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# Post-Secondary Student Services and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Exploring how Non-Indigenous Student Services Leaders Can Respond to the Calls to Action

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Post-Secondary Student Services and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada:

Exploring how Non-Indigenous Student Services Leaders

Can Respond to the Calls to Action

by

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A THESIS

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## **Abstract**

In June 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), a federal commission chaired by Senator Murray Sinclair, issued a final report that includes 94 calls to action (TRC, 2015d). The report also identifies the moral obligation of educators and educational leaders to facilitate systemic change. There is a direct correlation between several of these recommendations and calls to action and the work of post-secondary student services practitioners. However, most student services practitioners in Canada have been raised in Western colonial systems of education that have excluded Indigenous Knowledges and offered limited understanding of the experiences of Indigenous people in Canada. Therefore, many non-Indigenous student services practitioners have a knowledge gap that may impede their interest and ability to engage in reconciliatory work. This research paper explores how non-Indigenous student services practitioners can be guided to respond to the call for reconciliation and Indigenization of post-secondary education that has been made in the TRC's final report.

Research took place on the lands of the Lekwungen, Xwsepsum, and WSÁNEĆ families and involved participants from the three public post-secondary institutions within these regions. The research methodology integrated qualitative participatory research methods with Indigenous methodology and methods. A total of 14 participants were engaged in the study, including seven Elders, six student services practitioners, and one faculty member. The study resulted in the identification of six findings that offer direction and support for student services practitioners to engage in reconciliatory work: learn the history and reality of colonization in Canada; build relationships with local Indigenous communities; view Indigenous students holistically; examine and reduce barriers to Indigenous student retention; become consciously aware of the complexity of reconciliation; support the development of cultural allies.

These findings identify a need for significant training and education of non-Indigenous student services practitioners about the impact and legacy of colonization on Indigenous people. In order to effectively respond to the calls to action, non-Indigenous student services practitioners develop an understanding of, and respect for, the histories, diverse cultures, and knowledges of Indigenous people. They also need to consider the lived experiences of the non-Indigenous students that they serve.

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## Chapter 1

### Statement of the Problem

In June 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, a federal commission chaired by Senator Murray Sinclair, issued a final report that included 94 calls to action to improve relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015d). The Province of British Columbia (n.d.) has since mandated every ministry to move forward on these recommendations. Many of these calls to action are directed towards post-secondary education and are designed to engage post-secondary leaders in reconciliatory efforts. However, it is still up to individual institutions to determine how they respond, and it is up to the leadership within these institutions, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to interpret the Commission's recommendations and apply them at an institutional level.

As a non-Indigenous student services practitioner, I was drawn to understand what these calls meant to my work. The role of student services practitioners within the Canadian post-secondary environment is to support student retention and student success for *all* learners. It is, therefore, natural that leaders in this field should be involved in responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (2015d) calls to action. The opportunity was to determine *how* to respond ethically and meaningfully.

### The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was established in June 2008 by the federal government of Canada as part of the 2006 Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2016). This settlement, which currently stands as the largest settlement in Canadian history, was established in response to a

class-action lawsuit filed against the federal government for abuses suffered by students enrolled in the federal residential school system, which operated from 1867 to 1996 (TRC, 2015c). The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement maintains that in order for Indigenous communities to effectively heal and move forward, those affected by the residential school legacy need to be heard, acknowledged, and witnessed (Reimer, Bombay, Ellsworth, Fryer, & Logan, 2010). The TRC (2015a) was tasked with documenting and communicating an accurate account of the history and legacy of residential education for Indigenous people in Canada and, further, tasked with developing a guide for reconciliation. Their final report was published in 2015 and included a list of 94 calls to action and a multi-volume final report (TRC, 2015c). The calls to action are directed to multiple sectors, levels of government, and public agents, including all levels of education, from primary to post-secondary. While they do not specifically identify post-secondary student services, an analysis of the calls to action reveals direct links between the work of student services practitioners and the action requested of post-secondary education. It is the position of the researcher that student services practitioners can contribute significantly to reconciliation efforts. Specific opportunities from the calls to action that are relevant to post-secondary student services are identified in Table 1.

Table 1

*Overview of Calls to Action Relevant to Post-Secondary Student Services*

Opportunity for Student Services Practitioners	Related Call to Action
Develop services that support Indigenous student academic attainment levels as well as post-graduate employability.	#7, #10
Enhance non-Indigenous student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.	#63
Develop services that incorporate Indigenous Knowledges in their approach to delivery.	#62
Create opportunities for parental and community involvement in service delivery.	#10

**Reconciliation in Post-Secondary Education**

The task of working towards reconciliation in post-secondary education is relevant to all Canadians and has recently been identified as a priority by most Canadian post-secondary institutions. There are a variety of arguments aimed at increasing interest in this work. One focuses specifically on the economic benefits to increasing the post-secondary graduation rates of Indigenous people. Indigenous youth are the fastest growing demographic in Canada, and yet for reasons that are explored later in this paper, Indigenous student admissions and graduation rates are significantly lower than those of non-Indigenous students (Battiste, 2013; Malatest & Associated Ltd, 2002; Mendelson, 2008; Statistics Canada, 2011). Howe (2011) and Mendelson (2006, 2008) identified a direct correlation between one's level of education and one's wage. This means that the lower the number Indigenous graduates, the lower the overall income of Indigenous peoples. Mendelson (2006) attempted to make this issue a concern for non-Indigenous people by identifying that higher wages contribute to a stronger national economy,

and therefore, the strength of the Canadian economy may rest on the education and opportunities of the quickly growing demographic of Indigenous peoples.

However, beyond the economic benefits lies a significant social responsibility and moral obligation to right the wrongs that previous educators and institutions have inflicted on a significant membership of the population within our country (Regan, 2010). As Canada's First People (United Nations, General Assembly, 2007), the Indigenous people of Canada have inherent rights that have been ignored and must be restored. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2014) reminded us of how important it is that institutions of education acknowledge their role in contributing to the current gap in retention and graduation rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. They pointed to a need for the development critical awareness: "Because schools are among the most powerful institutions wherein social stratification is reproduced, they are also where it must be challenged" (p. 8). Educators must become attentive to how systems of education can influence or perpetuate current dominant structures.

Since the release of the TRC's (2015b) report, there has been a rise in the levels of public commitment to this process. Within its *Imagining Canada's Future* initiative, the federal government's Social Science and Humanities Research Council (2016) called on researchers to explore "how the experiences and aspirations of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada are essential to building a successful shared future" ("Future Challenges," para. 2). The British Columbia provincial government introduced the *Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Training Policy and Framework* in 2012, with a goal of increasing Aboriginal student enrolments by 75% by the year 2021 (British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education, 2012, p. 38). Part of this framework includes the *Aboriginal Services Plan* initiative, which encourages all post-secondary institutions within British Columbia to work collaboratively with Indigenous communities to develop

services and programs that will support access and academic success within the respective institutions (p. 18).

Several national organizations have made a commitment to reconciliation. Universities Canada has identified Indigenous education as one of the top four priorities within their association. In their 2015 publication *Principles on Indigenous Education*, they referenced a need for “mutual respect for different ways of knowing” and the possibility of the cohabitation of Western science and Indigenous Knowledges (para. 4). The Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences (2015) has adopted the “Touchstone of Hope: Principles and Processes” (para. 2) as an approach to guiding the organization through reconciliation. The Canadian Association of University Teachers (2015) made a public announcement acknowledging post-secondary’s involvement in “the damaging effects of colonialization” (para. 2) and endorsing its support for reconciliation. In November of 2016, the Canadian Association of University Teachers published a policy statement on *Indigenizing the Academy*. The policy provides guidance on how to create space for Indigenous Knowledges within university settings. In a similar move, the Canadian Association of College and University Student Services (2016) launched a competency framework for student services practitioners, which includes Indigenous cultural competency as a primary component.

It is important to acknowledge that given the diversity of lived experiences of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people across Canada, there is no common definition for the term reconciliation. Reconciliation means different things to different people. The TRC (2015a) acknowledged this diversity of perspectives and provides their definition for clarity and purpose: “Reconciliation is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country” (p. 3 #). This research was framed

around this particular definition, with the intent of developing an understanding for how to meet the definition's objective as it pertains to the work of post-secondary student services.

As post-secondary leaders and administrators struggle to understand what reconciliation might look like within the academy, some Indigenous scholars and allies are skeptical about how much change is likely to occur. Gaudry [Métis] and Lorenz (2018) proposed that the immediate efforts on Indigenous student recruitment and faculty hiring do not address core issues related to research and learning environments that are inclusive of Indigenous Knowledges. Scholars like Battiste [Mi'kmaw, Potlotek First Nation] (2013), Pete [Plains Cree, Little Pine First Nation] (2016), Vaudrin-Charette (2019), and many others have also called on institutions to facilitate deeper cultural shifts beyond recruitment and hiring practices. There are also those who are skeptical about the possibility of achieving true reconciliation. Kahnawá:ke scholar Alfred (2004) contended that reconciliation within current post-secondary structures, where colonial powers remain dominant, is impossible because these structures can only perpetuate colonial perspectives and practice.

The importance of ongoing research into the process of reconciliation, including both successes and failures, were identified explicitly in the TRC's (2015a) report:

For reconciliation to thrive in the coming years, it will also be necessary for federal, provincial, and territorial governments, universities, and funding agencies to invest in and support new research on reconciliation. Over the course of the TRC's work, a wide range of research projects across the country have examined the meaning, concepts, and practices of reconciliation. Yet there remains much to learn about the circumstances and conditions in which reconciliation either fails or flourishes. (p. 125)

This research is intended to help increase the awareness of non-Indigenous scholars and practitioners about what reconciliation and decolonization with post-secondary student services means. It also is intended to support movement in others towards reconciliatory work.

### **The Role of Student Services in Supporting Student Academic Success**

Student services in Canadian post-secondary environments include a variety of support services designed to assist the student in their overall academic experience. As defined by the Canadian Association of College and University Student Services (1989), “The primary purpose of student services is to develop programs and provide services which support and promote student-centered education” (para. 1). Administrative offices or units that fall within the umbrella term of student services may include, but are not limited to, academic advising, accessibility services, career services, counselling and coaching, financial aid and awards, multicultural services, new student orientation, Indigenous student support, international student support, residence life, service-learning, spiritual advising, student activities, student conduct, and work-integrated learning. The organizational structure and representation of student services varies from campus to campus across Canada. There are several ways in which student services support student retention and student success, including programs that address barriers and facilitate skill development and learning, services that address students’ social and emotional well-being, and initiatives that promote social responsibility and community engagement (Coble, 2019; Cox & Strange, 2010). Student services practitioners contribute to safe and supportive learning environments, both physical and virtual, through the oversight of student policies and student conduct systems. Also, noted by the Canadian Association of College and University Student Services (1989), “Student services personnel act as informed partners in the shared tasks of shaping and maintaining a campus community where students can learn inside and



outside the classroom” (para. 1). In summary, student services contribute to the culture, expectations, and outcomes of post-secondary learning for students of all backgrounds. It is, therefore, necessary for non-Indigenous student services practitioners to develop an understanding for how Indigenous students experience post-secondary education, so that they can work towards creating positive learning experiences for all students.

### **Definition of Terms**

Several terms are used throughout this study for which different definitions may exist or for which additional clarification may be needed to understand the context in which they are used. Therefore, a list of terms and definitions is provided in Table 2.

Table 2

#### *Definition of Terms*

Term	Definition
Aboriginal	a term used to describe those who identify as a member of the first inhabitants of Canada. This term encompasses First Nations, Inuit, and Métis, but also excludes many First Peoples who do not identify with this term (B. Lee, personal communication, December 4, 2017).
Decolonization	the process of undoing or dismantling colonial structures of power. Within education, this often refers to the practice of challenging perspectives on what knowledge is, whose knowledge is it, and how knowledge is gained and transferred (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2013).
First Nations	a term developed by the Canadian Federal Government to identify someone who is registered under Canada’s Indian Act (1867); does not include Inuit or Métis (Indspire, 2019).
Indian	the legal term used to identify a First Nations person who is registered under Canada’s Indian Act (1867). This misnomer was first applied to First Nations people during the colonial period, in which Europeans seeking trade routes mistook what would become the Americas for India (Cardinal, 1999).

*Table 2 continued*

Term	Definition
Inuit	the cultural groups of people who live in the northern and Arctic areas of Canada, occupying 35% of Canada's land mass and over 50% of its coastline (Indspire, 2019).
Indigenous	a term used internationally to describe the original inhabitants of a particular region or country, in contrast to those who have settled, occupied, or colonized a region or country. This can include First Nations, Inuit, and Métis, but also can exclude many First Peoples, and is not a unilaterally accepted term (Battiste, 2013).
Indigenous Knowledge	localized knowledge that is specific to the history and cultural values of Indigenous communities in a specific region (S. Wilson, 2008).
Indigenization	the meaningful inclusion of Indigenous Knowledges, history, culture, and perspectives into all aspects of the post-secondary environment, including curriculum and service delivery (Pidgeon, 2016b).
Métis	a distinctive cultural group whose descendants are a mix of Indigenous and European ethnicity, and who come from a unique shared political and historical background (Métis National Council, n.d.).
Native	a (somewhat dated) term that refers to the relationship of someone or something to a particular region or place. It has been used to describe Indigenous people in Canada, giving reference to their history which traces their origin to these lands (B. Lee, personal communication, December 4, 2017).
Non-Indigenous	a term used to describe someone whose family roots are not originally from the land in which they inhabit (Regan, 2010).
Settler	a term referring to someone whose ancestors are not originally from the land we now know as Canada. This includes descendants of individuals who either came to Canada or were brought to Canada from somewhere else. This term often, but not always, refers to those in the dominant white European culture; however, settlers can come from anywhere in the world (Regan, 2010).
Reconciliation	the process of establishing and maintaining mutually respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians (The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015d).

*Table 2 continued*

Term	Definition
Reserve	a portion of land held through the Indian Act and treaties for the exclusive use by specific First Nations communities, not to be confused with what is historical traditional territory of an Indigenous Nation (Harris, 2011).
Student Services	sometimes referred to as student affairs, this is the division or unit within a post-secondary institution that is responsible for providing co-curricular and extra-curricular student support designed to increase student retention and enhance student academic success and overall learning experience (Cox & Strange, 2010).

### **Purpose of the Study**

This research attended to two distinct goals. First, the research will help clarify the ways in which non-Indigenous student services practitioners can effectively and respectfully contribute to reconciliatory work through service design and delivery. Second, this research will help identify strategies to motivate non-Indigenous student services practitioners to be part of the response to the TRC's calls to action.

The outcomes from this research will be most relevant to Indigenous and non-Indigenous post-secondary administrators and leaders within the field of student services. These are individuals who have the capacity to bring about change in frontline student support, and, depending on their level and sphere of influence within their institution, to impact administrative policy design. Members of faculty and senior administrative leadership may also have an interest in this research; notably, research outcomes will be of particular interest to leaders within institutions who have prioritized Indigenization, decolonization and reconciliation within their strategic plans.

### **The Research Question**

This research plan addressed a primary research question as well as two sub-questions.

**The overarching question:** How can non-Indigenous student services practitioners be guided to respond to the call for reconciliation and Indigenization of post-secondary education that has been made in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's final report?

**Subquestions:** More specifically, I explored the following:

- What training, knowledge and supports are required of non-Indigenous student services practitioners who want to respond to the TRC's calls to action?
- How can we increase the participation of non-Indigenous student services practitioners in this work?

### **Identity and Role of the Researcher**

In keeping with Indigenous protocol around positioning myself, I would like to start by stating that I am a non-Indigenous, third-generation Canadian. My father's family came to Canada from Scotland, and my mother's family came from Norway, Ireland, and Syria. I live on Vancouver Island in the WSÁNEĆ territory with my husband and children. I work at Royal Roads University, which resides on the territory of the Lekwungen and Xwsepsum families. I have worked in the field of student services since 1996. My master's degree is in education, with a specialization in Student Affairs Administration, from the University of Vermont. Over the last 20 years, I have held various student services positions in large, small, public, and private institutions in both the United States of America and in Canada. I love what I do and feel proud of the impact that my services have had on students throughout my career. As a dedicated life-long learner, I consistently look for ways to improve my practice, and I am now working towards a doctorate degree at the University of Calgary in Education with a specialization in Post-Secondary Leadership. I am also still very new to understanding myself in relation to my colonial roots, the Indigenous people who are my neighbours (I live approximately 100 yards

from the Tsartlip First Nations community), and the responsibilities I bear in the process of reconciliation. As a descendent of settlers, I am still learning about my role in the colonization and oppression of Indigenous people. It is only in my adult years, through the process of developing relationships with Indigenous neighbours and colleagues and seeking to understand more about a culture to which I was raised to be oblivious, that I have started to understand where I fit in this landscape. As a result of this learning, I am motivated to be part of the change that is required (Poitras Pratt & Danyluk 2017; Regan, 2010).

Through my personal engagement with the TRC's documents (2015a, 2015c, 2015d), I have identified gaps in my personal understanding, knowledge, and training that I believe have limited my ability to provide appropriate services to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. The alignment between the start date of my doctoral studies and the release of the recommendations from the TRC presented a happening to which I felt compelled to respond. I believe I have a responsibility to understand how these calls to action intersect with, and impact, my field of work. As a leader within a system of education that has been historically involved in the discrimination and exclusion of Indigenous people, I feel compelled to take action and change the direction of post-secondary education. As the Director of Student Services at a small public university in BC, I have the opportunity to facilitate changes in service design and service delivery. Therefore, this research has direct relevance to my work and will inform my own field of practice. It also aligns with the moral responsibility that I hold as a non-Indigenous practitioner in education to promote culturally safe learning environments that reflect and include Indigenous culture and knowledges.

As a new researcher, I find comfort in the sentiments expressed by Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011), who acknowledged that "the various paradigms are beginning to 'interbreed' such

that two theorists previously thought to be in irreconcilable conflict may now appear, under a different theoretical rubric, to be informing one another's arguments" (p. 97). This evolution of perspectives towards research paradigms as fluid and inter-relatable supported my interest in integrating aspects of Western and Indigenous methods in this study. Critical theory rose above others as having the strongest influence on my approach to research (Brookfield, 2004; Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011). Brookfield (2004) described critical thinking as "being able to identify, and then to challenge and change, the process by which a grossly iniquitous society uses dominant ideology to convince people this is a normal state of affairs" (p. viii). I believe that bias must be explored, injustices must be addressed, and learning must occur so that injustices can be avoided in the future. I also believe that social justice and racism must be treated as a complex subject; one cannot tackle one "ism" without acknowledging the multiple other "isms" that allow the dominant culture to wield power over marginalized cultures (Battiste, 2013; Monture, 2009; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2014).

I am not a subject-matter expert in either decolonization or Indigenous student support. Like many non-Indigenous student services practitioners, I am challenged by my lack of understanding about Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Many Indigenous scholars, including Battiste [Mi'kmaw, Potlotek First Nation] (2013), Mihesuah [Choctaw Nation] (2006), Monture [Haudenosaunee, Grand River] (2009), Poitras Pratt [Métis] and Danyluk (2017), Regan (2010), and Tippeconnic Fox [Comanche] and McClellan (2005), have suggested that this deficiency in cultural awareness is a result of being raised in a colonial society. Godlewska, Moore [Cree], and Bednasek (2010, p. 419) discussed this generally shared obliviousness as part of a "purposive and wilful ignorance" that has been intentionally developed by early settlers and

passed down from generation to generation. Battiste (2013) warned about the unintended consequences of cultural naivety in education:

Education systems perpetuate a biased construction of the strength of colonialism posing as globalism, Eurocentric institutions, economic survival of the nation, cultural institutions and reasoned democracy alongside the idea that Indigenous peoples are primitive, uneducated, justly conquered people who would have been assimilated long ago but for their cultural backwardness. (p. 32)

Many non-Indigenous student services practitioners, including me, are products of the Eurocentric institutions to which Battiste (2013) referred, and though the will to change may exist, the capacity to do so may be wanting. This research will initiate conversations that increase awareness and understanding for how reconciliation and decolonization within the post-secondary student services environment can occur, and my hope is that it will be validated by surrounding Indigenous communities.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

This literature review is divided into five sections. In the first section, I identify the theory and conceptual framework that guided the research plan. In the second section, I introduce the history of Indian Residential Schools and Indigenous education in Canada. This provides an historical background for the work of the TRC and helps to create an understanding of the impact that the Indian Residential School system continues to have on the experiences of Indigenous students. In the third section, I explore the role of student services in the Canadian post-secondary environment and review the literature that has helped to define and shape the field. Developing insights into the history and purpose of post-secondary student services helps to shape an understanding of the possible links between student services and the TRC's (2015d) calls to action. In the fourth section, I review the action areas from the TRC's (2015b) report that are directly relevant to the work of post-secondary student services. This is followed by literature that explores the practical and moral arguments for responding to the TRC. Such arguments include the link between Indigenous student success rates, increased employability, and economic impact, as well as the ethical responsibility that draws educators, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to this work. I then examine literature about Canadian post-secondary leadership structures in order to provide context to the environment in which leadership decisions are made and how these decisions can be influenced. In the final section, I address the role and responsibility of non-Indigenous leaders in efforts of reconciliation,

A variety of authors and scholars were reviewed for each section, and a significant proportion of the authors are Indigenous. Content includes peer-reviewed journals, books, government reports, member association publications, and various media publications. This



combination of sources helped shape an understanding of the intersection between student services and the opportunities that have been presented by the TRC's (2015d) calls to action.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In the spirit of reconciliation and in the interest of modeling an approach that respectfully intertwines Indigenous and Western approaches to knowledge gathering (Sternberg & Hogue, 2011), this research project was guided by a combination of Western European frameworks and theories along with Indigenous Knowledges. In particular, the framework of adaptive leadership (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002) and the theory of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 2010) were drawn on from Western perspectives of knowledge and understanding.

The framework of *adaptive leadership* (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002) was developed to address complex systemic changes in organizations. It is specifically suited for challenges that involve changes to organizational values and identity. It is also used in environments with distributed leadership that encourage emergent leaders and divergent thinkers. Drawing on reconciliatory work within Australia, Leigh (2002) presented adaptive leadership as a viable approach for reconciliation between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals on a national level because of its effectiveness in creating change through small, manageable interventions. This framework recognizes the strength and opportunity that non-hierarchical developing leaders hold within various levels of an organization or community. These leaders, dispersed among the organization, can permeate various pockets of the organization to create waves of change. They do this by starting in the areas for which they have direct responsibility and then connecting with others who share the same vision. Adaptive leaders can introduce opportunities for disruption by moving others into a place of discomfort, either through exposure to new information or the discovery of an issue or problem (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Heifetz, Linsky, & Grashow, 2009;

Leigh, 2002). Through discomfort, a necessary state of disequilibrium can be achieved, and this allows for the entry of a catalyzing moment wherein individuals affected by the disequilibrium are motivated to seek change.

The framework of adaptive leadership aligns with the work of Paulette Regan (2010), a non-Indigenous scholar, who has written about the role and responsibility of settlers for ownership of the mistreatment of Indigenous people and abuse of treaties and Nation negotiations. Regan suggested that settlers must engage in a process of *un-settling* themselves by bearing witness to the history of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations and to the impact that this history has had on current-day realities of Indigenous people. Wampanoag scholar, Gkisedtanamoogk (2010), emphasized the link between knowledge and action:

If you are immune, complacent, indifferent and untouched by the horror of human avarice and aggression, then you are not paying attention. It is not possible to be engaged in this work and not behave differently. (p. 53)

As a non-Indigenous scholar learning about the permeating legacy of colonization in Canada, I have been made to feel uncomfortable and disrupted. This has inspired me to seek change within myself and my approach to work. Through this research, I hoped to gather knowledge and understanding in a respectful way that may help me to facilitate disequilibrium and motivation in other non-Indigenous student service practitioners.

Bandura's (1977) *theory of self-efficacy* also guided this research. Bandura's theory suggests that all individuals are inspired to do things when they believe they can do them well. Bandura suggested that people who feel a low sense of efficacy will avoid difficult tasks, whereas people who feel a high sense of self-efficacy will be motivated to tackle challenges and

difficult tasks. The level of effort dedicated to any initiative therefore correlates directly to an individual's feelings of self-efficacy.

For non-Indigenous leaders, working towards decolonization and Indigenization can feel scary, and can look like a very challenging and overwhelming task. A lack of Indigenous cultural knowledge, combined with a fear of doing the wrong thing, can create a sense of low self-efficacy and impede an individual's desire and level of commitment to reconciliatory work (Koukkanen, 2007; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2017). Moreover, social structures that privilege those in the dominant culture make it easy for non-Indigenous leaders to do avoid engagement in reconciliatory work altogether (Regan, 2010). However, if it is possible to increase a sense of self-efficacy among non-Indigenous student services practitioners about the work of reconciliation, then it may be possible to increase their level of commitment to this work. This must be done with care, however, to avoid any sense of illusory superiority or the risk cultural appropriation.

One Indigenous framework that helped guide this research is the medicine wheel. As a non-Indigenous practitioner and scholar, I am grateful for the teachings I have received about how the medicine wheel can serve as a conceptual framework for teaching and learning. Ormiston [Northern Tutchone/Tlingit] (2012) shared how some, though not all, Indigenous cultures use the medicine wheel as a guide to a journey. Each of the four quadrants represents a different place on the journey; in some cultures, these quadrants represent the physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual dimensions to knowledge and understanding. It can serve as a guide for the process of contemplation, growth, change, and regeneration; it starts a journey and brings one back home. In certain Indigenous cultures, the wheel is a metaphor for the interdependence of all beings, animate or inanimate. Though the medicine wheel is a prominent

symbol common to many Indigenous cultures, it is not fully representative of all Indigenous cultures, nor is it interpreted the same by those whose cultures who use it.

Scholars of Indigenous research methodology, Chilisa [Bantu] and S. Wilson [Opaskwayak] both identified the medicine wheel as a conceptual framework for engaging in research and knowledge gathering (Chilisa, 2012; S. Wilson, 2008). Similarly, Bell [Kitigan Zibi First Nation] and Calliou [Michelle Band] both addressed how, as a pedagogical tool, the medicine wheel can frame a concept in order to communicate better understanding by illustrating the interconnectedness between different themes within a concept (Bell, 2014; Calliou, 1995). According to Bell (2014), the medicine wheel communicates the “importance of appreciating and respecting the ongoing interconnectedness and interrelatedness of all things” (p. 14).

In Figure 1, the four action areas from the TRC’s (2015d) calls to action document that this research will explore are represented in the four directional quadrants of the wheel, starting in the East and following the sun to South, West and North. The wheel helps to convey how each action area is separate, yet interconnected, part of a process to transform student services within the academy. The Eastern quadrant represents the enhancement of student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect. These attributes are foundational and necessary for the beginning of any journey towards reconciliation. In the Southern quadrant is the development of services that incorporate Indigenous Knowledges in their approach to delivery. This stage of the journey represents a shift within the academy towards greater inclusivity, where Indigenous students are able to feel that their cultures and identities are respected and mirrored in the services that support their academic success. The Western quadrant expands the opportunity for parental and community involvement in service delivery. This stage marks another shift in service design; one that connects student services and experiences with

communities outside of the academy. The Northern quadrant marks the end of the academic cycle: the development of services that support Indigenous student academic attainment levels as well as post-graduate employability. The image of the medicine wheel rests on a foundational basis of individual and institutional commitment to change, that are respectively supported through the theory of self-efficacy and the framework of adaptive leadership (see Figure 1).

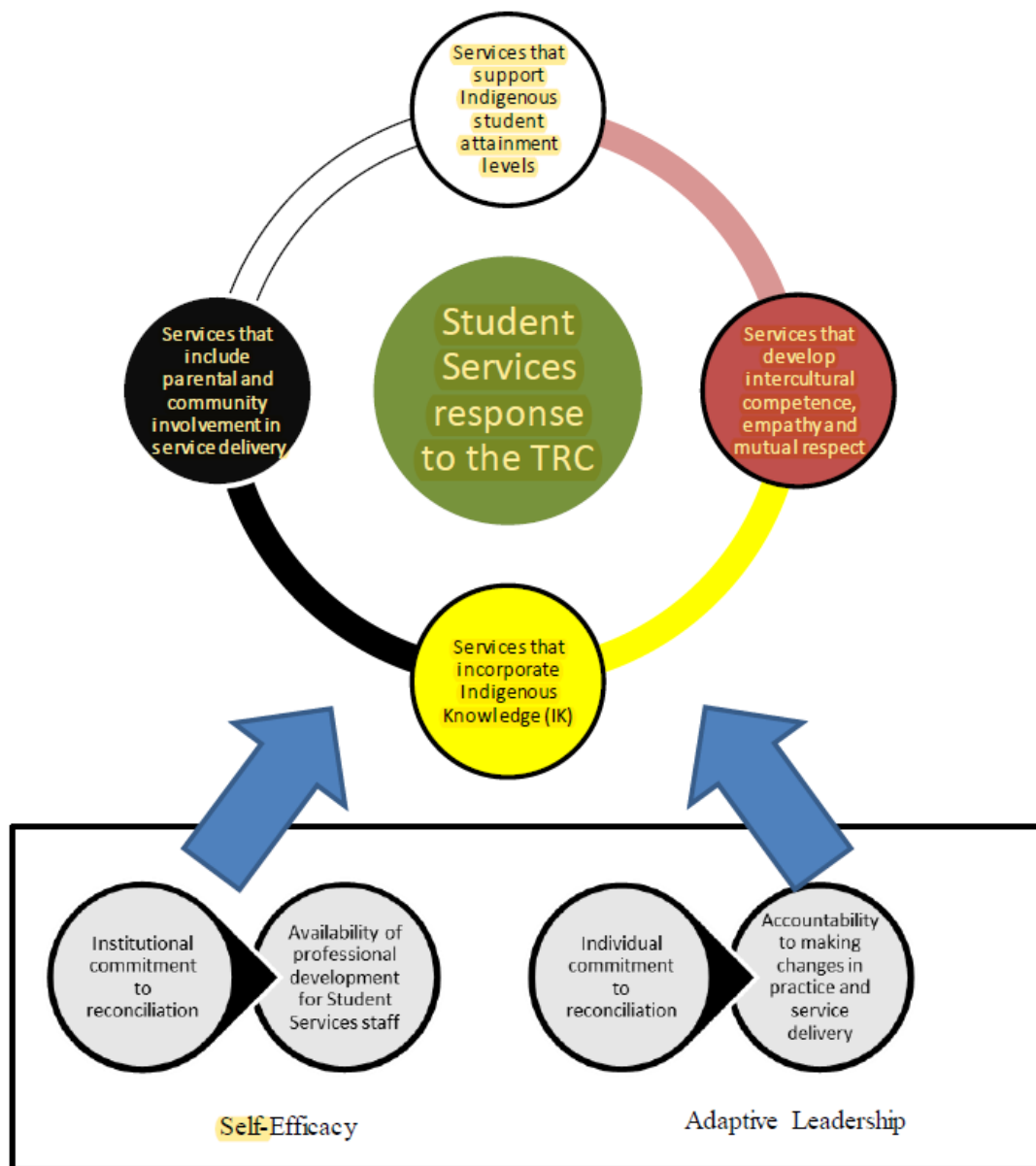


Figure 1. Student Services and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action.

## **The History and Legacy of Indian Residential Schools**

With the best-selling book *The Unjust Society*, author and activist Harold Cardinal of Sucker Creek First Nation was one of the first to fully expose the history and legacy of Indian Residential Schools to the broader Canadian public. The book was first published in 1969, and then republished in 1999. As Cardinal (1999) recounted, Indian Residential Schools were part of a significant federal campaign to colonize and westernize Indigenous populations across Canada and North America. Indian Residential Schools in Canada date back to the late 1880s, a time of ongoing treaty negotiations between Indigenous communities and European settlers as the Europeans made plans for expanded trade routes across increased access to natural resources across North America (Cardinal, 1999). The establishment of a school system for Indigenous youth was initially a component of treaty negotiations; at the insistence of Indigenous leaders of the day, there was a shared understanding that the treaty agreements would secure access to education for all Indigenous youth (Cardinal, 1999). The delivery of primary and secondary education was contracted out by the federal government to different religious affiliations. Though there may have been multiple motivations for those involved in developing these teaching institutions, the purpose of these schools soon became one of assimilating Indigenous people into the dominant culture (MacDonald & Hudson, 2012): “The early focus on benefits to Aboriginal people and the balance between Western and Aboriginal worldviews and languages soon gave way to a far more coercive system which entailed forced assimilation and cultural destruction” (p. 431).

Indian Residential Schools trained students for entry into lower-level service positions; half of the day might be spent on academic subjects and the other half on labour and service training (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003). It has been suggested that this was an intentional

attempt to keep Indigenous people within the lower economic classes (MacDonald & Hudson, 2012), and the practice of enforced social stratification is thought to continue today through secondary education models that stream students according to their race and their perceived abilities (LeTendre, Hofer, & Shimizu, 2003; Oakes, 2005; TRC, 2015c). There are some who contend that the Indian Residential School system was used as a form of cultural genocide by facilitating the disintegration of languages, ceremonies, and cultural practices of Indigenous peoples across Canada and North America (Cardinal, 1999; MacDonald & Hudson, 2012). These authors also suggested that post-secondary education was complicit in these efforts, as they contributed to the training and education of the teachers who worked in the Indian Residential School System.

In 1969, Jean Chrétien, who was then Minister of Indian Affairs, drafted the *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy, 1969* and presented it to parliament. Though the stated intention of the paper was to give equal rights and power to Indigenous communities across Canada, it was perceived by Indigenous leaders and communities as another attempt at assimilation, as it did not acknowledge the unique and separate existence of Indigenous ways of knowing and being (Pidgeon, Archibald, & Munoz, 2013). In response to this paper, which became known as “The White Paper,” the National Indian Brotherhood, now known as the Assembly of First Nations, drafted the *Indian Control of Indian Education Report* (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972). This influential report represented a step towards self-determination and has informed federal education policy (Paquette & Fallon, 2010).

In 1990, Phil Fontaine, member of Sagkeeng First Nation and leader of the Assembly of First Nations, publicly shared his experiences of trauma and abuse within the Indian Residential School system (TRC, 2015c, p. 130). His courage and vulnerability inspired others to share their

stories about Canada's residential school system. As previous residential school survivors and their descendants came forward, the Canadian public started to take notice; these were firsthand accounts of physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect. By removing children from their home cultures, the incoming colonizers interrupted the transfer of Indigenous Knowledges between generations and caused long-term negative impacts across multiple generations that significantly affected the general health and well-being of Indigenous peoples. Some of the long-term impacts include the loss of local Indigenous languages, loss of connection and familiarity to local culture, loss of parenting skills, reliance on substance abuse to mask personal pain, and loss of pride in personal heritage (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003). These afflictions have been passed onto subsequent generations of Indigenous people; thus, the term intergenerational trauma. The residential school legacy has also been linked to prevailing issues of mental health, addictions, and poverty within today's Indigenous communities (Monture, 2009). Through the *Indian Control of Indian Education* (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972), the National Indian Brotherhood worked to revive these lost systems of knowledge transfer. However, a lack of trust in government-funded federal or provincial education initiatives and, in many cases, a rightful lack of trust in Western education hindered the process of cultural education revival (Milne, 2016). In the latter part of the 20th century, governments and the public became more aware of the harm being inflicted on children and communities, and the schools were gradually closed. The last residential school operated by the Canadian Government was the Gordon Indian Residential School in Saskatchewan, which closed in 1996 (TRC, 2015c, p. 360).

In their report entitled *Report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People Volume 3*, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (1996) acknowledged that the efforts being made to improve Indigenous education in the latter half of the 20th century were not overly impactful.



The rates of education and socio-economic development of Indigenous people in Canada highlighted a need for more rapid and significant changes to educational systems (Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, 1996). The report introduced several recommendations to education, which inspired a variety of retention initiatives and pathway programs (Pidgeon et al., 2013). Unfortunately, a decade after the release of the report, Aboriginal students still lagged behind non-Aboriginal students in both admission rates and matriculation rates (Mendolson, 2006). Indigenous registration and graduation rates in science, technology, engineering, and math were particularly low in comparison to those of non-Indigenous students (Stereberg & Hogue, 2011).

So what is to be done? Battiste [Potlotek First Nation] (2013), Barnhardt (2008), Kirkness [Ochekwi-Sipi] and Barnhardt (2001), Koukkanen [Sámi] (2007), and Schissel and Wotherspoon (2003) are just some of the voices who were calling for more than just the revitalization of what has been lost. They have each explored the possibility of how the integration of Indigenous Knowledges could change, and improve, education institutions if Western epistemology were to make room for Indigenous epistemology. Many authors, including Coleman (2012); Findlay (2000); Gallop and Bastien (2016); Menzies [Gitxaala Nation], Archibald [Sto:lo First Nation], and Smith [Maori] (2004); Mihesuah [Choctaw Nation] (2006); Pidgeon [Mi'kmaq] (2008); and Poitras Pratt [Métis], Louie [Carrier Nation], Hanson [Métis], and Ottmann [Saulteaux] (2018), have identified a need for post-secondary institutions to become more actively engaged in the process of reconciliation and Indigenization for the purpose of developing a post-secondary system that will offer a more honest and culturally relevant education for all learners.

Freemon (2010) acknowledged that the term reconciliation is problematic for some Indigenous people. It can suggest having to “put up with or ‘be reconciled to’ something with which you are not happy” (p. 149). It can also be perceived as a premature promise, given the persistence of dominant colonial structures. Scholars such as Alfred [Kahnawá:ke] (2004, 2016), Alfred and Corntassel [Cherokee Nation] (2005), and Simpson [Mississauga Nishnaabeg] (2011) advocated for Indigenous resurgence over reconciliation, suggesting that current interpretations of reconciliation may simply perpetuate colonialism or assimilation.

It must be recognized that colonialism is a narrative in which the Settler’s power is the fundamental reference and assumption, inherently limiting Indigenous freedom and imposing a view of the world that is but an outcome or perspective on that power. (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005, p. 601)

Ermine of Sturgeon Lake First Nation echoed the frustrations of facing an impenetrable dominant perspective: “One of the festering irritants for Indigenous peoples, in their encounter with the West, is the brick wall of a deeply embedded belief and practice of Western universality” (Ermine, 2007, p. 198). It is, therefore, necessary to be consciously aware of how prevailing dominant perspectives may influence and ultimately shape well-intended work.

### **The Role of Student Services in Canadian Post-Secondary Education**

At all levels of post-secondary education, student services have been known to have a direct influence on the tone, culture, and community of an institution (Cox & Strange, 2010). The developing role that student services hold within post-secondary education with respect to student admission, retention, and achievement is examined in this section.

The type of work linked to the term student services varies across Canadian post-secondary institutions as does the approach used to deliver the services (Cox & Strange, 2010).

Common services within the field currently include academic advising, accessibility services, career services, counselling and coaching, financial aid and awards, multicultural student services, new student orientation, Indigenous student support, international student support, residence life, spiritual services, service-learning, student activities, student conduct, and work-integrated learning. The unifying characteristic across the field of student services is the commitment to enhance the process of student learning, development, and growth (Canadian Association of College and University Student Services, 1989).

The *professionalization* of student services in Canada has been in development since the middle of the 20th century (Cox & Strange, 2010). In the first part of the 20th century, student support services existed on Canadian campuses under the framework and expectations of *in-loco-parentis*, meaning “in place of the parent” (Baldizan, 1998, p. 29). During this period of time, university academics managed oversight of both student academic behaviour and social activities, often through the roles of residence and dormitory dons or as academic advisors (Baldizan, 1998). Much of this work was tied to institutional and societal values that reflected a primarily Western European, white, middle-class worldview (Torres et al., 2010). As student demographics expanded to become more diverse, new services were developed to support their experiences, and new specialized roles were identified within institutions. Following the end of World War II, colleges and universities experienced an increase of enrollment from veterans. Faced with new demands from a changed student body, institutions began to offer transitioning support for veterans in the forms of personal and career counselling. Eventually, these services were opened to non-veterans as well (Cox & Strange, 2010). This opened the door for new, non-academic support roles.

During the latter half of the 20th century, a body of scholarly literature on student development theory grew out of the United States. This helped to shape the purpose and function of student services practitioners in Canada. Seminal works in student development theory from Chickering (1969) and Kohlberg (1976) facilitated a better understanding of the motivations and concerns of students. By recognizing the post-secondary student experience as a *developmental process*, institutions began to design services that supported students as they moved through these various stages of development. As research into the student experience continued, Astin (1984), Boyer (1990), Schlossberg (1989), Terenzini, Pascarella, and Blimling (1996), and Tinto (1975, 1987), as well as others developed theories on issues related to student retention, persistence, and success, including theories on why post-secondary students may *not* be successful and how institutions can help students to become successful. Cox and Strange (2010) suggested that the growth in literature about college student development helped to inform the development of a variety of services aimed at increasing retention and decreasing attrition. Student services took on the responsibility for supporting academic preparedness and worked to remove barriers to learning, including psychosocial stresses and financial pressures. There was a shift towards grounding student services work in relevant research (Torres et al., 2010). In particular, Tinto's (1987) *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition*, encouraged institutions to focus on the process of social integration and the development of a *common student experience*. Services then began to specialize in supporting the transition into post-secondary, and in many cases, became responsible for on-boarding students to the cultural expectations and norms of post-secondary environments (Cox & Strange, 2010).

As different student services formalized their identities within the post-secondary environment, several professional associations also began to contribute to scholarly research that informed student services practice. Cox and Strange (2010) offered an historical review of the development and influence of these publications. In 1959, the American College Personnel Association, which is now known as College Student Educators International, began publication of the peer-reviewed *Journal of College Student Personnel*, which is now known as the *Journal of College Student Development*. In 1963, the National Association for Personnel Administrators began publication of the *NASPA Journal*, which is now known as the *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*. In 1971, the Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education began publication of the *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, which served as the primary source for peer-reviewed research related to both education and support in post-secondary institutions (Cox & Strange, 2010). In 1973, the Canadian Association of College and University Student Services began offering professional development and training across Canada. Though it is not peer-reviewed, the Canadian Association of College and University Student Services began publication of a magazine titled *Communiqué*. This growth in research about the learning experiences of post-secondary students helped to guide the field of student services (Cox & Strange, 2010).

The latter part of the 20th century saw an expansion in student development literature. During this period, many researchers began to focus attention towards the unique needs of minority student populations (Gilligan, 1982; Gosman, Dandridge, Nettles, & Thoeny, 1983; Tierney, 1992). Much of this research suggested that cultural identity plays a significant factor in the student experience, and the goal of creating one *common student experience* may not be in the best interests of the student or the institution. Tierney (1992) took particular aim at Tinto,

suggesting that it is not the student who should adjust to the institution, but the institution that should adjust for the student.

In response to this developing perspective towards the multiple identities of students, student services practitioners began to explore the experiences of different student groups, considering a variety of cultural factors, including gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and family history within post-secondary (Cox & Strange, 2010). As a result, institutions began to increase specialized supports to meet a broader range of student needs. This led to the creation of services that could assist those who identified with a minority group, including, but not limited to: Indigenous students, international students, women, first-generation students, LGBTQ students, students with a disability, students from low-income families, and mature students (Swail, 2003).

This recognition and appreciation of the diversity of students gave rise to new institutional services models. Some institutions introduced service structures that allowed for the compartmentalization of services into units that offered a full suite of services to particular student populations. Examples of this include Indigenous student services and International student services that offer advising and support throughout the entire student life-cycle (prospect to graduate). As acknowledged by Kun et. al. (2005) and Pidgeon et. al. (2014) there are benefits and challenges to this compartmentalized service structure. Benefits include the relationship development between students and advisors, and the peer support that can be facilitated within certain sub-populations of students, all which contributes to student retention. Challenges include the increased demand for staff to be both generalists and specialists in a variety of service areas, as well as the risk of creating unwanted silos within the campus community.

In addition to providing support to students from minority cultural identities, student services took on the role of educating those in the dominant cultures about how to be aware of cultural differences and create inclusive learning communities. This was seen as an important aspect to fostering student retention and student success. New student orientation programs began to include educational sessions on cultural competence and inclusivity (Barr, McClellan, & Sandeen, 2014). New programs were introduced in the area of student clubs and organizations. Institution-sponsored student activities and events became more educational, bringing awareness to topics like mental health, racism, sexuality, and gender.

With this increased focus on learning happening outside of the classroom, student services practitioners also began to identify themselves as educators and facilitators of a co-curricular experience. In a joint publication of the American College Personnel Association and National Association of Student Personnel Administrators titled *Learning Reconsidered: A Campus-wide Focus on the Student Experience*, Keeling (2004) introduced the concept of an *integrated* approach to supporting post-secondary learning. This work positions student services practitioners as partners with faculty in the teaching and learning process. In their review of the field in Canada, Cox and Strange (2010) described student services as a centralized hub that supports the student experience by linking faculties and departments to institutional values and facilitating the intersection between academic and co-curricular activities. They also identified eight key principles for good practice in student services, which include:

1. Centring practice on student needs.
2. Expecting individual differences.
3. Being flexible in our approaches.
4. Responding to needs appropriately and on-time.

5. Anticipating needs, rather than reacting to them.
6. Applying resources efficiently and sustainably.
7. Focusing on outcomes and results.
8. Designing and implementing services in an integrated manner (p. 237).

This combination of principles speaks to the balance that those in the field of student services try to achieve while continuing to meet the needs of students, faculty, and administration.

Not all the literature supported an increase of resources or services. Some education critics who are disappointed with rising tuition costs have questioned the value of expanding administrative services (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009). Arum and Roksa (2011) provided an unsympathetic review of post-secondary leadership, suggesting that post-secondary institutions have become wasteful with both resources and personnel and that students now suffer from a lack of impactful and meaningful learning. This type of criticism has initiated a rippling effect among post-secondary institutions, triggering debates about resource allocation, the nature and purpose of certain services, and the role of the university. As a corollary support to academic learning, student services have become caught in this crossfire. Arum and Roksa questioned some of the work being done by student services practitioners, suggesting that institutions have strayed too far away from their core purpose of teaching and learning, focusing more on the social development of students than the academic development of students.

However, as the post-secondary landscape becomes increasingly more competitive, research on student retention has remained a valuable tool for institutional strategic planning. Gaskell (2008), Metz (2004), and Wilcox, Winn, and Fyvie-Gauld (2005) suggested that the work of student services has direct impact on attrition and matriculation and should, therefore, be considered in the context of strategic enrolment management. Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, and



Associates (2005) also suggested that to be successful, institutions should invest in services that support student success. A recent 2018 collaboration between BCcampus and the Ministry of Advanced Education has produced a series of electronic guides for people working in the post-secondary sector that are aimed at helping to facilitate Indigenization, decolonization, and reconciliation within the academy (Cull, Hancock, McKeown, Pidgeon, & Vedan, 2018). In recognition of the important role that students play in student retention, the series includes a specific guide for frontline staff and student services advisors (Cull et al., 2018).

### **Action Areas for Student Services**

As identified earlier in this report, four action areas from the TRC's (2015c) calls to action are of particular relevance to practitioners in the field of student services: (a) Indigenous student academic attainment levels and post-graduate employability; (b) the enhancement of student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect; (c) services that incorporate Indigenous Knowledges in their approach to delivery; and (d) parental and community involvement in service delivery. In this section of the literature review, I explore the link between the work of student services and each of these areas.

**Indigenous student academic attainment levels and post-graduate employability.** An exploration of the literature identified an understanding of the difference between the academic attainment levels of Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students. One perspective is that many Indigenous students are under-prepared for post-secondary education (Cardinal, 1999). The TRC (2015a) cited lack of appropriate funding as a rationale for a lack of preparedness. Though the administration, oversight, and funding of public education are a provincial or territorial responsibility, on-reserve First Nations schools are funded by the Federal Government (Cardinal, 1999). Federal funding structures have not been reviewed as frequently as provincial

and territory funding structures; annual increases to budgets at the federal level have been smaller than annual increases at the provincial and territory levels of government (TRC, 2015a). This has led to a significant funding discrepancy between on-reserve and off-reserve institutions (Mendelson, 2008). As the availability of funding can be directly linked to the availability of educational resources (e.g., information and education technology), several authors asserted that this inequity of funding has contributed to a discrepancy in levels of academic preparation (Cardinal, 1999; Laboucane, 2010; Mendelson, 2008; Neeganagwedgin, 2013). This funding discrepancy is a source of anger and hard feelings and is representative of social inequity. For some scholars, this disparity was best described as colonial discrimination towards Indigenous people (Battiste, 2013; Cardinal, 1999; Pidgeon et al., 2013) and as a representation of the federal government's disregard for original treaty agreements.

Opaskwayak educator and activist, Peggy Wilson (1996) took a different perspective regarding the preparedness of Indigenous students. In speaking about her experiences teaching first-year students at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, she shared: "Indigenous students were adequately prepared in reservation schools to handle academic tasks. But what they were unprepared for was racism, large classes, dysfunctional counselling, and a lack of interaction with their teachers and their mainstream classmates" (p. 27).

There is also a perspective among many Indigenous scholars that attempts by educators and institutions to address Indigenous student retention and success are too often focused solely on making adjustments to the *Indigenous student* rather than making adjustments to the surrounding environment (Alfred, 2004; Battiste, 2013; Battiste, Bell, & Findlay, 2002; Cardinal, 1999; Episkenew, 2013; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001; Koukkanen, 2007; Mihsuah & Wilson, 2004; Monture, 2009; Pidgeon 2008, 2016a; Sterenberg & Hogue, 2011; Tippeconnic Fox &

McClellan, 2005; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2013). These authors suggested that student support is not about making students feel more comfortable within a colonial environment, but about making the environment more culturally safe for the Indigenous student. Therefore, the adjusting needs to be done by the institution and not by the Indigenous students. Similarly, Pidgeon (2008, 2016a) has argued a need to increase Indigenous presence within institutions through curriculum, protocols, services, and settings. However, there was a shared sentiment among some scholars, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, that Indigenous Knowledges are not valued in the academy (Absolon, 2016; Battiste, 2013; Battiste et al., 2002; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001; Koukkanen, 2007; Kovach, 2009a; Monture, 2009; Vaudrin-Charette, 2019). According to Sámi scholar Koukkanen (2007), the academy “expects [Indigenous] students to leave their ontological and epistemological assumptions and perceptions at the gates of the university” (p. 27). This can foster disconnection between Indigenous students and their learning environments.

Student development literature on minority student persistence and academic achievement linked the level of student engagement with the level of academic achievement: “Student engagement represents two critical features: the extent to which students take part in educationally effective practice and the degree to which the institution organizes productive activities for student learning” (Kinzie, Gonyea, Shoup, & Kuh, 2008, p. 23). Kinzie et al. (2008) identified the following activities as key areas for student engagement: student–faculty contact, cooperation among students, active learning, prompt feedback, time on task, high expectations, and respect for diverse talents and ways of learning. Kinzie et al. posited, “Efforts to create more hospitable campus environments for underrepresented students must be culturally sensitive and strive to employ engaging educational practices that make a difference to student success” (p. 34). Though they referenced the requirement to ensure that efforts are culturally sensitive,

there was no deep analysis into what this might mean for students who come from cultures that hold significantly different cultural values than the dominant culture. Pidgeon (2008) and Tierney (1992) suggested that student services' efforts to support Indigenous students through the transition to post-secondary, though well-intentioned, have been misaligned. As a result, students are challenged by the expectation that they extract themselves from their individual culture in order to join the dominant culture (Coble, 2019; Jones, Castellanos, & Cole 2002; Pidgeon, 2008; Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000). The activity of severing ties to home, family, and community is incongruent with many Indigenous values and ways of being.

There are examples of retention and achievement initiatives that are well-aligned to the Indigenous student experience. One example is the SAGE Model: Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement (Pidgeon, Archibald, & Hawkey, 2014). This is a faculty and student mentoring model that supports the recruitment and retention of Indigenous graduate students. The example shared by Pidgeon et al. (2014) is a model employed by five different BC institutions: University of British Columbia Vancouver, University of British Columbia Okanagan, Simon Fraser University, University of Victoria, and University of Northern British Columbia. Aboriginal Student Centres (also known as Native Student Centres) are also able to offer a level of cultural familiarity which can help students to bridge the two worlds of home and school. Though it is important to note that cultural practices and traditions vary significantly from Nation to Nation, there are common values within Indigenous ways of being that Aboriginal Student Centres embody and promote while adhering to local practices.

As one example of post-graduation employability initiatives, The LYNX Aboriginal Student Career and Employment Program, launched in 2008 by the University of Calgary, offers a Canadian-wide online service designed to support Indigenous post-secondary graduates in their

career search (University of Calgary, Lynx Aboriginal Student Career and Employment Program, 2016). As of December 2015, there were 2,969 Indigenous students registered with Lynx, representing 124 different post-secondary institutions in Canada (pp. 3–4). Technology advances introduced in 2015 will allow Lynx to track the engagement of students through the level of interaction that they have with the site. Lynx is an example of the power of collaboration and of how technology can be leveraged to harness opportunity.

The SAGE model (Pidgeon et. al., 2014) and The Lynx (University of Calgary, 2016) are only a couple examples of really good work that is happening in pockets across Canada. There are Indigenous and non-Indigenous student services practitioners who are working in various ways to facilitate change that will support reconciliation in post-secondary education. Indspire (2018), a national Indigenous charity that delivers services and programs that promote education for Indigenous people, launched a survey to Indigenous students across the country in 2018. The objective of the survey was to understand the experiences of post-secondary students in an era of reconciliation. The results of that survey indicated that some good work is happening, but that much more is needed in order to fully support the success of Indigenous students in Canadian post-secondary environments (Indspire, 2019).

**The enhancement of student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.** In 1979, Standing Rock Sioux author, theologian, and activist, Vine Deloria, wrote that “the fundamental factor that keeps Indians and non-Indians from communicating is that they are speaking about two entirely different perceptions of the world” (p. vii). The recommendation by the TRC (2015d) regarding the enhancement of capacity for intercultural understanding among students requires a significant shift in the way that students, faculty, and staff perceive Indigenous presence: “The education system itself must be transformed into one

that rejects the racism embedded in colonial systems of education and treats Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian knowledge systems with equal respect” (p. 123). This is a challenging task. Developing intercultural competence is not necessarily a new priority; Redpath and Nielsen (1997) reminded us that intercultural awareness has been a relevant topic among Canadian post-secondary leaders, particularly as it relates to internationalization efforts. Jones et al. (2002) and Rendón et al. (2000) also suggested that post-secondary institutions should prioritize initiatives that welcome and support intercultural competency throughout the campus. However, interestingly, there is limited awareness of the distinct cultural differences between non-Indigenous and Indigenous cultures and, in many cases, a resistance to seeing Indigenous cultures as equal to non-Indigenous cultures (Absolon, 2016; Cardinal, 1999).

Though increasing the capacity of students, faculty, and staff to understand and appreciate the cultural identities of others may contribute to a more inclusive environment for students from minority cultures, promoting multiculturalism may not be enough, according to some scholars. Following an examination of the experiences of Indigenous students in post-secondary environments, Currie, Wild, Schopflocher, Laing, and Veugelers (2012) identified a higher level of racism among students in Edmonton than students in the United States. Pidgeon (2008, 2016) and Tippeconnic Fox and McClellan (2005) supported the need for increased awareness and understanding specifically for Indigenous cultures and ways of being. They also asserted that those who work in student services have an opportunity and a responsibility to facilitate this awareness and understanding of Indigenous cultures, both inside and outside of the classroom.

There is also a perspective that the prevalent or dominant narrative of Canadian multiculturalism allows the nation to ignore racism in favour of celebrating multicultural pride in

Canada (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005). This may not be a reality that members of the dominant culture in Canada want to believe, but it is a perspective supported by many Indigenous Canadian authors (Absolon, 2016; Battiste, 2013; Cardinal, 1999; Milne, 2016; Monture, 2009; Neeganagwedgin, 2013; Pidgeon, 2008, 2016a, 2016b) and non-Indigenous allies (Lund & Carr, 2015; Regan, 2010). Poitras Pratt et al. (2018) described it this way:

Colonization in contemporary schooling can occur at multiple levels despite an ethos of multiculturalism or other inclusive discourses: at the epistemological level of knowledge systems, at the material level of representation, at the discursive level of curriculum, or at the human level of whose bodies are safe and whose experiences are valued. (p. 15)

Decolonizing practices then may benefit from a shift from multiculturalism and cultural competence towards critical awareness and cultural humility (Fisher-Borne, Cain, & Martin, 2015). Through cultural humility, practitioners develop awareness of the influence that power and privilege can overtly or covertly assert.

### **Services that incorporate Indigenous Knowledges in their approach to delivery.**

Within the body of literature that addressed post-secondary student services for minority students, there has been a growing discussion about incorporating Indigenous Knowledges into service design and delivery. Tippeconnic Fox and McClellan (2005) offered the first major student services publication in North America focused on Indigenous students. This was a quarterly monograph, published in the United States that dedicated an entire volume to supporting Native American students. Their recommendations included the integration of ceremony and Indigenous protocols into activities and services, the recognition of Indigenous approaches to medicine, health and well-being, and the inclusion of Elders whenever possible and appropriate. In another American work, Indigenous scholars Shotton [Wichita & Affiliated

Tribes], Lowe [Navajo], and Waterman [Onondaga] (2013) offered the first comprehensive text to address the support needs of Indigenous students. In their book *Beyond the Asterisk*, they acknowledged the invisibility of Indigenous students in education research. Though the editors and contributing authors from both publications were all from the United States, the content is transferrable to Canada. Pidgeon has dedicated much of her research to student services and student affairs in Canada. Pidgeon (2008) argued for the increase of Indigenous presence in student services and supported that in order to ease the tensions that Indigenous students feel while trying to bridge two separate worlds, there is a need for support services that are specific to Indigenous students. Archibald [Sto:lo First Nation] and DeRose [Secwepempc-Esketemc First Nations] (2014), Battiste (2013), Battiste et al. (2002), Battiste and Henderson (2009), Koukkanen (2007), Neeganagwedgin (2013), Pidgeon et al. (2014), Sterenberg and Hogue (2011), and P. Wilson (1996) are just some of the voices bringing awareness to the support needs of Indigenous post-secondary students in Canada, both inside and outside of the classroom. In different ways, they all discussed the personal challenges that Indigenous students experience with the institutional expectation that they discard their personal cultural values upon entering post-secondary education. The common theme among these diverse scholars was the need to recognize the cultural privilege of the dominant European cultures in post-secondary institutions and the requirement to shift the balance of privilege by incorporating Indigenous Knowledges into all aspects of the post-secondary experience. Battiste (2013) proposed an environment where “neither [knowledge system] is entirely lost but sustained by a new cognitive framework for curriculum, systems and training” (p. 33).

The literature addressing the need to increase Indigenous Knowledges interwove with the literature about student academic achievement and employability. Gallop and Bastien (2016)



Pidgeon (2008, 2016a, 2016b), and Rendón et al. (2000) suggested that the requirement to divest oneself of their Indigenous culture can have a detrimental effect on the retention rates of Indigenous students, whereas the increase of Indigenous Knowledges may have the opposite effect. By increasing Indigenous Knowledges in service delivery, student services can facilitate a learning environment that connects Indigenous students with their learning in a familiar way, thereby increasing their chances of academic success.

It is possible to identify certain links between Western student development theory and Indigenous approaches to student support. For example, using her theory on marginality and mattering, Schlossberg (1989) asserted the value in facilitating a sense of belonging for students within the first few weeks on-campus. According to Schlossberg, students need to feel that they are connected to something, that they matter, and that they have something of benefit to contribute to their learning community. Schlossberg suggested that if students do not feel connected, then there is a likelihood that they will disengage and not persist through graduation. This was echoed in the research of Pidgeon (2008), who explored specific service needs of Indigenous students. Pidgeon supported the creation of orientations and activities that target Indigenous students and that integrate Indigenous culture into their design.

Similarly, the research of non-Indigenous American educator Earnest Boyer (1990) identified that successful learning communities intentionally create a *sense of place*, where there is shared understanding of rules and structure and where accomplishments are celebrated. Boyer's principles of a campus community include activities that are educationally purposeful, open, just, disciplined, caring, and celebrative. Indigenous approaches to learning communities also include ceremony and place-based protocols and pay tribute to the history and accomplishments of regional communities (Huntley, 1998; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2005; S. Wilson,

2008). These potential cross-cultural connections illuminate a possibility for student services practitioners to further explore how to develop services that successfully incorporate Indigenous Knowledges.

Indigenous scholars Martin [Muscogee Creek] and Thunder [Ho-Chunk] (2013, p. 42) acknowledged that there may be no “easy formula” for incorporating Indigenous culture into the practice of service delivery. They addressed the challenges of sharing Indigenous culture with non-Indigenous communities when there is a history of mistreatment and discrimination towards Indigenous culture. After years of poor relations in the area of education, there is understandably some negative Indigenous sentiment towards non-Indigenous educators (Charbonneau, 2016; Milne, 2016). Trust-building is a necessary step in developing intercultural understanding. The threat of misappropriation also ran strongly throughout Indigenous scholarly literature (Mihesuah, 2006). Some Indigenous Elders have concerns about the potential for Indigenous Knowledges to be misused or misinterpreted (Huntley, 1998; Mihesuah, 2006). There is also concern about ethnic fraud and individuals pretending to hold or transmit Indigenous Knowledges without having the authority, or the lived experience, to do so (Battiste, 2013; Mihesuah, 2006). However, according to Nagy (2014), the decision by the federal government to respond to the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement (2007) claims by engaging the national public in a process of Truth and Reconciliation, as opposed to a public inquiry, has demonstrated a commitment to deepening the relationships and understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians.

**Parental and community involvement in service delivery.** A core value within Indigenous epistemology is the value of connection to community (Battiste, 2013; Huntley, 1998; Koukkanen, 2007; Swan, 1998; S. Wilson, 2008). Parental and community relationships

play a significant role in the Indigenous teaching and learning process. Therefore, any efforts to engage with the student should also include efforts to engage with their family and community (Battiste, 2013).

In an effort to bridge the cultural gap, American Indigenous authors HeavyRunner [Blackfeet Tribe] and DeCelles [Assiniboine Sioux] (2002) introduced a service delivery model that reflects and integrates Indigenous values. It is called the “Family Education Model” (p. 29). The model is predicated on the belief that relationships with family, and connection to family identity, are critical to self-identity and self-confidence. This involves working within the context of the family and communities that students come from. When students begin their post-secondary journey, their family members are welcomed into the university or college community. Co-curricular programming aims to involve family members and regional Elders as much as possible. HeavyRunner and DeCelles proposed that students be viewed as members of a connected family unit:

When colleges and universities view student attrition as resulting from a lack of individual commitment or ability, these institutions fail to recognize the disconnect between the institutional values and the student/family values; hence the real reasons for high attrition rates among disadvantaged students are never addressed. (p. 33)

This type of collectivist perspective challenges the individualist values that have been developed and shared by many student services practitioners. For example, it seems to contradict the works of Astin (1984) and Tinto (1975), which support developing the student’s individual identity and sense of independence, and of Baxter Magolda (2007), who suggested that post-secondary institutions have a responsibility to support the facilitation of personal development by encouraging students to “extract . . . [themselves] from what they have uncritically assimilated

from authorities” (p. 69). Baxter Magolda further suggested that “self-authorship of identity, relationships and knowledge are necessary for mature adult decision making, interdependent relationships and effective citizenship” (p. 70). Therefore, making space for Indigenous ontology and epistemology will mean creating a place for differing approaches to student engagement and student development.

### **Education, Employability and the Economy**

Mendolson (2006) reminded us that the academic attainment levels and employability of Indigenous students is a relevant issue to *all* Canadians. According to Mendolson, the educational outcomes and related professional outputs of Indigenous students could also have long-term effects on the entire country. Mendolson’s research, which received funding from the Federal Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, highlighted the importance of increasing Indigenous academic achievement rates to the Canadian economy. Through a review of statistics on Aboriginal populations, Mendolson learned that Indigenous populations have significantly higher births rates than non-Aboriginal populations, and household income rates of Indigenous populations are significantly lower than those of non-Indigenous populations. The inference is that more people are being born who will not be earning and contributing to the Canadian economy. According to Mendolson, this should be concerning to all Canadians as a pending crisis that needs to be averted: “The educational failures sown today will be the social and economic costs reaped tomorrow—and in this case, tomorrow is not a distant future” (p. 5).

On the more optimistic side, Mendolson (2006) observed that income levels are significantly higher within Aboriginal households where education levels are higher. Mendolson also noted that off-reserve Indigenous populations, particularly those in urban areas, seem to have higher academic achievement rates than those who live on-reserve and/or in rural areas.

Mendolson did not suggest a rationale to explain this difference; he only supported the development of initiatives to increase achievement levels for on-reserve populations.

Education and subsequent employment may, or may not, guarantee parity in compensation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Pendakur and Pendakur (2011) suggested that challenges in income disparity continue to exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians, even amongst those with higher levels of education. However, Howe (2011) reported that when comparing the earning differences between people who complete a post-secondary degree versus people who do not, the overall increase in lifetime earnings of Indigenous post-secondary graduates is higher than that of non-Indigenous post-secondary graduates. Therefore, education makes a significant difference to Indigenous people's lifetime earnings.

### **Leadership and Decision-Making in Post-Secondary Institutions**

In order to consider the complex leadership challenge being presented to student services practitioners by the TRC's (2015d) calls to action, it is necessary to understand the larger picture of how leadership operates within the post-secondary environment. It is also important to develop an awareness of the other major issues facing post-secondary leadership today and how major decisions are made within the post-secondary environment.

Most post-secondary institutions in Canada are governed through a bicameral model that divides leadership responsibilities between an academic senate and a board of governors. This model supports collegiality among academic leaders and protects the individuality and academic freedom of faculty (Bolden, Petrov, & Gosling, 2009). Some post-secondary institutions are simultaneously hierarchical and horizontal, demonstrating tensions between the collegial approach of academic leadership and the managerial approach of administrative leadership.

Many institutions operate as a system of well-coordinated silos led by deans and department heads that are loosely tied to one another through an institutional vision statement (Bolden et al., 2009). Within these silos, emergent leaders may also exist, which include members of faculty or staff who are able to exert influence outside of their defined roles. These individuals are often a catalyst for innovation and change within the organization. Together, faculty and administrators grapple with a list of competing demands.

According to Patterson, VanBalkom, Jensen, and Cummings (2009), Canadian post-secondary leaders face multiple demands from various constituent groups, including students, faculty, governing bodies, industry, community partners, and alumni. Leadership priorities are therefore developed in response to both internal and external pressures. In recent years, increased operating costs, particularly in the areas of salaries, capital infrastructure, learning technologies, and IT infrastructure have made budgets and funding a key priority and focus (Kowch, 2016). For many institutions, changes to funding models, and the decreasing reliability of provincial government funding, present new budgetary pressures and a need to diversify revenue streams (Beach, Broadway, & McInnis, 2005; Patterson et al., 2009). Shifts in student demographics and changes in student expectations around learning and engagement have contributed to making the post-secondary environment a very competitive landscape (Nelson Laird, Chen, & Kuh, 2008; Mendolson, 2006). The TRC's recommendations have inspired a number of change initiatives across Canadian institutions in areas of curriculum, research, and training (Timmons & Stoicheff, 2016).

### **The Role of Non-Indigenous Leaders in Reconciliation**

This research study intentionally focused on the ways in which non-Indigenous student services practitioners can respond to the TRC's calls to action. Therefore, it was necessary to

explore what the literature said about non-Indigenous persons involved in active reconciliation. Many Indigenous authors (Battiste, 2013; Cardinal, 1999; Deloria, 1979; Monture, 2009) discussed the absence of non-Indigenous voices on issues related to the history of the Indian Residential School System and the educational experiences of Indigenous people in Canada. This absence was attributed to a lack of personal connection to the feelings and experiences of oppression and discrimination and to the privilege of not being directly affected by this history. Absolon [Flying Post First Nation] (2016) articulated this void of knowledge as a persistent colonial structure: “In Canada, ignorance prevails about the history and ongoing colonizing tactics against Indigenous peoples, thereby fuelling ignorance and amnesia at gross levels. People don’t know what they don’t know” (p. 47).

Crean (2009), a non-Indigenous writer and activist, discussed the need for non-Indigenous people to own the history of the Indian Residential System: “Ownership means understanding the how, who and why of something like the residential school system” (p. 56). Chambers (2009), also non-Indigenous, similarly suggested that the Truth and Reconciliation efforts lack value and meaning to non-Indigenous people who have been raised in systems of privilege that have excluded or distorted the history of Indigenous experiences. Chambers recommended that non-Indigenous people face this history, and risk feeling uncomfortable and ashamed by it, in order to respond to it effectively. Regan (2010) has become an important voice in this work, as she has challenged settlers to respond with a call to action that requires significant unsettling. The works of Poitras Pratt [Métis] and Danyluk (2017) and Godlewska et al. (2010) are examples of non-Indigenous scholars working alongside Indigenous scholars in collaborations where the dominating narrative is not the dominant culture.

Although the involvement of non-Indigenous voices is desired, some scholars, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, cautioned about the intention and integrity of the work of non-Indigenous people (Alfred, 2004; Justice, 2012; Regan, 2010). Poitras Pratt et al. (2018) warned that non-Indigenous leaders who have not taken the time to develop the foundational skills required to do the work “risk the coupling of superficial understanding with substantial power” (p. 18). Cherokee Nation scholar Justice (2012) wrote about the notion of “settler-saviours” in an op-ed for the *Vancouver Sun*. These are individuals who feel compelled to *help*, but do not demonstrate any understanding or accountability to how they have contributed to the current structures of oppression. Similar to what has been termed the *white saviour industrial complex* (Cole, 2012; Schneider, 2015), the *settler saviour* demonstrates a lack of responsibility to, or even recognition of, the privileges and power they hold (and maintain). The result of their involvement is, therefore, simply a perpetuation of power and oppression and further disempowerment of Indigenous peoples.

## **Summary**

The Indian Residential School System has a history in Canada that is nearly as long as the country itself. However, its impact on the experiences of Indigenous people in Canada, and its legacy as a tool used to eradicate Indigenous culture, has only recently come to the attention of mainstream leaders and academics, in part as a result of the recent work of the TRC (2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2015d). Part of its legacy includes the significant difference between the academic achievement rates of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in Canadian post-secondary education. The TRC’s (2015a) report and supporting literature pointed to the Indian Residential School for the lack of academic preparedness of Indigenous students entering the post-secondary



environment. The literature also pointed to post-secondary institutions and their leaders for not respecting and including Indigenous Knowledges and Indigenous culture within the academy.

Research conducted by Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars aligned with the recommendations of the TRC regarding the need to integrate Indigenous Knowledges and Indigenous cultural practices into curriculum, services, and programs—for the benefit of all learners. Student services practitioners, who have a mandate to support student retention and student success, are well positioned to facilitate frontline changes to services and programs. However, the literature identified a prevailing lack of awareness of, and services for, the unique needs of Indigenous students within the current post-secondary environment. The research also suggested that the issue of reconciliation and Indigenization is both timely and relevant, and senior leaders and decision-makers may be forced to, or chose to, prioritize these initiatives against other competing interests.

### **Next Steps**

The literature identified what non-Indigenous student services practitioners *should do* in response to the TRC's (2015d) calls to action: Incorporate Indigenous Knowledges and Indigenous cultural practices into all aspects of service design and delivery. This ethical approach will create an environment where Indigenous students are welcomed, individual cultures are shared, and trust is built. What remains unknown is the *how to do it?* The propensity and ability of student services practitioners to respond effectively is still unclear. As identified through the literature, the TRC's calls to action require significant change. However, there are specific barriers to overcome in order to facilitate that change. Many student services practitioners, including me, are products of "Eurocentric institutions" (Battiste, 2013, p. 32) and have not been taught the history and impact of the residential school system or been made aware

of the existence of Indigenous knowledges and cultural practices (Pidgeon, 2008). Therefore, though the will to respond to the TRC's calls to action may exist, the knowledge and skills required for change may be elusive and challenging to acquire.

Adaptive leadership provides a framework to explore this challenge. It is a process that encourages individuals to respond to complex challenges in ways that are accessible to them. The researcher, with the help of participants, drew connections between the knowledge of local Indigenous Elders, Indigenous educators, and other post-secondary leaders in order to build a framework for how non-Indigenous student services practitioners can respond to the TRC's (2015d) calls to action. This framework could increase the levels of self-efficacy among non-Indigenous student services practitioners regarding the TRC's calls to action and inspire these practitioners to *take action*.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology and Methods**

This chapter is about the methodology and methods used in a study that explored how non-Indigenous student services practitioners can respond to the call for reconciliation and Indigenization of post-secondary education issued by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (2015a, 2015d) final report. The study took place on the lands of the Lekwungen and WSÁNEĆ families, and the approach to this study integrated components of both Indigenous and Western European methodology and methods. This section begins with a description of the alignment between the selected methodologies (i.e., qualitative participatory research and Indigenous methodology), methods (i.e., Indigenous methods and appreciative inquiry), and the research topic. It includes a discussion about how the methodologies and frameworks supported an approach that respected both Western and Indigenous ways of knowing. The research question is then introduced, and the research setting and participants are described. The approaches used in data collection and analysis as well as the ethical considerations involved in the study are discussed in the final section.

#### **Integrating Methodologies and Methods**

The combination of Western and Indigenous methodologies and methods in this research was an intentional effort to engage in active reconciliation. Chilisa [Bantu] and Tsheko (2014) suggested it is possible to decolonize the research process by inviting different worldviews into the production and creation of new knowledge. As a non-Indigenous researcher, I could not bring an Indigenous lens to this work. However, I could respectfully integrate elements of Indigenous methodology and methods into my work in a manner that respects an Indigenist paradigm (S. Wilson, 2007). In doing so, I was able to honour the recommendations of the Truth and

Reconciliation Commission (TRC, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2015d) and the Tri-Council Policy on Ethical Research with Indigenous Peoples (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2018), both of which call for the respect of Indigenous knowledges and protocols and the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge systems in research and education.

**Qualitative participatory research.** Warren and Karner (2010) described qualitative research as a vehicle for the exploration of meaning and motivation. As a research paradigm, qualitative research offers the opportunity to satisfy personal curiosities about the social construction of the world in which we live and illuminates possible solutions to complex issues. In the ethos of participatory research, it also presents the opportunity to contribute to social change and the improvement of the world in which we live (Warren & Karner, 2010).

Participatory research is a form of qualitative research that aims to redistribute power bases by involving participants in collective problem solving and empowering participants to co-generate new knowledge (Hall, 1992). In participatory research, the researcher is not a subject-matter expert, but a facilitator, responding to a research question or problem by involving participants in a variety of activities in order to identify knowledge that will facilitate the improvement of a process, situation, or setting (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995; Erikson, 2011; Hall, 1992). In the case of this research study, power and voice was given to Indigenous leaders and educators who have knowledge and understanding for how non-Indigenous student services practitioners can improve their learning and practice in order to respond to the TRC's (2015d) calls to action. "Participatory methodologies are often characterized as being reflexive, flexible and iterative" (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995, p. 1668). The flexibility of qualitative participatory research helps to facilitate the weaving of Western and Indigenous methods.

**Indigenous methodology.** Indigenous research paradigms value the interconnectedness of epistemology and ontology; they view knowledge as intricately tied to the understanding of self in relation to the rest of the world (Battiste, 2013; Kovach, 2009b; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2013; S. Wilson, 2007, 2008). Within Indigenous epistemology, knowledge creation is interdependent with relationships, cultural traditions, and values that are developed and shared from generation to generation. Relationships with people as well as with physical settings and with natural surroundings, including animals, trees, earth, air, water, and spirit, provide context and meaning critical to knowledge sharing and new knowledge creation (Battiste, 2013).

As someone who is non-Indigenous and was raised in Western-European traditions and understandings, engaging with an Indigenous paradigm required a constant dismantling of my own dominant narrative that (if not properly checked) could have overridden the research perspective. Therefore, I examined my own positionality in relationship to the research to help clarify my accountability and responsibility to this work (Castleden, Morgan, & Lamb, 2012; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2019). I had to also be mindful of the way in which I described my relationship to Indigenous methodology and methods and respect the cultural gaps that I held by nature of being non-Indigenous. It was therefore appropriate to acknowledge that Indigenous methodology *informed* my work (Kovach, 2009b). There is also a risk that this work may be interpreted as a misappropriation of Indigenous traditions and values, and therefore, it could be perceived as disrespectful in nature (Mihsuah, 2006). To mitigate these concerns and strengthen the credibility of this work, I sought guidance from the Indigenous participants in this study, including Elders and education leaders. In doing so, I have been taught to embrace humility, to engage others with openness and transparency, to ask for permission, to request forgiveness for

any mistakes I make, and to always acknowledge those who rightfully own the knowledge or teaching.

**Indigenous methods.** Kovach [Pasqua First Nation] (2009b) suggested,

It is not the method, per se, that is the determining characteristic of Indigenous methodologies, but rather the interplay (the relationship) between the method and paradigm and the extent to which the method, itself, is congruent with an Indigenous worldview. (p. 40)

The core principles and values of Indigenous research methods include respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; S. Wilson, 2008). To follow these principles and values, research practices must demonstrate respect for Indigenous cultural integrity and meet the needs and interests of Indigenous peoples. There is a level of accountability from the researcher to the research participants as well as the research subject; both the purpose of the work and the manner in which it is conducted must be of benefit to Indigenous communities (S. Wilson, 2007, 2008). Research practice must adhere to local Indigenous protocols, and research outcomes must support the well-being of the Indigenous communities involved (Kovach, 2009b; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2013; S. Wilson, 2007, 2008). This type of approach encourages research that can “reflect the ideal of equality among participants and emphasize building relationships and connectedness among people and with the environment” (Chilisa & Tshenko, 2014, p. 223).

This research attempted to honour several values and principles of Indigenous methods. Attention to *place* helped to determine the physical setting and boundary for the study and demonstrated respect for local knowledges (S. Wilson, 2008). The recognition of Elders as fundamental knowledge keepers (Battiste, 2013; Castellano, 2000; Owens et al., 2012) was

integral to the design of the study. Local protocols for respectfully engaging with Elders were learned and followed. This included (a) dedicating time to developing relationships with participants prior to interviews; (b) the act of gifting Elders as a form of recognizing the value of their time, knowledge, and generosity; (c) the consideration of physical settings and dedication to creating safe and comfortable spaces for discussion; and (d) the process of member-checking to validate themes and findings.

Making time and space for yarning during interviews and focus groups helped facilitate the weaving of Indigenous and Western methods. Yarning is an Indigenous research method that involves storytelling and making meaning through dialogue (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Kovach, 2009b). Bessarab [Bardi and Yindjibarndi descent] and Ng'andu (2010) described yarning as

an informal and relaxed discussion through which both the researcher and participant journey together visiting places and topics of interest relevant to the research study. . . .

[and also] a process that requires the researcher to develop and build a relationship that is accountable to Indigenous people participating in the research. (p. 38)

Owens et al. (2012) acknowledged yarning as a process that allows for connections to be made between Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of knowing. It is also a method that demonstrates respect for the ways in which Indigenous knowledge is understood and shared. Though pre-set questionnaires were introduced and reviewed during each interview and focus group; the core research activity was the open and free-flowing dialogue that developed.

**Appreciative inquiry.** Appreciative inquiry (AI) was used as a guiding framework for research design. AI is a Western approach used to identify and enhance strengths within a group or organization. By helping members within organizations articulate and leverage their strengths

and opportunities, AI can inspire change (Bushe, 2011; Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008). Fiol and Lander (2013) have identified AI as a tool that can be very effective in designing and improving post-secondary student services.

The process of AI is divided into four stages: (a) discover, (b) dream, (c) design, and (d) destiny. In the discovery stage, participants identify the positive attributes of the group or organization (i.e., what is working really well). In the dream stage, they consider the possibilities for optimal group performance (i.e., they dream big). The design stage requires a deeper dive into how systems might work within the optimal reality. The destiny stage then creates a commitment to action and actualization of forward movement towards new opportunities. This cycle through four separate stages is similar to the medicine wheel approach used in Indigenous epistemology and the participatory action research cycle. In some Indigenous cultures, the medicine wheel is used to frame a concept, guide a journey, or provide balance (S. Wilson, 2008). As a metaphor, it represents “the importance of appreciating and respecting the ongoing interconnectedness and interrelatedness of all things” (Bell, 2014, p. 14).

AI has also been identified as a tool for creating safe spaces for challenging conversations, as it allows participants to speak openly about difficult topics (Bloor & Wood, 2006; Michael, 2005). This is important to both participatory and Indigenous methods, both of which highlight a requirement for safe research environments that foster trust between the researcher and the participants (Bergold & Thomas, 2012; S. Wilson, 2008). Chambers (2009) reminded us that the process of exploring the impact of colonization can be painful and difficult for those who have been colonized, and it can be scary and unsettling for those who are part of the dominant colonizing culture. The storytelling approach used in AI helps to shift power away from the interviewer and empowers the interviewee to provide a genuine and uninhibited account



of their experiences (Bloor & Wood, 2006). This made it an appropriate choice for potentially difficult conversations about reconciliation.

In this research project, AI was used to help open interview and focus group discussions. The framework of AI and its four subsections were discussed at the beginning of each interview and focus group. A template questionnaire was also shared with participants, which was divided into the four AI subsections and offered discussion questions around the research topic. This questionnaire was used as a supporting tool for dialogue, but did not dictate or limit the semi-structured format of the conversations, each of which took their own shape and path.

It should be acknowledged that this research project took a slight departure from the foundational design of AI. In its purest form, AI is designed to help members of an organization identify or illuminate core values and strengths in order to optimize organizational structure and design (Cooperrider et al., 2008). However, this research project assumed that reconciliation is a core value and that responding to the TRC's (2015d) calls to action is a goal. Therefore, AI was used as an instrument for identifying the way in which to align this value to actions in order to achieve this goal.

Michael (2005) observed that use of AI as an interview technique may over-emphasize a perspective of positivity, and therefore, its use may be perceived by some as lacking a full understanding about the gravity or complexity of the issue being discussed. This was certainly a concern, given the nature of this research topic. However, Grant and Humphries (2006, p. 408) affirmed that AI is not just about "the good stuff;" a critical analysis of the responses within any AI research engagement can illuminate gaps, identify areas that need development and "draw attention to important but unnoticed dimensions, such as, for example 'hidden' sources of power." However, Subašić and Reynolds (2009) also reminded us that the process of

reconciliation must not sidestep or exclude the acknowledgement of past harms by non-Indigenous people towards Indigenous people. Therefore, at the beginning of each interview and focus group, I explained how AI was a technique used to generate possibilities, but not intended to understate the seriousness of research topic.

### **The Research Question**

This research plan was guided by a primary research question and two sub-questions. The primary question was: How can non-Indigenous student services professionals be guided to respond to the call for reconciliation and Indigenization of post-secondary education that has been made in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's final report? More specifically:

- What training, knowledge and supports are required of non-Indigenous student services practitioners who want to respond to the TRC's calls to action?
- How can we increase the participation of non-Indigenous student services practitioners in this work?

### **The Research Setting**

The research took place on the lands of the Lekwungen and W̱SÁNEĆ families and involved individuals who are associated with student service delivery at one or more of the three public post-secondary institutions that reside within Lekwungen and W̱SÁNEĆ territories: the University of Victoria, Camosun College, and Royal Roads University (Royal Roads). This geographic area is also commonly known as the Greater Victoria Region (Songhees First Nation, 2014).

The identification of this research boundary (the lands of the Lekwungen and W̱SÁNEĆ families) reflects the Indigenous value of place-based education (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005).

Within Indigenous ontology, where one lives, and with whom one shares the land, is an important part of one's culture and has an influence over what one understands about the world (Battiste, 2013; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2013; S. Wilson, 2008). Because Indigenous culture, traditions, and protocols vary from region to region, Indigenization must exist at a local level; it must reflect local history and respect local cultural protocols and traditions. I live in the W̱SÁNEĆ territory and work on the lands of the Lekwungen families. Understanding what reconciliation in post-secondary student services means to the people of these regions is critical to understanding how non-Indigenous people working in these regions can respond to the TRC's (2015d) calls to action.

Lekwungen traditional lands stretch across the southern tip of Vancouver Island, throughout the city of Victoria and parts of Greater Victoria that are now known as Langford, Colwood, View Royal, and Esquimalt. These lands are the ancestral home to the people known today as the Esquimalt and Songhees people (Songhees First Nation, 2014). The W̱SÁNEĆ territory stretches up the south eastern peninsula of Vancouver Island through what is now commonly known as Saanich, Central Saanich, North Saanich, and Sidney. It is home to four Nations: Tsartlip, Pauquachin, Tsawout, and Tseycum (Horne, 2012).

Both the Lekwungen and W̱SÁNEĆ people consider themselves part of the group of Nations now commonly known as the Coast Salish People. Their original territories spanned along the southwest coast of Canada and the northwest coast of the USA and included the Canadian Gulf Islands and the American San Juan Islands (Thom, 2005). The Coast Salish are a "water" people; for centuries they have lived off the water and have travelled and traded up and down the West Coast of North America (Songhees First Nation, 2014). They live a "Big House" culture, meaning traditional ceremonies are both celebrated and protected inside the Big House

(Songhees First Nation, 2014). Their historic languages include Hul'q'umi'num', Kwakwaka'wakw, Lekwungen, and SENĆOŦEN (Burt Charles [Sc'ianew First Nation], personal communication, December 4, 2017).

All three post-secondary institutions involved in the setting for this study have articulated their commitment to reconciliation and are in various stages of engagement in this work. The University of Victoria, established in 1903, is a comprehensive research university with over 20,000 students (University of Victoria, n.d.-a, para. 3). In 2017, approximately 4.6% of the student population identified as Indigenous (University of Victoria, 2017). The institution offers bachelors, masters and doctoral degrees, as well as a series of certificates, continuing education, and continuing studies programs (University of Victoria, n.d.-a, Our Undergraduate Programs section). The University of Victoria's Office of Indigenous Affairs delivers services and support for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students; manages the University's First People's House; and helps to facilitate and support Indigenous partnerships outside of the University. Indigenous Affairs staff members assist in bringing Indigenous Knowledges into academic curriculum and institutional events (University of Victoria, n.d.-b). The University of Victoria's 2017 *Aboriginal Service Plan* prioritizes community-based programs, programs that support transition to post-secondary, and culturally relevant programming (p. 13).

Camosun College, established in 1971, has a student population that is just under 10,000 and is divided between two separate campuses. Camosun College (n.d.) offers diplomas, bachelor's degrees and university transfer and access programs, as well as career, technical and vocational programs in the fields of the arts, sciences, business, health and human services (Wide range of programs section, para. 1). Approximately 5.9% of Camosun students identify as Indigenous (Camosun College, Centre for Indigenous Education and Community Connections,

2018). At Camosun College, the Centre for Indigenous Education & Community Connections, Eyē? Sqā'lewen, oversees an Indigenization Plan that has four distinct components:

(a) curriculum development, (b) services to students, (c) policy and planning, and (d) employee education (Camosun College, 2013, p. 3). In the summer of 2020, they will be hosts for the second time of the S'TENISTOLW conference, an international conference that draws Indigenous scholars, educators, service providers, and community members from all over the world to discuss topics and issues related to Indigenous adult and post-secondary education (Camosun College, Centre for Indigenous Education & Community Connections, n.d.).

Royal Roads University was established in 1995 on the site of a previous military college. It is a small research university that offers professional and applied degree programs through a blended learning model to approximately 4,000 students (Royal Roads University, n.d.), about 7% of whom identify as Indigenous (Asma-na-hi Antione, personal communication, August 30, 2019). Royal Roads has recently identified six core elements of work that will support their journey of moving forward together with Indigenous communities in a good way: (a) respecting the people of these lands, promoting the understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing and being; (b) committing to learning about the past and its impact on Indigenous peoples, celebrating Indigenous cultures; and (c) applying Indigenous protocols to research with Indigenous peoples and contributing to repairing the effects of oppression of Indigenous peoples (Royal Roads University, Indigenous Education and Student Services, 2019).

### **Snowball Sampling Technique**

Participants were recruited for this research through a snowball sampling technique (Sadler, Lee, Lim, & Fullerton, 2010). This process involves using an initial contact and Knowledge Keeper to refer the researcher to additional respondents. Each respondent then

similarly refers the researcher to new respondents, and so the participant pool grows like a snowball. The selection of the initial respondent(s) is based on criteria specific to the research study. That respondent is then asked to refer other participants who are known by that individual to share specific attributes or qualities that are being studied (Sadler et al., 2010). This technique has been identified as helpful for connecting a researcher with participants that may otherwise be difficult for that researcher to access (Atkinson & Flint, 2001).

In October 2018, I attended a meeting at Royal Roads University of Elders who serve as advisors and/or educational liaisons to Royal Roads University (Royal Roads), Camosun College, or the University of Victoria. At this meeting, I provided an overview of the research proposal and discussed approaches to moving forward to semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Following this meeting, seven Elders expressed an interest to participate in the study. These seven Elders then helped in the selection of future participants. After engaging in either an interview or small focus group, Elders were asked to identify Indigenous or non-Indigenous student services practitioners who are motivated by or engaged with the work of Indigenization and reconciliation. In particular, they were asked to identify someone with one or more of these descriptors:

1. has demonstrated an interest in the process of Truth and Reconciliation;
2. has demonstrated an interest in Indigenizing their approach to service design or delivery through the incorporation of Indigenous Knowledges (IK) or culture;
3. has demonstrated an interest in increasing recruitment and retention levels for Indigenous students;
4. has engaged Indigenous family or community members in their service design or delivery.

A specific request was made to ensure that these individuals did not work within the student services department at Royal Roads, due to the potential for conflict of interest given my role as the Director, Student Services, at Royal Roads.

The individuals identified by the Elders were invited to participate in this study through an email communication. This invitation included an explanation for how they were identified as a potential participant. It also included information about the project and the informed consent process. Ten individuals were identified as possible participants and received an invitation to the research. Seven of these individuals were willing and able to contribute to the study.

This approach supported certain core values of Indigenous methods. It recognizes the Indigenous principle of appreciating Elders as Knowledge Keepers and helps to facilitate the cultural integrity of the research process (S. Wilson, 2008). It ensures that the researcher is recruiting participants who are relevant and important to the study (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2013; S. Wilson, 2008). It also recognizes the value of relationships and relationality (S. Wilson, 2008), as the Elders refer those with whom they share both relationships and knowledge.

### **The Participant Sample**

A total of 14 participants were involved in the study, all of whom have a dedicated role within one, or more, of the three public post-secondary institutions that reside within Lekwungen and W̱SÁNEĆ territories: University of Victoria, Camosun College, and Royal Roads. Seven Elders contributed to the study, all of whom act as advisors to one or more of the three public post-secondary institutions in the research setting. These Elders have been identified by local Indigenous community leadership as Knowledge Keepers who can liaise with the post-secondary sector. Of the seven Elders, one was from Tsawout First Nation in the W̱SÁNEĆ territories; three were from Scia'new First Nation and one from T'Sou-ke Nation, both of which are

neighbours to the Lekwungen lands; and two were from Kwakwaka'wakw, which is outside of Coast Salish territory on the northern part of Vancouver Island (part of the Nuuchahnulth Nations). Because the two Kwakwaka'wakw Elders did not identify as Coast Salish, they framed their contributions as the voice of “guests” to these lands, cultures, and traditions.

Of the seven other participants, two were from the University of Victoria, two were from Camosun College, two were from Royal Roads, and one had worked with all three institutions in the past decade. Five identified as Indigenous, two identified as non-Indigenous, and all identified as visitors to the lands of the Lekwungen and WSÁNEĆ families. Six of them hold administrative roles in the field of student support. One is a faculty member. Though the research plan did not include outreach to faculty, she was identified by Elders and included in the study because of the research she has facilitated to develop resources for students, faculty, and staff that support reconciliation in post-secondary education.

The high proportion of Indigenous participants among the student services practitioners should be acknowledged, given that this research was designed with the outcome of engaging more non-Indigenous practitioners in reconciliatory work. The snowball sampling process meant that participation was not only dependant on specific criteria, but also on the trusted relationships of initial participants. The lack of non-Indigenous participants could suggest that there are currently a limited number of non-Indigenous student services practitioners engaging in reconciliatory work on the Lekwungen and WSÁNEĆ lands, or that those who are attempting to engage in this work may not yet have established relationships with local Elders or Indigenous colleagues.



## **Data Collection Methods**

Research data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and small focus group discussions. At the guidance of Elders (personal communication, October 31, 2018), all participants were given the option of participating in either an individual interview or a small focus group discussion. This provided participants with a greater choice for how they wanted to be involved and encouraged them to consider what might be the safer, more comfortable approach to engage with the topic.

In support of the iterative approach to participatory research, there were two separate stages of data gathering. The first stage involved interviews and focus groups with the Elders. I then created transcripts of these conversations and engaged in preliminary data analysis so that research themes could be brought back to the Elders for their review and feedback. (This is explained further in the data analysis sections.) The second stage of data gathering involved the post-secondary professionals who were identified by the Elders as potential participants for the study. All interviews and focus groups took place between November 2018 and September 2019.

As the primary researcher, I was responsible for the collection and storage of all data. All interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded, and I generated all transcripts of these recordings myself. A small amount of personal and demographic information of participants was collected: name or optional pseudonym; optional identification as First Nations, Métis, Inuit, or non-Indigenous (no proof of identification required); and optional identification of academic background and current role within the public post-secondary education system.

**Semi-structured interviews.** In a semi-structured interview, the researcher works through a list of open-ended interview questions while leaving room for the participant to build off the questions and take the interview into new or unscripted directions. Unlike structured

interviews, which strictly adhere to a pre-determined set of questions, semi-structured interviews allow the researcher and the participant to depart from the question set as they feel appropriate. This can be helpful in research studies that seek to understand why a certain choice has been made or why a specific behaviour may exist (Fylan, 2005). Semi-structured interviews align with both AI and Indigenous methods because they create an opportunity for the researcher and participant to develop rapport and, hopefully, trust (Michael, 2005). Semi-structured interviews also allow an opportunity for participants to influence the direction of the research. Galletta (2012) suggested that semi-structured interviews are helpful to participatory research when they are “sufficiently structured to address specific topics related to the phenomenon of study, while leaving space for participants to offer new meaning to the study focus” (p. 24). This conversational approach assists the researcher and participant in the process of reaching a shared understanding about the research topic.

I held individual interviews at multiple different locations; participants were given the option to identify a venue or to choose from a selection of options that I had identified. Accessibility, comfortability, and proximity to the workplace or home of the participants were considered in selecting the interview site.

**Small focus group discussions.** The use of focus groups involves bringing a group of participants together to generate interaction and response to topics of information that are relevant to the research study (Litosseliti, 2003; Jacklin et al., 2016). Focus groups can provide insight into preliminary findings; they can be used to clarify or amplify meaning or to underscore nuances and understanding of initial data analysis (Galletta, 2012).

Focus groups, by nature, can shift the power away from the researcher or facilitator, who is outnumbered by the participants (Litosseliti, 2003). Well-facilitated focus groups can offer

safe and engaging spaces where participants feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and opinions with one another and where researchers and ideas can be held accountable (Litosseliti, 2003). This allows participants to have some responsibility for the direction and outcome of the research. This supports the Indigenous value of responsibility in research (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991), as participants collectively generate knowledge and a shared understanding of the topic.

Small focus groups were incorporated in data collection for this study in order to create safe and open spaces for dialogue. The intention of *small* groups was to benefit from the opportunity to bring people together, while decreasing the possibility of participants feeling overwhelmed or intimidated by speaking out in a group. These discussions were held in Snej'wa E'lun, the Indigenous gathering space at Royal Roads.

**Trauma informed.** The psychologically heavy nature of the research topic had the potential to trigger challenging or unpleasant emotional responses in research participants. It was therefore necessary to consider how to engage in conversations in a safe and supportive way. The research was guided by trauma-informed principles identified by the Clinic Community Health Centre (2013): acknowledgement, safety, trust, choice and control, compassion, collaboration, and strengths-based (pp. 16–17). Acknowledging the strong likelihood that any participant in this study may have experienced some form of trauma related to colonization, it was important that participants felt like they were met with compassion and had agency in the process. Therefore, I made an intentional effort to create safe spaces so that participants felt they had choice and control. Participants were also informed about the availability of counselling support and how to access it.

**Data storage.** Regarding researcher use of data, all participants were informed that I would hold and protect data for five years or until the successful completion of my doctoral

degree, whichever comes first, and that data could be accessed by my academic supervisor. They were also informed that digital copies of the data were encrypted and stored on a desktop computer and hard copies of data (i.e., consent forms, printed transcripts, and notes) were stored in a locked filing cabinet. Schnarch (2004) reminded us of the importance of data ownership remaining with the participants and Indigenous communities involved in the research. Therefore, all participants were given the opportunity to have full access to their data; data will not be destroyed without participant permission.

### **Data Analysis**

Data gathering took place over a period of months, and data analysis occurred throughout different points of data collection. As the primary researcher, I conducted most of the analysis; however, the study also drew on participatory research methods that involved including participants in aspects of data analysis.

**Preliminary data analysis.** Preliminary data analysis began during the conduction and transcription of interviews and focus groups. During the interview and focus group discussions, I carefully followed the narrative being shared and listened for patterns and themes as they emerged in discussion. This allowed me to gauge whether to interject, probe, or shift focus. These interjections were managed with extreme care; Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010) reminded researchers that when employing techniques such as yarning, interjections can sometimes be necessary, but must never be disrespectful to participants, particularly Elders. Galletta (2012) discussed how interjections that involve clarification for understanding help to facilitate reciprocity between the researcher and participants, as this gives the participants an opportunity to redirect the focus and understanding of information being discussed. Through respectful curiosity, I was able to seek clarification and develop a deeper understanding of what was being

shared. There were also times when participants would stop and ask me if the conversation was meeting the research goals, or if we needed to talk about other topics. This gave us all the opportunity to reflect on what was being discussed.

Further preliminary analysis took place during the transcription process. As the individual responsible for creating the transcripts, I was able to spend time focusing on details in the data. This involved not only capturing the words exchanged, but also listening to tone, pace, and emotion shared and exchanged during the discussions. Pauses in speech, patterns of speech, and levels of emotion were also considered relevant to the analysis, as they helped to identify what was important or relevant to the participants (Bloor, 2001). I captured my observations and reflections through digital journals. The process of journaling allowed me to document thoughts and responses to what I was hearing and reading in the data and to track my progress of understanding themes and concepts (Saldaña, 2016). Lincoln et al. (2011) described this process of reflexivity as “a conscious experiencing of the self as both inquirer and respondent, as teacher and learner, as the one coming to know the self within the processes of research itself” (p. 124).

Reconciliation, by its definition, requires the development of shared, common ground between multiple diverse perspectives (Battiste, 2013). In order to respectfully engage all participants, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, it was important to develop an approach that was sensitive to the diverse perspectives of the participants. Active awareness during the interviews and reflective journaling after each interview helped me refine a research approach that was responsive to, and respectful of, the participants and the topic. This engagement with the process as it unfolded also allowed me to follow up on certain themes or topic areas that surfaced through discussions and interaction (Merriam, 2002).

**Inductive analysis and coding.** To initiate the coding process, I reviewed the transcriptions through a process of inductive analysis. “Inductive analysis refers to approaches that primarily use detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data by an evaluator or researcher” (Thomas, 2006, p. 238). In this form of analysis, different units of data can be linked together in order to identify relevant patterns. Large portions of transcribed data can be chunked into smaller segments, then through multiple layers of additional review, linked and grouped into smaller subcategories. It is a process that allows for the emergence of patterns or themes and can help to illuminate unpredicted relevant information that may be excluded from different types of analysis (Thomas, 2006). However, Shawn Wilson (2008) reminded researchers that Indigenous ontologies do not dissect information in order to understand it. Instead, they guide understanding through the recognition of the interconnections between people, place, animals, and spirit. Therefore, to align with Indigenous methods, the data analysis process involved zooming in to look for details and nuances, and then zooming out to recognize larger patterns and connections among the information being shared by all participants.

Coding was conducted using Word and Excel. Transcripts were created in Word documents and coded using the track changes and comments features in Word. The comments were then exported into Word tables that could be easily transferred into Excel documents for cross analysis.

**Types of coding.** The Elders’ transcripts were initially reviewed through a process of In Vivo Coding (Saldaña, 2016). This technique involves creating a code from the specific words and phrases that were recorded in the transcripts. It is an approach known to honour and respect the voice of participants (Saldaña, 2016) because the codes reflect the specific language shared

by participants. These codes were drafted into a summary document of themes, which was shared back with the Elders in written format for their review at an Elders' meeting.

Following completion of all data gathering, all transcripts (i.e., those of the Elders and other participants) were reviewed through an approach that Saldaña (2016, p. 293) described as "Eclectic Coding." Eclectic Coding is "the purposeful and compatible combination of two or more first cycle coding methods" (p. 293). Selected data were given either a Descriptive Code or a Concept Code. Descriptive Coding provides a label or description (i.e., a noun or short phrase) that summarizes a passage of data. This technique helps to create an inventory of salient points to be considered in analysis. Concept Coding uses words or short phrases to assign meaning to a passage of data; it is an approach that "stimulates reflection on broader social concepts" (p. 120). Concept Codes can be guided by disciplinary interests of the study, but can also emerge from reflection on the data. This type of coding allows for creative interpretation of the data and facilitates the development of "big ideas" (p. 119). Saldaña suggested that this type of coding "works best when the codes become prompts or triggers for critical thought and writing" (p. 123). This coding process supported the development of comprehensible links between the data and the call for transformational change that the research question was attempting to address. The analysis process then involved identifying links between the codes in order to generate themes of meaning.

**Member-checking.** Following each stage of data gathering, and during data analysis, emerging research themes were shared with the participants for their review and feedback. This feedback cycle, known as member-checking, is critical to Indigenous methods, in which the research must be taken back to community to ensure credibility and validity (Chilisa, 2012). It is also important to consider the way in which the research data are returned and to align this

approach to the methodology that guides the study (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). The Elders received the first iteration of research themes in a hard-copy document that was circulated for discussion at an Elders' meeting. This provided the Elders with an opportunity to share feedback and guidance before I moved the research forward. The second feedback cycle occurred following the completion of data gathering with the remaining seven participants. At this stage, a list of research codes and themes was shared with participants through email with a request for their feedback. This gave participants the opportunity to validate findings and helped highlight important elements in the data to ensure they were not overlooked. It also helped to clarify meaning and interpretations. The codes evolved through this back and forth process, with some participants engaging in multiple communications or conversations related to meaning and understanding of the data.

### **Ethical Considerations**

All researchers are bound by a moral responsibility to conduct ethically sound research, and particular consideration is expected when human participants are involved (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). This research was subject to Research Ethics Board requirements, including the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board of the University of Calgary (University of Calgary, 2008). To mitigate ethical concerns, I maintained transparent and open communication with research participants regarding research goals and processes. Communications about the research were shared in multiple modalities at each stage of participant engagement (i.e., digital, print, and verbal). All participants were given the option to select a pseudonym, and three of the 12 participants requested one. All participants received a copy of their signed consent form, which included instructions on how to withdraw themselves or their data from the study should they feel the need to do so.



## **Conclusion**

This chapter has presented the methodology and methods used in a qualitative participatory research study that involved cultivating an understanding for how non-Indigenous student services practitioners can respond to the calls to action that have been made by the TRC's (2015a) final report. The research design integrated components of Western and Indigenous research methods, with the aim of modelling an approach that respectfully creates space for the application of non-traditional paradigms and Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Appreciative inquiry guided the development of research instruments, but also made room for critical discussions. The conversational methods of storytelling and yarning supported the development of trust and rapport while the participants and I sought to illuminate areas of strength and possibility. Reflective digital journaling and multiple rounds of coding helped support the credibility of the data analysis process. Member-checking with Elders and participants supported Indigenous principles of responsibility and accountability. Overall, the approach attempted to respect the core Indigenous research principles of respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Findings**

This chapter introduces the findings from a qualitative participatory study that examined how non-Indigenous student services practitioners might effectively respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (2015d) calls to action. The purpose of this chapter is to present the themes that surfaced as findings and identify their relevance to the research question being explored. The chapter begins with a brief summary of the research opportunity and the approach taken to respond to it. This includes an overview of the process used in data coding and analysis. This is followed by the identification of six research findings. Each finding is explained in its own subsection and described with supporting text from the research data.

### **Overview of the Study**

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) released a series of calls to action intended to engage Canadian citizens in active reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Several of the calls were directed towards post-secondary education, and there are direct links between the work of student services practitioners and the action that has been requested of post-secondary institutions. This research sought to understand how non-Indigenous people working in the field of student services could effectively and respectfully support the recommendations of the TRC and engage in effective practices to facilitate reconciliation. The study explored the following research question and sub questions:

- How can non-Indigenous student services practitioners be guided to respond to the call for reconciliation and Indigenization of post-secondary education that has been made in the Truth and Reconciliation TRC of Canada's final report?

- What training, knowledge and supports are required of non-Indigenous student services practitioners who want to respond to the TRC's calls to action?
- How can we increase the participation of non-Indigenous student services practitioners in this work?

The study took place on the lands of the Lekwungen and W̱SÁNEĆ families, in what is also commonly known as Greater Victoria in BC Canada. There are three public post-secondary institutions in this area from which participants were drawn: the University of Victoria, Camosun College, and Royal Roads. In recognition of the Indigenous research principle of self-location (S. Wilson, 2008), I acknowledge that I am a non-Indigenous student services practitioner who has the privilege of working on the lands of the Lekwungen families and living in the territory of the W̱SÁNEĆ people and who recognizes my obligation to respond to the TRC (2015d) calls to action.

The research design integrated principles of both Western and Indigenous methodologies and methods. Research methods included the use of appreciative inquiry (AI) and techniques used in Indigenous methods, including storytelling and yarning. The four guiding principles of Indigenous research methods: (a) respect, (b) relevance, (c) reciprocity, and (d) responsibility, framed the overall design of the study (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991).

Participants were recruited into the study through a snowball sampling technique (Sadler et al., 2010). I first introduced the research concept at a meeting of Elders who work with the three institutions in the research setting. Within Indigenous knowledge systems, Elders are a primary source of wisdom and knowledge; they are highly respected members of their communities who offer guidance, advice, and support on a broad spectrum of topics (Battiste, 2013; Castellano, 2000). Because of the importance of their role in teaching and learning, it was

essential to begin this study by connecting with local Elders. Following that meeting, seven Elders agreed to participate in the study. These Elders were then asked to identify individuals whom they identified as doing good work in the area of reconciliation in post-secondary student support. This technique respects the role of Elders as primary Knowledge Keepers; having the Elders identify who to invite into the study provided credibility to the knowledge generated through engagement with the participants.

Semi-structured individual interviews and small focus group discussions were used to gather data. Questionnaires were designed with an AI framework, using the cycle of discovery, dream, design, and deliver (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001). However, discussions were not overly structured. The questionnaire served to guide conversations that were also supported by the Indigenous research method of conversational yarning (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Kovach, 2009b; Owens et al., 2012). This approach allowed participants to direct the flow of dialogue and created a safe and engaging space for conversation.

Data were gathered during two separate stages: (a) the first stage was with the Elders and (b) the second stage was with those whom the Elders had identified and referred as possible participants. A combination of digital journaling and member-checking helped facilitate a reflexive process of data analysis (Saldaña, 2016). Data were coded through an inductive process (Thomas, 2006), and themes were shared with participants for feedback. Six overarching themes for action surfaced as findings during data analysis.

## **Findings**

Six significant findings emerged from the data. These findings are distinct actions that non-Indigenous student services practitioners can take in supporting a response to the calls to action that were made by the TRC (2015d):

1. Learn the history and reality of colonization in Canada;
2. Build relationships with local Indigenous communities;
3. View Indigenous students holistically;
4. Examine and reduce barriers to Indigenous student retention;
5. Become consciously aware of the complexity of reconciliation;
6. Support the development of cultural allies.

Each finding is explained in the following sub-sections, and supporting data are woven into each finding's description. Specific data samples are attributed to pseudonyms in order to protect the privacy of research participants. All participants were given the opportunity to select a pseudonym, and three of the 12 participants opted to use one. Given the local focus of the study and interconnectedness of local communities, it would be hard to maintain the privacy of those three without assigning everyone a pseudonym. Therefore, the seven Elders are identified as Elder 1, Elder 2, Elder 3, Elder 4, Elder 5, Elder 6, and Elder 7. The six student services practitioners, which included five Indigenous and one non-Indigenous, are represented as Indigenous SSP1, Indigenous SSP2, Indigenous SSP3, Indigenous SSP4, Indigenous SSP5, and non-Indigenous SSP1; and the one non-Indigenous faculty member is non-Indigenous F1.

**Finding #1: Learn the history and reality of colonization in Canada.** Every participant in this study expressed the importance of developing a broader and deeper understanding among non-Indigenous people about the experience of Indigenous people in Canada. This history has not been included in the dominant Canadian narrative, and the lack of knowledge perpetuates negative stereotypes, racism, and discrimination. Elder 1 was fairly straightforward when he said, "All you've got to do is so simple: you've got to hear both sides. That's all it is. Our side, you've got to know, understand why we are the way we are. That's all."

However, the emphasis that Elder 3 brought to his response suggests that the task may be quite challenging:

There is going to be a lot of people that have to understand, really, *really*, understand what the First Nations people went through, and how they ... how they were told they were no good. And there are a lot of [our] people that believed that.

What this sentiment represents is a feeling common to all participants that non-Indigenous student services practitioners need to engage in education or training that explores the experience and impact of colonization in Canada, and how its damaging legacy continues to affect people today. There is also a need to understand how the colonial structure of the academy has excluded and minimized Indigenous knowledge and cultures.

Diffent ideas were shared about how to faciliate this learning. There was some discussion among participants about creating opportunities to bring non-Indigenous and Indigenous people together to learn. Elder 2 spoke about “involving everybody, talking about all their traditions, culture and things like that.” Similarly, Indigenous SSP5 shared, “What we just need to do is sit together, and talk together, and learn together, and then work on how we raise the awareness and consciousness of others, *together*.” There was also an emphasis on storytelling, and that people could be motivated and inspired by experiencing emotional responses to hearing the stories of Indigenous people.

Non-Indigenous F1 talked about creating inviting spaces for people to learn. In her perspective, understanding people’s motivation to engage and learn is key, and people who are forced to learn may actually be turned off the learning. She emphasized this by stating, “I want this to be my choice. I want to come to this with my full heart, not just my bureaucratic ‘I have to do that because my boss told me.’” This perpspective was echoed by Elder 3, who warned against

forcing non-Indigenous people to do learning they are not open to doing, as it can result in further poor treatment or harm of Indigenous people. She was also wary of any type of education that appeared to give special treatment to Indigenous people. In her words: “If you show too much favour on the Indigenous side, then they’ll [Indigenous people] become resentful. And we don’t need resentment. We just need respect.”

Non-Indigenous F1 suggested the use of *invitational rhetoric* to create safe and inviting spaces for dialogue and learning. Foss and Griffin (1995) defined invitational rhetoric as:

an invitation to understanding as a means to create a relationship rooted in equality, immanent value, and self-determination.... The invitational rhetor [teacher] does not judge or denigrate other’s perspectives, but is open to and tries to appreciate and validate those perspectives, even if they differ dramatically from the rhetor’s own. (p. 5)

This approach echoes that of Sturgeon Lake First Nation scholar, Willie Ermine (2007), who has called for the creation of ethical spaces to facilitate engagement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous SSP2, an advisor who has been involved in facilitating training at her institution, spoke about a desire for learning opportunities that are sustained and ongoing and that can support non-Indigenous participants through the process of learning:

I think it’s also, you know, good to follow-up with these people ... because maybe the lesson hits them way later.... When they’re reading something or watching something or they hear something from somebody, and it triggers them, and they end up thinking about that and going, “Oh *that’s* what they were talking about,” ... but then there’s no one to talk about it. (Indigenous SSP2)

The majority of participants also discussed the importance of experiential learning to facilitate shared understanding. There were several suggestions that non-Indigenous student services practitioners find opportunities to be involved in, or volunteer at, local Indigenous cultural events. In the words of Elder 5: “Experience is the best teacher in anything.” Elder 5 also told a story about University of Victoria students who assisted at a recent funeral. She spoke about their participation as a learning experience: “You don’t have to teach, if they are just there to witness.” Indigenous SSP3 shared similar advice: “Just come, participate. If you want to learn this stuff, show up early, leave late. Help set up, clean up. That’s when all the meaningful work happens.”

The importance of incorporating a trauma-informed perspective was also raised in relation to training and education. Being trauma informed involves understanding, recognizing, and responding to the effects of all types of trauma (Klinic Community Health Centre, 2013). As Indigenous SSP3 stated: “There has to be trauma informed education going on. There has to be an understanding that we [Indigenous people] are still deeply healing from our trauma.”

There can be a significant cost to the Indigenous people (i.e., students, staff, or faculty) who are put in the role of educating others about Indigenous cultures and ways of knowing. Indigenous SSP3 talked about how much the work “costs her soul” and how at times, in spite of the good intention of others, she is “reduced to a puddle.” Similarly, Indigenous SSP1 talked about the personal resiliency she required to engage in the work she does. As Elder 3 acknowledged, many people are still healing, and they are coming to school while they are healing, with the hope of making the world better for future generations. It is therefore incredibly important that non-Indigenous student services practitioners do not unintentionally perpetuate harm.



Non-Indigenous SSP1, Indigenous SSP1, and Indigenous SSP 3 all spoke about the importance of not making assumptions about another person's trauma. It is impossible to guess who is the child or grandchild of a residential school survivor, a victim of the 60s scoop, or a person who was raised in foster care. Even harder to recognize are the victims of intergenerational trauma who may have learned to mask their true feelings for a public audience. Therefore, any training must be more than a history lesson; it has to also account for, and be sensitive to, the persistent effects of colonization on current generations of Indigenous people. Any training and education also must be designed in a way that does not cause more damage to Indigenous people.

The majority of participants indicated that though it is very important for educational content be informed by Indigenous peoples, non-Indigenous people also need to take accountability for their own learning. There was an expressed need for non-Indigenous people to become curious, explore, and be willing to become uncomfortable with the topics of colonization, racism, and decolonization, with the goal of understanding their own accountability to persistent colonial structures. It was also acknowledged by Indigenous SSP3, Indigenous SSP5, and non-Indigenous F1 that if non-Indigenous student services practitioners are intentional and ethical when taking-on this work, it will take a significant burden off Indigenous colleagues. With this sentiment also came the caveat to avoid any possibility of cultural misappropriation, expressed in particular by Indigenous SSP3, Indigenous SSP5, and non-Indigenous F1. Non-Indigenous people who support the learning of other non-Indigenous people must be mindful of their own positionality and how they approach Indigenous content. They must be able to distinguish between sharing Indigenous history and sharing Indigenous culture, which could lead to misappropriation. Specifically, they must understand that there are protocols regarding who

has the right to share Indigenous Knowledges. Some Indigenous Knowledges are protected and may only be shared by members of the community (sometimes only by specific individuals, depending on the teaching or content). Therefore, it is important to ask local community Elders or Knowledge Keepers about receiving and sharing any form of knowledge.

**Finding #2: Build relationships with local Indigenous communities.** The importance of building relationships with members from local Indigenous communities was identified as a priority by all the participants in this study. It was specifically recognized by all of the Indigenous student services practitioners as necessary for the work that they do, and it was identified as essential for any non-Indigenous student services practitioner who wants to engage in reconciliation. According to participants, this is because it is through relationships with the Indigenous community that protocols can be respectfully observed and learned and that cultures can be communicated and understood. It is through relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people that opportunities for cross-cultural learning and exchange can occur. It was therefore acknowledged that relationships between members of the academy and members of Indigenous communities must be fostered in order to facilitate any form of reconciliation. As Indigenous SSP3 shared, “It’s all about relationship.”

It also needs to be recognized that history has involved a power imbalance, such that some Indigenous people have felt, or still feel, unsafe in relationships with non-Indigenous people. This point was shared by most participants and particularly emphasized by the Elders. Careful attention to the building of meaningful relationships can help to rectify this power imbalance and subsequent harm. As Indigenous SSP2 described it: “If we have respectful trusting relationships with each other, then we can walk in a way that we’re not feeling intimidated or scared.”

There was a distinct message that relationships should be built *in community*. When asked a question about how to respectfully bring Indigenous knowledges into the academy, Indigenous SSP1 responded by saying:

Talk to them. Don't think that you have all the answers, go to community and say what do we need to do better? Go to local community, go talk to the Chief and Council, go talk to education programmers.... They know where their students are struggling.

Similarly, when asked what she had done that had worked well for her in her role, Indigenous SSP5 responded with: "visiting the Nations and talking with the Chiefs and Council, hearing what they want to get for support for their students." It is also through relationship building that we can better understand the needs of local communities and how to respond to these needs. Indigenous SSP5 observed that for her, part of that relationship is about "hearing what community wants, what the community would like to have." She went on to say, "And that's what I do, is listen. And when they need, want something, I'm like, 'OK ...what do you need?'"

Indigenous SSP3 referenced the importance of what she called "networking," which involved both planned and casual unplanned drop-ins with people in community with whom she felt she should have a relationship. She referenced the need to be flexible with her time and gracious when people from community dropped in on her, because those relationships matter to the work she does. Indigenous SSP4 also spoke about the benefits to getting off campus and out into the community in order to forge relationships. She provided an example of how, when new leaders were employed at her institution, she would seek them out and coordinate meetings between these new employees and local Indigenous educators by bringing the new employees out to visit different community sites. This included visiting band offices, on-reserve community education centres, and the local Friendship Centre.

Elder 5, Indigenous SSP5, and Indigenous SSP4 all spoke about relationship development that can happen through involvement at Indigenous cultural events that are open to non-Indigenous participants. Elder 5 emphasized that care must be taken when attending any cultural event, and local protocols must always be observed. Indigenous SSP5 reminded us that learning about protocols must also be done with care:

You watch, pay attention and you observe, and when you ask a question, you don't just ask a Brazilian questions.... Watch, pay attention, don't ask the *why* ask the *how*. There are some really valuable teachings there if you don't ask a bunch of questions. Just come, participate. (Indigenous SSP5)

Indigenous SSP5 emphasized the importance of purpose and intention when entering these events and the need for reciprocity: "Show up early, leave late. Help set up, clean up." Also, it must never be assumed that an event is open to outside participation. Permission to attend any cultural event must be secured in advance.

As relationships are built between non-Indigenous student services practitioners and members of Indigenous communities, these relationships can expand to include non-Indigenous students. Elder 1, Elder 3, and Elder 5 all spoke about different relationships that they made with non-Indigenous students and how those relationships changed the perspectives of the students and their own perspectives of non-Indigenous people. In the example shared by Elder 5, where non-Indigenous students were invited to volunteer at the funeral of a local Elder, students helped with food preparation and assisted in serving the Elders during the meal. Elder 5 spoke about how caring and supportive the students were in this environment and how much she thought they learned as a result of being there.

It was acknowledged by most participants that relationships take time to build and cannot be forced. As shared by Indigenous SSP5: “It’s a slow process.... Relationship building takes time and it takes energy. So, on both sides, it is not just a one-way road it’s a two-way road.” She also discussed the discomfort that can occur during the relationship-building phase. When speaking about the strength of the relationships she currently holds within her institution and with the Chiefs and council members of local Nations (to whom she is a visitor), she shared:

It takes time. Like, it took me a long time to get to this space [of strong relationships], as well, and it’ll take a long time for people to get comfortable in that space, to feel like they have earned the right to be in those spaces. But you have to build that trust. (Indigenous SSP5)

Indigenous SSP2 summarized it this way: “I think it has to go beyond ally-ship. It has to be more about relationship and cultivating respect and reciprocity and trust.”

**Finding #3: View Indigenous students holistically.** For non-Indigenous student services practitioners, viewing the student holistically means recognizing that services can be designed to support the whole student. Indigenous SSP2 described it like this: “The way I see student support is in a holistic way, so I’m taking care of their mental health, their physical health, their emotional health, their spiritual health, and their academic health.”

This finding suggests that by understanding students as whole, complex beings, we can design services and supports that are more conducive to who they are and what they need to succeed. Indigenous SSP2 also spoke about using the Indigenous medicine wheel and Indigenous teaching from her community to guide her approach to serving students: “Thinking about a wellness wheel, ... you think about each of those quadrants, and you think about how best to

support that person.” Similarly, Indigenous SSP3 acknowledged, “We’re really focused on showing the student all the support they need holistically: academic, financial, cultural.”

When services are designed with the whole student in mind, students are more likely to see themselves represented in the services being delivered. As Indigenous SSP3 shared:

We want a student who walks in to see themselves reflected here, to feel like they’re welcome, like they belong, because if they see and feel that then they’ll feel a sense of ownership, and then they’ll be able to flourish.

A significant theme in the data was the need to recognize the pressures that Indigenous students experience that are unique to Indigenous students. These pressures are related to a significant lack in understanding or regard for Indigenous cultural values by those in the dominant culture and to the history of colonization and legacy it has had, and still has, on education for Indigenous peoples. In this respect, viewing the student holistically means understanding the cultural obligations that many Indigenous student have to their families and communities as well as understanding the burden of intergenerational trauma that stems from colonization:

Students come here not to get a degree and go become self-sufficient; they are coming here to change the world for their community. So, they may be the one person in their family that everyone is hoping is going to come and get that education and come back and change things in their community, right? So, they have the whole community on their shoulders, they have this huge responsibility to do well here, to be successful, and if something stops that, it’s devastating to them.... They have let their whole nation down. They didn’t just let their mom and dad down, the whole nation is you know, counting on them. (Indigenous SSP1)

A similar sentiment was echoed by Indigenous SSP2:

When they're sent here, you know, they are not just coming here by themselves, they are coming here with their community, they're coming here with the honour of being funded; they're coming here with a giant sense of responsibility. I mean a lot of them are going back into their communities to work so it is really important that they get this done in a good way. And also, they have families to support and community is kind of, um, those younger generations they are watching them. So, it is like there is a huge responsibility on that one student to succeed here.

However, it is important to acknowledge that not all Indigenous communities share the same cultural expectations or traditions. Also, not all Indigenous students receive federal or band funding, Métis students, in particular. Recognizing the cultural diversity that exists within the Indigenous student population is an important aspect to viewing students holistically. Most participants, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, spoke about a lack of understanding of the diversity among Indigenous peoples. One of the Elders described her frustration this way:

They think all of us on Vancouver Island, North America, or wherever, are the same. We're not, they're not. It's just like with the non-Native, there are, there are English and there are Dutch.... You know there's all kinds of different nationalities out there. It's the same with us; we are all sorts of different nationalities, even though we're all Indigenous people. (Elder 3)

It is also important to acknowledge that not all Indigenous students come from an Indigenous community or feel connection with their Indigenous culture. Because not all Indigenous students come from the same, or even similar, cultural backgrounds, not all students will want to be supported in the same way. For some students, the transition to school will feel incredibly

significant, whereas others may not experience the same type of culture shock. Indigenous SSP4, who was raised on a northern rural reserve and now works in Indigenous student advising in an urban centre, emphasized this throughout discussions:

People that live on reserve or in community have a different way of thinking about things than people that are, Indigenous people that have lived in the city all their life, and have gone to schools and that sort, because they're colonized in a different kind of way.

The acknowledgement of diversity among Indigenous students, as well as the different levels of association students may have to cultural identities, was also articulated by Elder 5 and Elder 7. As Indigenous individuals who have lived out of their community for over 30 years, they spoke specifically about supporting Indigenous students who do not come from reserves or Indigenous communities. They suggested that Indigenous students who do not have the support of a home community may benefit from the facilitation of an Indigenous campus community or from ties to places like the Friendship Centre. There was also recognition that some students may not be connected to their Indigenous identity or may be early in the development of their relationship to their Indigenous culture and heritage. As shared by both Indigenous SSP1 and Indigenous SSP3, this may be the result of intergenerational trauma, the 60s scoop, or being a youth in care. For Métis, a cultural distancing or rejection was a form of post-resistance survival for those who could “pass” as White. Therefore, these students may be experiencing a variety of emotions related to identity and may benefit from cultural support through the institution.

Overall, there is a shared understanding that students need to be recognized for who they are and have services that support their individuality as well as their Indigeneity. As described by Indigenous SSP3:



We can't look at our students just as students. They're people with really rich, complex lives, who carry histories and stories. Most of our people carry stories of trauma, and whether or not that's their trauma, or intergenerational trauma, they carry those stories of trauma.

In recognition of the trauma that many students hold, many Indigenous participants also spoke about their personal desire to help students build confidence and resilience. As Indigenous SSP2 shared:

I'm hoping to install that sense of pride and identity in the students that I work with that are, you know, searching or they're at different levels of their identity and so they're trying to figure out who they are and where they come from.

Similarly, Elder 1 shared a story that described the impact that holistic cultural support can have on students:

Working with the University of Victoria [Indigenous] students, one year, six of them got their PhDs. After their graduation ceremony, they came into our office. They said, "You know, we almost quit after the second year. We came to visit the Old People, and we got our PhDs because we used the culture."

This spoke to the power of cultural support and how it can foster strength, resilience, and learning and serve Indigenous students in ways that Western supports cannot.

**Finding #4: Examine and reduce barriers to retention.** This finding involves examining services, administrative systems, policies, and processes to identify and remove unnecessary barriers to Indigenous student success. It also includes developing opportunities for more flexibility within existing colonial structures and designing services that offer more personalized support. The finding also identifies racism and discrimination as a barrier to student

success and calls upon non-Indigenous student services practitioners to help identify and address unsafe spaces.

Access to funding for education was identified by most participants as one of the greatest barriers to Indigenous student success. As Elder 4 acknowledged, “It starts right at the community.... We don’t have the finances.” Indigenous SSP4, non-Indigenous SSP1 and Indigenous SSP1 spoke about the inaccurate perception that Indigenous students receive adequate funding for their education. Non-Indigenous SSP1 and Indigenous SSP1 emphasized a need for more bursaries and scholarships for Indigenous students. Indigenous SSP2 spoke about the challenges she has in making decisions to disperse emergency funding: “I have to make a choice on you know, 10 people a month or five people a month.... This emergency fund is for unforeseen circumstances. There are a lot of unforeseen circumstances that happen throughout a student’s life.” When talking about mandatory application fees, Indigenous SSP3 shared her frustrations with the institution’s regulations:

That rule is a barrier to somebody and its nothing to us [the institution]. You don’t need to spend another \$42 to apply to a program, that’s “nickel and diming” to somebody, to somebody for whom 42 bucks is like winning the lottery.

Indigenous SSP2, Indigenous SSP4, and Indigenous SSP5 all spoke about a need to streamline administrative processes to make them less cumbersome for students to understand and follow. There was a lot of discussion about the time and energy that students expend in trying to understand administrative systems across campus—and sometimes across multiple campuses. When talking about the administrative run-around that she has observed, Indigenous SSP2 stated, “It is quite frustrating, even for myself, as a staff, I am quite frustrated when that happens, so I can’t even imagine a student that has had, you know, multiple doors kind of

slammed.” She went on to share that the burdens of administrative bureaucracy should not fall on the student, because the students have too many other important things to worry about; it should be the institution’s responsibility to make these systems easier to manage.

In respect of the previous finding of viewing students holistically, many participants expressed the need to accommodate students who may have obligations to their community. Several participants suggested that institutions create flexibility in some of their processes so that Indigenous students will not have to disconnect from their culture in order to be a student. For example, when there has been a death in the home community of a student, a student may be required to take time away from school beyond the standard absentee policy. Similarly, when there are traditional ceremonies taking place, students may feel torn between their obligations to school and their obligations to community. Therefore, it is important for the institution to consider how an Indigenous student might be able to achieve their intended outcomes without compromising cultural identity and responsibility. Indigenous SSP4 described it as the need for “a little bit of leeway.” Non-Indigenous F1 referred to this as an opportunity for finding “cultural commensurability” in administrative processes. It is also important to recognize that the traditions of any Indigenous student’s culture may be very different from those of the local Nations where an institution resides. For example, one participant spoke about her own involvement in Sundance, which is a ceremony specific to her Indigenous culture, but not common among local Coast Salish Nations. She was grateful that her employer recognized her cultural practice and gave her the time away from work she required, and she addressed the need for institutions to avoid cultural assumptions or generalizations when considering accommodations for students.

Student readiness was also identified by most participants as critical for student success. As Indigenous SSP2 shared: “Recruiting, you know, really ... you know gets them through the door, but if that readiness is not there, it’s just setting them up to fail.” This perspective was echoed by Indigenous SSP1 when she described some of the challenges that she has seen students face:

Basic need things, not degree things, right? And you know those are some of the struggles that our students are seeing, you know, their basic needs aren’t met and they’re still here pursuing an education to try and change things, right? So, how do we, how do we make sure that there are programs and services to catch them? And that’s a retention piece, um, it’s not just about getting them here, but it’s about keeping them here, and also preparing them to leave as well.

Elder 1, Elder 3, Elder 4, and Elder 5 all spoke about using culture to help prepare students for entering post-secondary education. “We share with the students: do your own healing. Remember, you’ve done nothing wrong. So, when you go up to that big building there, you will have a lot of room for the new teachings you are going to receive” (Elder 1). Other suggestions included orientation programs that bring Indigenous students together prior to classes, opportunities to connect with instructors and advisors before studies begin, access to Elders and circles, cultural programs on campus and in community, and opportunities to bring family members onto campus for celebrations or events.

Indigenous SSP4 spoke about developing coordinated support plans to meet the unique needs of each student. In her experience, when students meet a barrier, they are more likely to withdraw from the barrier than address it. However, when institutions increase their coordination of services, barriers decrease. She encouraged student services practitioners to work together to

support student success: “Let’s figure out what we have at this college.... Let’s have the people that are supporting them [the students] understand all the things that we can do.”

Indigenous SSP2 addressed the opportunity for early academic intervention for students who may be struggling after they have started their program. She tracks all Indigenous students whose GPA falls below minimum requirements and meets with them. She spoke about how the auto-generated communications from the Registrar that students receive can be brisk and disheartening, and so she tries to provide a warmer and more helpful outreach to students. In doing so, she is able to either support students to get back on track or help them exit in a way that allows them the opportunity to return when they are ready.

Building on the previous finding of supporting the whole student, reducing barriers also means creating safe spaces for students to be themselves. Indigenous SSP5 talked about creating environments “where Indigenous students just feel a sense of belonging, they feel a sense of um, generosity, they feel a sense of, being appreciated, respected.” The Indigenous student centres, Eyē? Sqā’lewen at Camosun College, the First People’s House at the University of Victoria, and Sneq’wa E’lun at Royal Roads, were all referenced as campus spaces where students felt welcomed. Often these are places where students can practice their culture, and as Elder 1 shared, when students can practice their culture, “they get that foundation of how ... how to be themselves.”

However, it was repeatedly expressed that students need to feel a sense of welcome in spaces outside of their respective Indigenous student centres. All participants spoke about students experiencing racism and tokenism on campus, both inside and outside of the classroom. Indigenous SSP2 recounted how frequently she was called on as an advocate for students who were experiencing racism from instructors and classmates. Indigenous SSP4 told a story about

witnessing racism in the bookstore while she was shopping with a student, and how the student would not likely have stayed to purchase her textbooks if she hadn't intervened and called-out the bookstore cashier. She also spoke about students who shared their frustrations about feeling tokenized:

They also would talk about, in the circle, about being in classes, big classes and the um topic of Indigenous whatever came up, and people looking to them and they'd say, "Oh, can you explain that?" You know, for the whole Indigenous Nations of all Canada ... 'explain that to me' ... which is crazy, you know? (Indigenous SSP4)

A need for bystander training and education programs that can help students and faculty address racism and tokenism were identified as a priority by several participants. The conversations about racism were, as one can expect, heavy. As Elder 1 shared: "No matter what happens, we always got one strike against us, it's the colour of our skin. We will always run into that."

**Finding #5: Become consciously aware of the complexity of reconciliation.** This finding addresses the need to be careful, intentional, and well-informed when engaging in this work. There are layers of personal experiences and perspectives to consider. Every participant acknowledged that reconciliation will look different to different people, and most participants believed that there is no clear path or blueprint to reconciliation. In the words of Elder 3: "Its complex."

Most participants felt the need to acknowledge that the TRC is not the first attempt to facilitate better relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada; it is simply the one that has had the most traction. Indigenous SSP1 reminded us: "There've been calls to action since colonization." She also brought attention to the human cost of the TRC's

work: “The Elders that had to share their pains, in order to bring this forward ... a lot of people were re-traumatized in order to raise awareness, in order to say this is important in Canada.”

Indigenous SSP2 shared her concerns about the integrity and authenticity of the work being done to date and about the purpose and intent behind those who are non-Indigenous and engaging in this work:

I’m really hesitant to think about reconciliation or apologies or any of that type of action. I think ... ya I think it’s about relationships. It all goes back to relationship. If you can’t be strong and make your words matter, then I think there is just so much work that needs to be done. And I’m hesitant to think about reconciliation.

Indigenous SSP1 framed reconciliation as the necessary work of non-Indigenous people:

Reconciliation isn’t for Indigenous people, I think it’s set up really for non-Indigenous people to situate themselves as visitors to Canada, and to try to do better to understand the true history of Canada ... to really kind of interrogate how and why this isn’t common knowledge. And it’s not the fault of Indigenous people or non-Indigenous people, it’s really the fault of government policy and practice and laws that kind of dismantled Indigenous nations, and histories and world belief systems.

Indigenous SSP5 spoke about her concern that “people want to get into fixing the ‘Indigenous problem,’” without considering that the core problem does not exist with Indigenous people, but with the way in which the dominant culture has treated Indigenous people.

Indigenous SSP1 expressed her frustration with people who feel compelled to “*save*” Indigenous people:

There are a lot of people looking at the symptoms of residential school rather than the root causes of the symptoms, right? And so, there are a lot of deficit models, like “*I need*

*to go and save the Indigenous people.*” That’s a colonizer kind of approach to, to work, right? How, somehow, it’s your responsibility to um, save Indigenous people, because they just don’t have enough employment skills, or they don’t have enough this or they don’t have enough that... and so...every opportunity that I can to address it, I think it’s a personal responsibility.

Several participants acknowledged that reconciliation is at risk of becoming a “buzz” word right now” (Indigenous SSP1, Indigenous SSP3, Indigenous SSP5, Elder 4, and non-Indigenous F1), and for many who have been doing this work for a long time, there was skepticism and concern about how long people’s attention for the topic will last. There was also discussion about the term *reconciliation* and that some Indigenous people really do not like the word, for many different reasons. As Indigenous SSP5 shared, “Reconciliation means there was a friendship before.... Where there wasn’t, there hasn’t been.”

There was a unanimous feeling among the Indigenous participants that for Indigenous people who are working to undo the impacts of colonization, it is not a day-job; it is a life commitment:

You know why do we do the work we do? Because it’s our hope that you know, our children or grandchildren, won’t have to forego their family or their tradition or their culture, they won’t have to leave that part of themselves at the door to be respected and understood and valued. (Indigenous SSP1)

There was also a shared recognition that any form of reconciliation will take a very long time to occur. As Elder 3 shared:

My personal thought on that is I’m not going to see it before ... before I’m gone. Not the complete, completely done. It’s going to be a slow, slow process. I mean, it took



hundreds of years for us to get this far, and it's not going to be wiped out completely in just a few years.

An important message expressed by the majority of Indigenous participants was for non-Indigenous practitioners to not be inhibited by a fear of making mistakes; mistakes will happen. When they do, it is important that the individual who made the mistake takes time to acknowledge it and make culturally appropriate amends. What was even more important was for non-Indigenous practitioners to bring “an open heart and mind” to the work and to remember to act with humility.

**Finding #6: Support the development of cultural allies.** This finding addresses how to increase participation of non-Indigenous student services practitioners in reconciliation and decolonization. This may be easier said than done. As Indigenous SSP5 observed: “Working as an Indigenous person trying to get non-Indigenous people to move, it takes time. Oh my gosh it takes so much time and energy. And it's hard, they don't want to move.” She went on to say, “It is building those relationships with colleagues on campus, and some of them are stronger than others, for sure. But ... they become champions.”

The majority of participants spoke about relationship building as a method to increase engagement of non-Indigenous student service providers. Indigenous SSP4, an Indigenous student advisor who works in community, spoke about the relationships she manages with various service individuals across her institution. As a result of these relationships, she has seen a change in how some of their services respond to the needs of Indigenous students. Her advice was to “make those connections and renew them all the time, like *every* opportunity.” Indigenous SSP2 discussed a monthly meeting she holds with non-Indigenous administrative support staff

across her institution. She uses this regular meeting as a way to develop a shared understanding of best practices for supporting Indigenous students.

Indigenous SSP3 talked about how important informal networks are to creating relationships across the institution: “When people from around the building stop by and chat with us, ‘unscheduled networking opportunities’ I call them, that’s part of the relationship building that we do.” These formal and informal networks provide opportunities for non-Indigenous practitioners to learn. They help to remove stereotypes and generate greater understanding for the experience of Indigenous students. This helps to develop cultural allies across the institution. Together, they create clusters of motivated people who want to learn and engage in active reconciliation.

Several participants discussed the non-Indigenous student services practitioners who want to contribute to reconciliation, but are fearful about how to start. As non-Indigenous F1 described, “I think there’s a lot of good meaning around reconciliation, like good intentions, but I think people are feeling quite unsure about how to proceed.” When discussing the fears of non-Indigenous people, Indigenous SSP5 (Indigenous participant and Indigenous student advisor) responded by comparing the potential discomfort of non-Indigenous student services practitioners to the discomfort or “uneasiness” that an Indigenous student may feel in a predominantly White European class. She then challenged us non-Indigenous people to get over our fears and “just show up.” She also compared this to speak about her own process of engaging with local communities who are not her home community: “That’s how for me, I have I have earned everybody’s trust ... because I keep showing up.” Similarly, non-Indigenous SSP6 spoke about bringing non-Indigenous colleagues with him to cultural events in community and how some were “surprised at just how valuable that experience was.”

Finally, it was also shared by most participants that in order to increase the number of cultural allies on campus, institutions need to be actively recruiting and hiring Indigenous colleagues into all roles across campus. An increased presence of Indigenous people will give strength to the work of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous faculty and staff who are working to decolonize post-secondary education.

## **Conclusion**

Presented in this section were the six findings from a research study that explored how non-Indigenous student services practitioners can respond to the calls to action that have been made by the TRC. The study and the findings are specific to those who work, live, and play in the lands of the Lekwungen and W̱SÁNEĆ people. As a starting point, they specify a need to increase understanding among non-Indigenous student services professionals of the impact that colonization has had on Canadians, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Post-secondary education has historically excluded and minimized Indigenous knowledges and cultures, which has contributed to the persistent colonization of Indigenous people. Non-Indigenous student services practitioners must take a proactive role in their own education and partner with Indigenous educators to support the work of building understanding about the history and impacts of colonization. This starts with taking accountability for learning about the real history and experiences of Indigenous people across Canada.

The findings identified the need to engage in work with good purpose and intention. They spoke to the effectiveness of cross-cultural relationships and community building as strategies for increasing people's awareness and understanding of Indigenous knowledges. They raised a need for student services practitioners to review systems and services and remove unnecessary barriers to student persistence. They also highlighted the importance of cultural safety and of

creating healthy environments for students, faculty, and staff that are free of discrimination and sensitive to individuals' personal trauma. Finally, they acknowledged that there is good work being done in the area of reconciliation, but there is much more work to do.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion and Analysis of Findings**

Presented in this chapter is a discussion of the findings revealed within a qualitative participatory research study that explored how non-Indigenous student services practitioners can effectively respond to the calls to action that have been made through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (2015a) final report. This section of the study includes a brief overview of the research question and study design, followed by a summary of the findings and discussion of their relevance to the research question and sub-questions.

Six findings emerged through this research that direct the work of non-Indigenous student services in responding to the TRC (2015d) calls to action. Each finding is introduced with a reference for how it answers the research question and/or sub-questions and is subsequently discussed in relation to the work of student services practitioners and the relevant literature from the field. The findings are also reviewed for their alignment to the four distinct focus areas from the TRC (2015d) calls to action previously identified in the literature review: (a) Indigenous student academic attainment levels and post-graduate employability; (b) the enhancement of student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect; (c) services that incorporate Indigenous Knowledges in their approach to delivery; and (d) parental and community involvement in service delivery.

Following the examination of the findings, the credibility of the research is affirmed, and a brief overview of the delimitations and limitations of the study are described. The implications for further research are then shared. The discussion of findings and their relevance to the field of post-secondary student services are summarized in the conclusion.

## Research Question and Study Design

This research responded to the inquiry question: How can non-Indigenous student services practitioners be guided to respond to the call for reconciliation and Indigenization of post-secondary education that has been made in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's final report? More specifically, two additional subquestions were answered:

- What training, knowledge and supports are required of non-Indigenous student services practitioners who want to respond to the TRC's calls to action?
- How can we increase the participation of non-Indigenous student services practitioners in this work?

In an attempt of active reconciliation, this qualitative participatory study integrated both Western and Indigenous methods. The study took place on the lands of the W̱SÁNEĆ and Lekwungen people, in the region now also known as Greater Victoria, BC. The selection of this research boundary honours the Indigenous perspective that knowledge and learning is place-based (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005), and the most relevant knowledge will be found by engaging with participants who live and work in these areas. It was anticipated that outcomes from this study would have a direct impact on the work of non-Indigenous practitioners who live and work on W̱SÁNEĆ and Lekwungen lands and would positively impact the Indigenous students they serve. As a non-Indigenous student services practitioner, this research was directly relevant to my work.

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and small focus group discussions. These conversations were guided by questionnaires, but also employed the use of yarning, which is an unrestricted free-flowing exchange of dialogue. Participants were drawn from the three public post-secondary institutions that reside on the lands of the W̱SÁNEĆ and

Lekwungen people: The University of Victoria, Camosun College, and Royal Roads. The research concept was initially presented at a meeting of Elders who work with the post-secondary institutions as liaisons and advisors. This meeting helped to shape the direction and approach to gathering data. Data were collected in two stages. The first round of interviews and small focus groups took place with seven Elders who volunteered to be part of the research. Participating Elders were then asked to recommend prospective participants who work in the field of student services and/or who have engaged in work that effectively supports reconciliation. This involved an additional seven participants: five who identified as Indigenous and two who identified as non-Indigenous. As data were gathered and analyzed, participants assisted in the review of codes and themes through a process known as member-checking. The role of Elders as primary Knowledge Keepers, the involvement of conversational methods of yarning, and the cycles of member-checking were all intended to align with Indigenous approaches to research methods.

### **Research Findings in Response to the Research Question and Sub-Questions**

Through the course of this study, six findings emerged in response to the research question about how non-Indigenous student services practitioners can respond to the TRC calls-to-action, and to the sub-questions about education and training to support this work and efforts to increase the involvement of other non-Indigenous practitioners in this work:

1. Learn the history and reality of colonization in Canada;
2. Build relationships with local Indigenous communities;
3. View Indigenous students holistically;
4. Examine and reduce barriers to Indigenous student retention;
5. Become consciously aware of the complexity of reconciliation;

6. Support the development of cultural allies.

The findings are listed here in the order through which a non-student services practitioner would address the work. One must start by learning about the history and reality of colonization before they can engage in effective decolonization work. However, when discussed in relation to the research questions, their order is somewhat different. Findings two, three, and four all respond directly to the overarching research question about *how* to do this work. Findings one and five respond to the first sub-question about training and education. Finding six responds to the second sub-question about increasing the motivation and participation of non-Indigenous student services practitioners in this work. These relationships are discussed in greater detail in this section.

**Research question:** How can non-Indigenous student services practitioners be guided to respond to the call for reconciliation and Indigenization of post-secondary education that has been made in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's final report?

Three findings directly addressed the primary research question: (a) build relationships with local Indigenous communities, (b) view Indigenous student holistically, and (c) examine and reduce barriers to Indigenous student retention. Each of these findings represents concrete action that non-Indigenous student services practitioners can take in order to respond to the TRC (2015d) calls to action. None of these actions can be accomplished without care and diligence and without the collaboration with Indigenous colleagues and communities.

***Build relationships with local Indigenous communities.*** This finding identifies a need to establish positive relationships between non-Indigenous student services practitioners and local Indigenous communities. The literature revealed that practices of colonization have eroded the trust of generations of Indigenous people in Canada's education systems (Alfred, 2004; Battiste,



2013). Relationship building is therefore a first step in rebuilding that trust. Though systemic inequality cannot be overcome simply through relationships, relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are critical to moving towards more equitable relations (Freemon, 2010).

This finding partially aligns with the nature of the relationship-development work that student services engage in, both inside and outside of the academy. It is not uncommon for student services practitioners to develop collaborative partnerships that support student success. However, these relationships do not generally include student families or communities. Though it is not unheard of for institutions to engage with members of a student's home community, as evidenced by parent and family orientation programs, or *family weekend* events, this effort is generally motivated by a perceived need to support the student's transition *out* of their home community. In the tradition of *in loco parentis*, the institution, and often the student services practitioner, replaces the role of the family, and student services practitioners are generally perceived as those with the necessary expertise to successfully guide students through their transition into post-secondary education. In contrast, this finding suggests that the necessary expertise to support student success actually lies outside of the skillset or scope of the non-Indigenous student services practitioner. For Indigenous students who are coming from community or off-reserve students who are seeking cultural representation, it is this connection to local Indigenous community and culture that will support their well-being during their time in the academy. In some student service models, cultural support is delivered through specialized units for Indigenous Student Services that are led by Indigenous practitioners. However, the responsibility of establishing meaningful relationships is not just important for Indigenous

practitioners; it is the responsibility of all practitioners who support the student experience to develop relationships of trust.

The benefits of relationship development with Indigenous communities are exponential. Through the establishment of trust and mutual respect, non-Indigenous student services practitioners can learn about local knowledges, culture, and protocol. This will inform their understanding for how to integrate these knowledges into service design as well as how to effectively foster awareness and understanding for these knowledges within their respective service areas on-campus. This leads to increased opportunities for the presence of Indigenous knowledges, protocols, and cultures within the campus setting, both curricular and co-curricular. The representation and presence of Indigenous culture may also help to create a more inviting space for Indigenous students and community members to engage in on-campus events and activities or to see themselves as connected to, and a part of, the institutions that neighbour their communities.

***View Indigenous students holistically.*** The term holistic is not new to the field of student services. There was significant literature about supporting student success by attending to student well-being and by considering the spiritual and emotional aspects of student experiences. There was also considerable literature about developing services that are culturally relevant and supportive of a diverse student community (Gilligan, 1982; Swail, 2003; Tierney, 1992). However, this particular finding calls on non-Indigenous student services practitioners to recognize Indigenous students through a non-Western paradigm and to consider how this paradigm might shift their service design and delivery.

Adopting an Indigenous perspective means understanding that some Indigenous students will hold the worldview that the connections between mind, body, earth, and spirit must be

included when considered holistic services. It involves recognizing the impact of history on the current identity and experiences of Indigenous students. It also includes the recognition of the significant diversity that exists among Indigenous students. Practitioners must consider what holistic looks and feels like from the student's point of view and not necessarily from the practitioner's point of view.

***Examine and reduce barriers to Indigenous student retention.*** As identified in the literature, reducing barriers to student success is central to the work that student services practitioners do (Cox & Strange, 2010). However, there was also a significant sentiment in the literature suggesting that non-Indigenous post-secondary student services practitioners are not doing this effectively for Indigenous students (Pidgeon, 2008; Pidgeon et al., 2014). Both the literature and the findings suggested there is an explicit need for non-Indigenous student services professionals to fully understand the complexity of barriers that are unique to Indigenous students.

Some of the barriers were more administrative in nature, which should make them easier to address. For example, changes to overly bureaucratic processes, or updates to student policies, can be facilitated by working collaboratively across the institution and by engaging policymakers who have the authority to make administrative decisions and changes. This requires the dedication of time and effort on behalf of those advocating for change.

Other barriers were related to feelings of isolation and loneliness. These can be addressed through the coordination of cultural support and community building across campus. Again, some of this is familiar work for student services practitioners, as community-building is a core priority of the work. However, the difference of creating community for Indigenous students will be in accessing the appropriate cultural resources and Knowledge Keepers to facilitate

meaningful support. As both the literature and findings identified, this is a knowledge gap for non-Indigenous student service providers (Pidgeon, 2008).

Some barriers were quite complicated and require a comprehensive institutional response. For example, both the literature and the findings identified various forms of racism and discrimination, inside and outside of the classroom, as barriers to student retention (Currie et al, 2012; Pidgeon, 2008; Monture, 2009). This requires a more wide-ranging response to create awareness and shift a campus culture. Student services practitioners are often involved in education and training regarding issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion. However, some of these barriers exist in teaching and learning environments that may fall outside of the traditional scope of student services work. Therefore, it will be necessary for non-Indigenous student services professionals to consider strategic ways to engage colleagues from across faculties and units into conversations about racism, discrimination, and cultural safety in learning environments.

An important aspect of this finding is the identification of *who* is responsible for making changes. As both the literature and finding identified, for too long, Indigenous students (as well as Indigenous scholars and staff) have had to adjust themselves and their ways in order to fit into the academy. It is the Western academy's turn to change; the academy should be arranging itself to appropriately welcome and serve its Indigenous students, scholars, staff, and communities.

**Research sub-question #1: What training, knowledge, and supports are required of non-Indigenous student services practitioners who want to respond to the TRC's calls to action?** Two research findings responded to this sub-question: (a) learn the history and reality of colonization in Canada; and (b) become consciously aware of the complexity of reconciliation. What these findings both suggest is that there is a lot of learning that needs to happen and that

this will be challenging, heavy, and often complicated work. As student services practitioners, we are working to undue a century of colonial harms; this will take time and be hard work.

***Learn the history and reality of colonization in Canada.*** This finding suggested that the priority of non-Indigenous student services practitioners in responding to the calls to action is to develop a deeper understanding about the history and legacy of colonization in Canada. This aligns with the work of many (most, perhaps all) Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars who are engaged in the topic of decolonization, reconciliation, or Indigenous resurgence. “On a societal level, the act of raising awareness of how colonialism has impacted the lives of the colonized and granted unearned privileges to colonizers is a fundamental and first step in decolonizing education” (Poitras Pratt et al., 2018, p. 19). This learning process should help develop the critical awareness required among non-Indigenous student services practitioners to facilitate a greater sense of responsibility and accountability to addressing persistent colonial structures in the academy.

It has also been acknowledged through this finding and the literature that many Indigenous scholars and practitioners in post-secondary education who are active in raising the consciousness of others are at risk of burning out. It is therefore necessary for non-Indigenous student services practitioners to take some accountability for coordinating these learning opportunities. The good news is that training is something that student services practitioners, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, already do. As noted by Cox and Strange (2010), student services practitioners are educators who often facilitate leadership or training activities in collaboration with services and resources across campuses. Therefore, non-Indigenous student services practitioners have an opportunity to leverage their skillset for facilitating learning by *engaging themselves* as learners in this work. However, as noted by both the literature and the

research participants, it will be critical for the content of this work to be well informed by Indigenous knowledges, local Indigenous culture, and protocol. The finding and the literature also suggested that this education and training have the depth and breadth to support deep learning and critical reflection. This type of training may therefore require a request to senior or executive leadership for the investment in dedicated resources and subject experts that will support such a framework.

***Become consciously aware of the complexity of reconciliation.*** Both the literature and the findings identify the complexity of reconciliation. It is difficult work that will require patience and care; there is no direct or clear path forward. Poitras Pratt et al. (2018) reminded us of the challenge of dismantling an entrenched Western worldview.

Time is a critical element to the success of reconciliation. Unlike other aspects of professional development, engaging in reconciliation is not something that can be achieved through a supplementary course, certificate or training. A significant amount of time will need to be dedicated to training and education. This includes learning about the history and impact of colonization, learning about the approach to trauma-informed practice, learning about the history and current cultural traditions of local Nations and learning about the needs of local communities. Then, a significant amount of time will need to be dedicated to relationship building between non-Indigenous student services practitioners and their Indigenous colleagues, and between non-Indigenous student services practitioners and local Indigenous community members and educators. The process cannot be rushed. This means that, as new staff are hired and oriented, as annual work-plans are developed, and as key departmental priorities are selected and identified against the backdrop of an institution's 5-year plan, reconciliation will have to remain a constant goal.

As was observed in the findings section, there is a caution that the term reconciliation may be becoming a buzz word. The discussion about the complexity of, and skepticism towards, reconciliation and reconciliatory work speaks to a need for the respectful treatment of the term when engaging with Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators and leaders. This links back to the finding about relationships. If non-Indigenous people are able to bring an open heart and mind into the work and create authentic relationships, then the skepticism (on the parts of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators and leaders) may be worn away to make room for positive collaborations.

While doing this work, non-Indigenous student services practitioners must be mindful of the significant cultural diversity among Indigenous peoples across Canada. Developing an understanding of one's local Indigenous cultures, protocols, and traditions will not facilitate the understanding of all Indigenous cultures, protocols, or traditions. It is not realistic to expect complete cultural fluency from Indigenous or non-Indigenous student services practitioners. What local understanding can develop is awareness to the differences between the dominant Western paradigms and Indigenous paradigms.

Both the literature and findings reminded us that many Indigenous people have endured generations of trauma. Engaging in activities that bring awareness to colonization can unintentionally interrupt wounds that are healing. Therefore, there needs to be a way for this work to be done in a manner that does not elicit the trauma of others. Being trauma informed requires an understanding that people bring their whole selves into the learning environment and that sometimes, parts of themselves are vulnerable, but not always visible. Non-Indigenous student services staff will need to be fully trained in understanding trauma-informed practice.

Reconciliation has been identified as a process that will be long and messy (TRC, 2015d). Given its complexity and reliance on the building of relationships and trust, it can also be assumed that the work will take some steps forward and some steps back. This means patience will be required.

**Research sub-question #2: How can we increase participation of non-Indigenous student services practitioners in this work?** There is one research finding that responds to this sub-question: Support the development of cultural allies.

*Support the development of cultural allies.* This finding proposed that non-indigenous student services practitioners leverage relationships and networks within the institutions where they work in order to facilitate pockets of momentum and support for decolonization and reconciliatory work. The finding was supported by literature on ally building. As Regan (2010) reminded us, allies can play a significant role in helping to facilitate decolonizing shifts and practices. However, being a true ally requires taking the time to fully understand context, history, and lived experiences of Indigenous people. Multiple Indigenous scholars (and non-Indigenous allies) warned against creating a space where non-Indigenous people picture themselves as saviours of the downtrodden. Both the literature and the findings expressed concern about the potential of the application of a deficit model, where non-Indigenous people perceive Indigenous people as having a deficit that needs to be addressed. It must be understood that the problem does not lie with Indigenous people; it lies within the narrative that supports the minimization, oppression, and exclusion of Indigenous knowledges and cultures and those who support this outdated practice.

Scholars of adaptive leadership have suggested that as non-Indigenous student services practitioners become more familiar with the realities of colonization, their inevitable discomfort



will create a motivation to become an ally (Leigh, 2002). This finding suggested that increasing an individual's understanding of colonization may facilitate the necessary disequilibrium that Heifetz and Linsky (2002) identified as necessary for the work of adaptive leadership. Creating an increased awareness of Indigenous knowledges, while balancing this awareness with an increased capacity for cultural humility, may also support the appropriate combination of self-confidence and humility to align with Bandura's (1977) theory self-efficacy and the motivation of individuals to engage practices of decolonization.

### **Alignment of Findings to the Principles for Good Practice in Student Services**

All six findings align with the eight *principles for good practice in student services* mentioned in the literature review. As posited by Cox and Strange (2010, p. 237), these include:

1. Centring practice on student needs;
2. Expecting individual differences;
3. Being flexible in our approaches;
4. Responding to needs appropriately and on time;
5. Anticipating needs, rather than reacting to them;
6. Applying resources efficiently and sustainably;
7. Focusing on outcomes and results; and
8. Designing and implementing services in an integrated manner

To best serve Indigenous students, these principles must be considered with the application of an Indigenous lens. The needs of Indigenous students may, or may not, also involve the needs of the student's family or community. All practitioners need to be open to understanding what those needs are. When considering individual differences, the significant diversity that exists among Indigenous students must be recognized, and generalizations about the Indigenous student

experience must be avoided. The application of flexibility must include Indigenous understandings and incorporate cultural commensurability. When responding to needs appropriately and on time, practitioners must take time to consider what “appropriate” means for the student(s) they are supporting. In attempting to anticipate needs, practitioners need to consider active consultation with the families and communities of Indigenous students to avoid inappropriate assumptions. When applying resources efficiently and sustainably, practitioners need to be mindful of the heaviness of this work and the ways in which our Indigenous colleagues are often called on to do much more than what their specific role profile demands. Finally, when focusing on outcomes and results, practitioners must also understand that many of those outcomes should actually be determined by the student or community.

### **Alignment of Findings to the Four Focus Areas from TRC**

The literature review of this study identified four focus areas within the TRC’s (2015d) calls to action that correspond directly to the work of student services: (a) Indigenous student academic attainment levels and post-graduate employability; (b) the enhancement of student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect; (c) services that incorporate Indigenous Knowledges in their approach to delivery; and (d) parental and community involvement in service delivery. The six findings from this research identified the foundational work that will be required of non-Indigenous student services in preparing to responding these four focus areas. In order to fully understand how to support Indigenous student academic attainment, or develop capacity for intercultural understanding, or offer services with Indigenous Knowledges, or invite parental and community involvement, a significant amount of learning must take place. Therefore, these findings chart a pathway. If conducted in a good way, the process of learning will develop humility and respect among non-Indigenous practitioners for

Indigenous ways of knowing. In turn, this will facilitate motivation to build relationships, which will build trust, which will inspire pockets of change, which will foster momentum towards larger shifts within the academy.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

The scope of this study is specific to the work of non-Indigenous student services practitioners in a culturally specific region. This study concentrated on southern regions of Vancouver Island, BC, and the findings will not necessarily translate to other regions within BC or to other provinces and territories. However, knowledge generated by this study should provide a relevant understanding of how reconciliation can be engaged in post-secondary student services at a regional level in other locals. This information can be used in future studies for comparative analysis between provinces and territories.

There were limitations to the research design. It did not involve current students or alumni. Though many of the participants had also been post-secondary students at one time, it would be beneficial to learn directly from the current experiences of Indigenous students in the academy. The study also treated the field of student services quite generally and did not differentiate between the different roles that student services practitioners hold within the institutions.

### **Quality and Credibility**

Quality in research refers to the transparency of the research process and the alignment of the research topic to the selected methodology and methods (Patton, 2002). Trustworthiness is related to the viability or validation of findings and results (Chilisa, 2012; Thomas, 2006). I attended to both quality and credibility through careful selection and implementation of research methods. The integration of Western and Indigenous methods showed alignment with, and

respect for, the research topic. The inclusion of “peer debriefings” and “member-checks” (Chilisa, 2012, p. 243) supported credibility of the data. Rapport building and ongoing communication with Indigenous Elders and research participants created opportunities to check-in regarding shared understanding and meaning of the findings. Attention to openness and transparency guided my actions and supported my intentions, as did the words of Opaskwayak Nation scholar Shawn Wilson (2008): “A ‘good heart’ guarantees a good motive” (p. 60).

Another aspect to quality and credibility is the confirmation and acknowledgement of researcher bias. Western and Indigenous paradigms conflict on the issues of researcher bias. Seale (2004) suggested that findings must be reflective of the *data* and not the will or political views of the researcher. However, Kovach (2009a, 2009b) told us that relational assumptions are central to meaning making in Indigenous Knowledge systems and that Indigenous methods allow for the interplay between the researcher and the research. Therefore, though my researcher bias should be declared, it should not necessarily be discounted in the process of data interpretation. Similarly, S. Wilson (2008) reminded us that: “We cannot remove ourselves from our world in order to examine it” (p. 14).

As a student services practitioner conducting research in the field and practice for student services, I undoubtedly brought bias into this work. As a new researcher and a non-Indigenous researcher, I positioned myself between the differing perspectives on researcher bias and tried to remain critically aware of the role my bias played throughout the research process. I did this by engaging participants in the conversation of researcher bias and by requesting feedback from participants regarding my own understanding and interpretation of information generated through the interview process. This brought a level of consciousness and ethical relationality to the work.

## **Opportunities for Future Research**

There are many opportunities to build on this work. Since the beginning of this research project, there has been a rise of interest and scholarship in the topic of decolonization in post-secondary institutions across Canada. There are opportunities to expand the participant group and reach out to more non-Indigenous practitioners who may now be engaging in this work. There are opportunities to conduct environmental scans for promising practices in the area of education and training for non-Indigenous people. Additional research could also expand to involve voices of students and alumni, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. On a more local level, one next step in this project would be to transition this from a qualitative participatory study to an action research project that would seek to engage and facilitate change among non-Indigenous student services practitioners in the region.

## **Conclusion**

This research study has presented findings that articulate the beginning of a response by non-Indigenous student services practitioners to the TRC's (2015d) calls to action. In order for non-Indigenous student services practitioners to fully engage in decolonizing student services in the academy, significant growth in the understanding and awareness of the impact of colonization on Indigenous knowledges and cultures must occur. By developing an appreciation for what has been historically excluded from the academy, non-Indigenous student services practitioners, with the support of their Indigenous colleagues, can begin to consider how to rebuild systems and services that support the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges and cultures.

Research participants discussed the fear that many non-Indigenous educational leaders feel towards engaging in the work of reconciliation and that many are nervous about stepping into this work without a blueprint or master guide. It was also acknowledged by participants that

people look too much to papers, books, and theories and not to authentic, experiential learning or practical understanding. To move forward, non-Indigenous student services practitioners will need to become comfortable transitioning into the role of learner. They will be required to accept that they may not be the experts in understanding how to meet Indigenous students' needs or support their successes. They may not even understand what success is to the Indigenous students they are supporting. It may mean taking uncomfortable risks and becoming vulnerable as new relationships are forged. It also means taking a full stand against racism and discrimination in all of its forms. The path will not be linear. It will require commitment to an open heart and an open mind.

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