on the projects dissemination so that their voice extends to a wider audience. For the purpose of the current study, I will be collaborating with the

educators who participated in this research and asking them to join me in sharing this work. Co-presenting with participants ensures that the study is shared properly and with relevant audiences. Through co-authored publications and joint presentations, it is anticipated that researchers, policy makers, and organizations will have access to the information and use it to inform their own practice. In addition, to maintain connections with the community one does research with, researchers are encouraged to advocate and share knowledge that supports the deconstruction of stereotypes and biases. I intend on continuing my role as ally and an advocate by acknowledging my academic privilege and using it to share the knowledge, strengths, and voices of Indigenous people.

Final Reflection

Throughout this journey, I have grown as a researcher and an ally. I am exceptionally grateful for this opportunity as my awareness of social justice, multiculturalism, strength-based research and Indigenous worldviews has been impacted drastically. When I first began to conceptualize this thesis, my research goals were to explore how various theoretical constructs impacted the resilience of Indigenous youth. However, I was operating from a Western paradigm, reading Eurocentric literature and seeking to do a study that only served my educational needs. As I began to read seminal texts such as Shawn Wilson's "Research is Ceremony" and Linda Smith's "Decolonizing Methodologies," I became aware that I needed to do research that was with and for a community.

Throughout this process, I have had to challenge my thoughts and biases, and reconceptualize my understandings of the research process. This thesis has both transformed my understandings of research and shaped me as an individual. In carrying out the research, I consistently reminded myself of Wilson's (2008) words to build relationships, honor those

relationships, and honor my own thoughts, feelings and experiences. Being welcomed into the Kainai community was a humbling moment and I am grateful for the teachings I have learned, the friendships I have made, and self-awareness I gained.

The process of planning and writing this thesis has been stress provoking but during my commutes to Kainai Nation, I was always overcome with a sense of peace. While staying in the community I was able to journal and to write fluidly. This peace was difficult to regain when I attempted to write my thesis in Calgary. I frequently encountered writers block and questioned my ability to do this work. I would scan the literature but my writing often felt unauthentic. I then read a section by Hampton (1995) in which he wrote:

Emotionless, passionless, abstract, intellectual, academic research is a lie, it does not exist. It is a lie to ourselves and a lie to other people. Humans—feeling, living, breathing, thinking humans—do research. When we try to cut ourselves off at the neck and pretend an objectivity that does not exist in the human world, we become dangerous to ourselves first, and then to the people around us (p. 52).

My writers block appeared to stem from my attempts to objectify, quantify, and critique the literature but this not what Indigenous research is to begin with. Indigenous worldviews are holistic and strive to uplift rather than break down. I had to shift my mindset and acknowledge the good work that other researchers had done. I also had to write with my emotions. I recalled why I set out to do this work and as the emotions of anger, sadness and hope filled my thoughts, I began to write: I was angry at the unjust treatment of Indigenous communities, I was sorrowful for the people who are still suffering, but I found hope in the evidence suggesting that communities are recovering and thriving. I also found hope in my role as an ally.

During the art event, I witnessed student's dedication, passion, and courage. They often made art that was personal to their life story and it challenged me to engage in my thesis with the same level of passion and courage. Spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually I have been challenged and changed by this process. Wilson (2008) states, "*If research doesn't change you as a person, then you haven't done it right*" (p. 135).

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APPENDIX A

Consent Form

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

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Title of Project:

Toward Poo'miikapii: Applying Blackfoot Approaches to Wellness in Education

Sponsor:

University of Calgary – Research Services Office (RSO) – Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada

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. Participation is completely voluntary and confidential. You are free to discontinue participation at any time during the study.

Purpose of the Study

Toward Poo'miikapii: Applying Blackfoot Approaches to Wellness in Education is a voluntary research study designed to improve culturally-rooted interventions in the classroom. The study will document both the processes of applying Blackfoot approaches to wellness in the classroom and the

experiences and recommendations of staff and students who engaged in these processes. The information gathered in this study will be used to create a framework that may be used to guide schools in how they can best serve Indigenous youth.

What Will I Be Asked to Do?

1. You will be invited to participate in audio-recorded research conversations and talking circles. Research conversations will be approximately one hour, and will occur one-on-one with a member of the research team. You will also be invited to participate in one of two talking circles, which will be approximately two hours.
2. You will be asked to talk about your experiences in any of the Blackfoot approaches to wellness that you have participated in at school this year (i.e., a Blackfoot wellness program in your classroom, a Blackfoot film workshop, a Blackfoot visual art project, and/or a Blackfoot culture camp).
3. Following completion of the study, you will be invited by email to review all transcripts and findings. Once complete, research findings will be made available in research publications and a framework with guidelines for how schools serving Indigenous students may shape their own educational systems. You are also welcome to share your feedback with one of the research team members via email or phone.

During individual conversations and the talking circle, you will be asked for permission to be both video and audio-recorded. Video-recording is being used in this study so that non-verbal communication between you and the research team member may be considered for holistic interpretation of the data. Video-recordings will be kept strictly confidential.

Participation is completely voluntary, you may refuse to participate altogether, may refused to participate in parts of the study, may decline to answer any and all questions, and may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?

Should you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to provide your name, email, age, and ancestral/ethnic background(s). Your age and ancestral background(s) will be collected in order to provide general information regarding the participant sample in the circulation of results. This information will not be associated with your records unless you specifically request to have yourself identified this way in the research. Your name and email will be used for contact with the research team throughout the study, but will never be disclosed outside of the study. Only the principal investigator and co-investigators listed above will have access to the list of participants.

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 grant permission to be video-taped: Yes: ____ No: ____

I wish to keep my name private, 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?

We do not think there is anything in this study that could harm you or put you at risk in any way. Given that you are a teacher or student in a KBE classroom speaking about your perspectives and experiences in relation to culturally-rooted Indigenous intervention in KBE schools, any potential harms are no greater than those you normally encounter in your everyday life related to the research. However, should you experience any distress or discomfort during your participation, a member of the research team will be happy to provide you with the names of mental health professionals outside with whom you can speak.

Given that you will have an opportunity to provide feedback regarding culturally-rooted Indigenous interventions in KBE schools, you may find that participation benefits you through tailoring future interventions to your needs and desires. You may also find that participation benefits you through the application of results through publication and presentation of findings. Further, you may benefit from having a space in which to voice your perspectives on the research topic.

There will be no monetary compensation for your participation. However, you will be given a culturally appropriate gift to acknowledge your contributions. There is no cost to you should you choose to participate.

What Happens to the Information I Provide?

Only the principal investigator and co-investigators listed above will have access to the information collected. No one except the principle investigator and co-investigators will be allowed to see or hear any of the answers to the research conversations or the talking circles. You will be assured confidentiality by having a specific pseudonym of your choice. You will not be identified by your actual name or initials, and your identity will be kept strictly confidential in any publication resulting from this research. All transcribed conversations and recordings will be assigned pseudonyms and stored in a locked filing cabinet. All digital files will be encrypted and password-protected on Karlee's private, password-protected computer. Five years following completion of the research, recordings and hard copies of transcripts will be destroyed. You will be given the option of having your individual recordings and transcripts returned to you or discarded. Digital copies of all transcripts will be kept on a password-protected external hard drive for an additional five years, at which time they will be permanently deleted.

You will be given a written copy of any publications that result from this study, and the suggested framework that is produced from this research.

Please note that confidentiality may be limited in the talking circle following the study. Prior to opening the circle, all participants will be reminded that information shared in the talking circle must be kept confidential as per cultural protocols and professional discretion. However, the research team cannot guarantee that participants will keep information confidential outside of the group.

Should you choose to withdraw from the study, you will have two weeks after data collection to inform the research team and your data will be permanently deleted and destroyed. However, we cannot guarantee that participants in the talking circles will keep information confidential outside of the group. Participation is completely voluntary. You are free to discontinue participation at any time during the study. No one except the principal investigator and co-investigators will be allowed to see or hear any of the research conversations. There are no names on the videos or transcripts.

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:

Karlee Fellner
Principle Investigator
(612)710-3275
karlee.fellner@gmail.com

Marisa Van Bavel
Co-Investigator
(403)828-2847
marisa.vanbavel@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) 220-6289/220-4283; email 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

Letter of Invitation



Werklund School of Education

2500 University Drive NW
Calgary, AB, Canada T2N 1N4

Phone 403-220-6794

Fax 403-282-5849

<http://werklund.ucalgary.ca>

Letter of Invitation

Toward Poo'miikapii: Applying Blackfoot Approaches to Wellness in Education

Principal Investigator: Dr. Karlee Fellner (Cree/Métis), Assistant Professor
Werklund School of Education
University of Calgary
(403) 818-6446; kfellner@ucalgary.ca

Co-Investigators: Shannon St. Pierre, MSc Counselling Psychology Student
Werklund School of Education
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Marisa Van Bavel, MSc School and Applied Child Psychology Student
Werklund School of Education
University of Calgary
(403) 596-5423; marisa.vanbavel@ucalgary.ca

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

To All Teachers and Students in Kainai Board of Education (KBE) Classrooms that Engaged in the Implementation of Blackfoot Approaches to Wellness in the Classroom:

As someone who participated in KBE's *Poo'miikapii Program*, you are invited to participate in a research project that will document the process of integrating Blackfoot approaches to wellness into the classroom, and will explore both teacher and student experiences of engaging in this process.

To best serve Indigenous youth in Canadian schools, research should focus on the implementation and continued review of sustainable culturally-rooted Indigenous interventions within schools. The work in this study will explore the experiences of students and teachers who participate in such interventions. The goal of this research is to use an Indigenous research paradigm to answer the questions:

- (1) How does the implementation of Blackfoot approaches to wellness affect the classroom environment?*
- (2) How can Blackfoot approaches to wellness be included in pedagogy and curriculum to better serve Blackfoot students?*
- (3) How do Blackfoot approaches to wellness enhance students' experiences in school?*

Participation in this study will involve video- and audio-recorded research conversations and talking circles. Research conversations will be approximately one hour, and will occur one-on-one with a member of the research team. All participants will also be invited to participate in one of two talking circles, which will be approximately two hours. Research conversations and talking circles will explore participants' impressions, experiences, and feedback in relation to the implementation of Blackfoot approaches to wellness in the classroom, including their perceived impact on the classroom environment and student experiences, and recommended implications moving forward.

Following completion of the study, you will be invited to review all transcripts and findings. Once complete, research findings will be made available in research publications and a framework with guidelines for how schools serving Indigenous students may shape their own educational systems.

If you are interested in participating in this study, or would like more information, please contact Marisa Van Bavel at marisa.vanbavel@ucalgary.ca or Karlee Fellner at karlee.fellner@gmail.com.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Marisa Van Bavel (Co-Investigator)

APPENDIX C

Research Conversation and Talking Circle Prompts

Research Question:

- 1) How do educators and students experience participation in traditional and contemporary Blackfoot cultural and artistic engagement as a means to address student wellness and educational engagement?
- 2) How can traditional and contemporary Blackfoot cultural and artistic engagement be included in pedagogy and curriculum to better serve Blackfoot students?
- 3) How does engagement in traditional and contemporary Blackfoot culture and art benefit Blackfoot students?

Principal Research Conversation Prompt:

I'm interested in having a conversation about your thoughts and experiences regarding the Kainai Board of Education's process of implementing traditional and contemporary cultural and artistic engagement for students. It is my hope that the results from this research will be used to inform other organizations who are interested in better serving the needs of their Indigenous students. I look forward to hearing your thoughts, so begin anywhere you like, and we'll go from there.

Additional Research Conversation Prompts/Questions

- How have you been experiencing the traditional and contemporary Blackfoot cultural and artistic engagement so far?
- In your experience, what do you feel has been most helpful or beneficial in the cultural and artistic engagement so far?
- In your experience, what do you feel has been least helpful or beneficial in the cultural and artistic engagement so far?
- What would you like to see incorporated or added to the traditional and contemporary Blackfoot cultural and artistic engagement improve the classroom environment?
- How have the traditional and contemporary Blackfoot cultural and artistic engagements changed your daily routines at school, if at all?
- Based on your experience, how do you think this type of approach may be implemented most effectively in other schools?
- Based on your experience, what advice would you provide to schools wishing to better serve their local Indigenous students?
- What hesitations, fears, or barriers do you experience in these processes?
- What do you find exciting and/or what strengths do you experience in these processes?

