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Bottlenecks and Breakthroughs: A Narrative Inquiry into the Storied Experiences of how School Administrators Understand their Efforts Towards Decolonization

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Bottlenecks and Breakthroughs: A Narrative Inquiry into the Storied Experiences of how School
Administrators Understand their Efforts Towards Decolonization

by

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A THESIS

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Abstract

This research study was undertaken to offer a space to engage in conversation and to make sense of how school administrators understand their efforts toward decolonization. It evolved out of curiosity in how narratives have shaped and continue to reshape our current context of the curriculum, and how to best (re)consider the current knowledge structures that are present in schools. The purpose of this study is to come to a better understanding of how school administrators understand their role towards decolonizing education. The guiding question for this research was, what does it mean to live together well in this world, and what is the role of curriculum in it? Narrative inquiry as a methodology, offered, by way of interviews and written narratives, an opportunity to attend to the stories using the commonplaces of temporality, sociality and place. The field texts included research conversations transcripts, field notes, and journals. Three narrative accounts were co-composed, one for each participant. The use of narratives allowed participants to express their views and articulate their own interpretation of their lives and stories. After looking across the narrative accounts, three resonant threads were identified that highlighted the importance of understanding a Settler¹ identity, of unlearning colonialism, engaging in sustained professional learning, and of embracing ambiguity. One conclusion arising from this study is that unlearning colonialism is an ongoing process.

Keywords: decolonization, story, unlearning, Settler identity, colonialism, leadership, narrative inquiry

¹ Lowman and Barker (2015) refer to Settler with a capital “S” because the authors use Settler as an identity that connects a group of people with common practices, just as Indigenous, as a term, is used in the same way. I have chosen to use the capital “S” as well because it is a foundational part of my identity that requires my attention and as Lowman and Barker contend, it represents a way for me to choose and act differently. I also recognize that the term has a legal definition, and this is not the way that I am using the term in this research.

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DEDICATION

To my dad,
Sam Sarson (1944-2006),
whose absence I felt
as deeply as his presence
on this journey.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Did you ever wonder how it is we imagine the world in the way we do,
how it is we imagine ourselves, if not through our stories? (King, 2003, p. 95)

Context of the Study

I have many interests in curriculum that have brought me here, orienting me to the topic of decolonizing education. In my early teaching years, I was exposed to important understandings of what it meant to interrogate curriculum, uncover controversial issues, and ensure that student voice and agency were being attended to. In teaching in various schools across the city of Calgary, I came to understand the role that curriculum plays in creating the conditions for each young person to thrive, and I realized that schooling experiences are what can bring us together, rather than set us apart. Along the way I was driven by a desire to find ways to enact social change. As a teacher, I was involved in research about decolonization and anti-oppressive education more broadly, its impact on curriculum, gender, sexuality, and schooling, the culture of poverty, and issues of democracy. These experiences inspired me to pursue a role as a specialist for the Calgary Board of Education in Curriculum and Assessment where I was provided the opportunity to work alongside system leaders, school leaders, teachers, students, and faculty from the Werklund School of Education. As a school principal, I worked towards the combination of ethical and instructional leadership with a focus and an understanding of the role that curriculum plays in shaping who we are as human beings. Years later, in my current role as System Principal, Core Curriculum and Assessment, I have become even more curious about what experiences are necessary for school administrators to engage in and with, to understand how curriculum, both lived and planned, helps to support a generation of young people who care deeply about the land, human rights, and their education. In each of these

experiences, I have grappled with the notion that what is written in a curriculum does not always represent how students see themselves or the larger world. Because of this, I have an interest in learning more about how best to balance existing knowledge structures with the ones that are absent, and how to bring forward new ways of knowing that have not been considered before. I wonder how narratives have shaped and will re-shape our current context of curriculum and I am curious about how to best (re)consider our current knowledge structures. What does it mean to live together well in this world, and what is the role of curriculum in it? My professional employment and career experiences, coupled with previous research, brought me here, at this time, in this place. This research study weaves together notions of story, (de)colonization, and ideas and possibilities for a future-oriented study into the curriculum-making world of teachers and school administrators.

In my experience, there is a disconnect between the lived experiences of students and teachers, how curriculum is written, and how it is experienced inside and outside of the classroom. Aoki (1986) described this idea as follows: “A teacher’s pedagogic situation is a living in tensionality...that emerges, in part, from the indwelling in a zone between two curriculum worlds: the worlds of curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived experiences” (p. 159). This idea inspired my research. I wish for a schooling system that does not simply repeat what has been done before. I wish for an education that acknowledges the land and place and embodies feelings of reciprocity. I wish for a school experience that brings us together instead of setting us apart, and I wish for issues of power and privilege to be dismantled. I have developed an interest in how school administrators take up the work of anti-racism in a Canadian context, and I want to understand how the curriculum, lived and planned, holds and generates possibilities for personal and social change. I explored teachers’ thoughts and musings about what exactly *is*

anti-racism education, and how do we begin to design curriculum that includes all voices to generate new responses to old questions, and to provide new opportunities for positive change.

As I think back to significant moments in my career, I remember the distinct ways I have engaged in conversation with colleagues about our role in supporting the next generation of young people. I became increasingly aware of the times in the classroom and in the school in general where I knew something was not quite right. Had I misspoken in a way that implicated my bias? Had I represented an idea that uncovered a stereotype? Did my own privilege and power position me in a certain way to ask a certain question? In my years as a classroom teacher, I puzzled over how to include student voice in authentic ways, and how to design curriculum that represented the full range of uniqueness in our classrooms.

I recall the various ways that I have tried to support teachers in unravelling their own bias and stereotypes in how they approach curriculum, and in capturing an embodied response to what it means to arrive at places of knowing, and unknowing. One example that comes to mind was when, as a staff, we began working with, and learning about critical literacy as a way to better understand how it can and should live in classrooms. We studied race, class, and gender together, and we brainstormed ways to engage young children in topics that could open space for important dialogue. We researched relevant literature, studied literacy strategies, shared professional readings, and engaged in important discourse. Through each encounter there were some teachers that invested their emotions and their time, leaning into the conversation, and then there were those who stayed on the perimeter, protecting themselves. It became apparent to me that because some of the teachers had not been exposed to conversations about critical social justice issues, in a school setting, they were ill prepared to participate meaningfully. My observations led me to believe that they were uncomfortable, as they stirred in their seats,

distracted by their phones, unable to provide examples or ideas. What was I to do as a leader when the teachers' own previous knowledge was informed solely by White², Westernized³ notions of teaching and learning? Without this professional learning time, teachers would have continued to provide reading material that represented who *they* are, not who the students are. I could not justify a quick fix of critical literacy professional learning without also providing the opportunities for educators to engage in their own processes of unlearning⁴, and their own understanding of epistemology, with the intention of moving things forward. As Patel (2016) pointed out, “the privileged need no interventions; they have already achieved” (p. 24).

Something changed recently when I arrived at this work with a different approach. Something changed when teachers were engaged in conversation about anti-racism that started from acknowledging their connection to place and land. Something was different when we asked: who am I? where do I come from? where am I going? This was the case on one particular morning when we listened to Robin Wall Kimmerer's (2013) chapter, “Allegiance to Gratitude” from her well-known book, *Braiding Sweetgrass*. We paid attention to her words in advance of Thanksgiving weekend and reflected on practice. We engaged in conversations about gratitude and reciprocity, giving and taking, liberty and freedom, rituals and ceremony, and asked questions such as, how are we rooted in cultures of gratitude? We spent time together, sharing

² White dominance in Canadian society offers an opportunity for White Canadians to choose being unraced, or separate from race. Because of this, I have chosen to capitalize White and Whiteness to challenge the freedom of racial invisibility.

³ I am using the term culturally, referring to Europe and to populations that owe its origins to Europe through the processes of imperialism and colonization.

⁴ Throughout this research I will be using the term unlearning as I believe that the concept of unlearning most honourably reflects the spirit of the TRC Calls to Action regarding the transformative changes required to restore and sustain respectful relations.

our own stories and contemplating how we might include more storytelling and Indigenous knowledge in our classrooms. We were starting to see how an Indigenous pedagogy of storytelling was shifting the landscape of curriculum design in our school. This made me consider this question: what are the ways of knowing that teachers need to learn in order to influence curriculum design?

Over time, my roles and responsibilities have shifted from working primarily with students in the classroom to working with teachers and school administrators in support of their work with students. I understand that my work as a system principal is to build capacity to support student growth and achievement. I am curious about my own learning about curriculum, and I wonder how I might support and work alongside educators in such a way that nourishes new understandings and possibilities about curriculum so that both they and students have opportunities to thrive. I wonder what draws certain people into the openness required to unlearn certain points of reference, and what inspires new ways of thinking about curriculum possibilities. I wonder about the stories they carry with them, their memories, and what drives them to continue despite setbacks, competing priorities, and a global pandemic. I am curious about how curriculum design, that which included and uncovered, supports the work towards decolonizing education.

Through my observations and experience I have become aware that teachers are a product of their own schooling processes and carry these memories of school into their own classrooms which, in turn, affects how they design learning experiences. Knowing this, it is important that I ask: what does it mean to educate students for the real-world? and what is the real-world now? Seidel (2014) writes about wonder, nature, and education and asks of us to consider, what does it mean for living and learning in schools when we are distracted by

preparing children to be workers and to support economic growth in the ‘real-world?’ She reminded us that:

when these tensions and forgettings are ruptured by the present, by terror, politics, illness, or simply the struggles of day-to-day human relating, and we are brought to face our shared earthly mortality it might become literally impossible to continue with confidence certain educational practices and ways of being. (p. 134)

Philo Hove (1996, as cited in Seidel, 2014) explained that wonder itself “lies at the heart of what it is to be human: it places us directly and transparently in the face of the world in which we live with others” (p. 137). If we are to embrace new ways of doing and being, how can it be possible that we share our stories of wonder with students? How can we establish new ways of knowing, new relationships with one another and the more-than-human-world? And further, “what if it matters in this time of extinctions and global human suffering, what if it matters, to the future of life, that we learn to do this?” (pp. 137-138).

I have considered what possibilities might open if I refuse the hermetically sealed labels and categories (educator, researcher, parent, partner), while taking into consideration the different ethical considerations in relation to the ways in which those social categories may be scripted and made legible. Initially, I considered how I see myself as an educator in relation to myself as a researcher? Then, more recently, how I see myself as an educator, a researcher, a system leader, a parent, and a partner, during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. What has opened for me is an understanding and an awareness that it is not about what we know, or what we think we know – it is about how we have arrived at that place of knowing. It is with this interest, in how we come to arrive at particular places of knowing, that I have identified a problem in the field of education. If teachers are designing curriculum based on what they think they know, from a knowledge system rooted in Western notions of colonialism, there is a real

possibility that the education system will continue to repeat itself based on what we *think* we know. With that in mind, I ask: what does it mean to be, know, and do with respect to curriculum?

Research Problem

If schools are not fundamentally designed to support knowledge systems other than those that are Westernized, with limited ways of knowing, how do educators shift their understanding of knowledge so that they can teach and learn in ways that honour more than one way of knowing? Historically, research and practice has been based on a Westernized notion of what it means to know, and this has been outside of Indigenous knowledge, so how do educators know what they know if they are not considering more than one way of knowing? Crotty (1998) explained epistemology as “a way of looking at the world and making sense of it. It involves knowledge, therefore, and embodies a certain understanding of what is entailed in knowing, that is, how we know what we know” (p. 8). I questioned different knowledge systems in my research, specifically Indigenous methodologies and systems of knowing. This was a challenge because I was never engaged in learning and coming to know in these ways; however, that does not give me an excuse or reason to not explore them in research now. After all, we may have been here before, but I have never been *here* before in my research and this provides me with an opportunity to consider space, time, geography, the social, political, economic, historical perspectives, and coming to know through these moments of difference. Through these moments of difference, I am awakened to the assumptions that I hold. It is through this awareness that I come to pay special attention to my positionality as researcher, someone who lives in the field, with a responsibility to tell a story, to generate new knowledge through storytelling. Where is the gap in knowledge? What is the problem? The Eurocentric worldview in the design of curriculum,

in the design of learning experiences, and in the overall “feeling” in the school points to a type of equity literacy that is missing. What do school administrators have to say about this?

According to Paris (2012), “culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (p. 93); therefore, “in the face of current policies and practices that have the explicit goal of creating monocultural and monolingual society, research and practice need equally explicit resistances that embrace cultural pluralism and cultural equity” (p. 93). If schools reflect the very fabric of diverse communities and are a window through which educators and researchers examine the opportunities for equitable and inclusive environments, then they must also interrogate the practices that exist inside the walls of the institution, especially those that encompass knowing, being, and doing.

Purpose and Research Questions

Richardson and St. Pierre (2018) explain that who we are and what we can be, what we can study, and how we can write about what we study, are tied to a knowledge system that claims authority over both the subject matter and its members. In order to disrupt some inherited rules that are narrow and exclusionary, we can write about topics that matter both personally and professionally, in ways that are less hierarchical and more self-reflexive. Honouring the location of the self encourages us to construct our own narratives that situate our own writing in other parts of our life such as “disciplinary constraints, academic debates, departmental politics, social movements, community structures, research interests, familial ties, and personal history” (p. 824). In other words, writing stories is about us, our workplaces, our friends, and our families. Writing stories is not emotionally easy and it asks us to rely on memories that are partial, sometimes painful, and often fractured.

The purpose of this study was to come to a better understanding of how school administrators understand their role towards decolonizing education. It is focused on how educators arrive at places of knowing. With respect to decolonizing education, I believe that we first must uncover, through discourse, these places that are held as knowledge, what we think we know, and what we think we ought to know. With new knowledge we can then make a connection to what we *do*. It is here that there is a direct connection to being and becoming, and what this could mean for students, families, teachers and school administrators. The intention, then, in this research, was to open a conversation about how school administrators understand how they have arrived at these places of knowing and how this understanding impacts their decision-making in what they choose to include and exclude from curriculum. In fact, right now, while writing these words, teachers are covering off topics from the “mandated” curriculum. Through no one’s – or everyone’s – fault, there lies a struggle to become someone, student or teacher, amid a provincial battle over what is considered knowledge, whose knowledge matters, and what we should do with the knowledge once it has been consumed. This study expands on previous scholarship related to anti-racism education, curriculum and approaches to teaching and leadership that embody notions of decolonizing education for the future. I developed the following central research question for this study: How do school administrators understand their efforts towards decolonizing education? To support this guiding question, I have developed three sub-questions:

1. What are school administrators’ approaches to decolonizing education?
2. What types of unlearning do school administrators experience in addressing anti-racism in school and classroom environments?
3. How do school administrators describe the bottlenecks and breakthroughs?

Rationale and Significance

When all of the parts of a good day fall away, I think back to what was worthy of my time. According to Jardine (2012):

Thinking, exploring, coming to know, setting things right, questioning, searching out possibilities and solidarities – these are ancient, multifarious, and convivial tasks, ones that are hidden right here, in the often meager curriculum mandates inherited by teachers and students in schools. The topics ‘covered’ in school link teachers and students not just to each other but also to great arcs of mixed, contested, and sometimes quite troublesome ancestries, rife with possibilities of engagement and transformation, with successes and failures, heroes and villains and great contests over who is who and what is what. (p. 6)

How is it, then, that school leaders can support teachers in their own learning and unlearning about who is who and what is what to ensure that it is not just simply “topics” covered in school, instead, it is thinking and exploring what is worthy of time? In reflecting on this idea, I am reminded of an experience that revealed the tensions and realities in schools when it comes to thinking about what is worthy.

During an afternoon of professional learning, teachers and administrators at a school in a large metro board in Alberta, engaged in conversation about ways to improve students’ overall sense of belonging in school. They were following Circle protocol, which was new to most teachers on staff. At the time, school data revealed that only seventy-one percent of students at the school indicated they felt as though they had one adult to connect with in the building. It was time to start looking at ways they could improve students’ overall sense of belonging as well as their feelings of being safe and respected at school. In Circle, the question to the group was

posed, how can you, as a teacher, engage students in Circle with the purpose of promoting a welcoming, caring, safe and respectful learning environment? The conversation was rich and moving, all teachers participated and learned from one another. In my perspective this was a significant moment for the staff, to come together in new ways, consider new possibilities for how to engage in conversation and learn from one another through sharing stories. They were beginning to shift pedagogy and create a new culture. At the conclusion, once everyone had a chance to share, they opened the conversation. One teacher remarked that they believed it was a good conversation, especially for Humanities classes but that in Math, teachers do not do this “kind of thing” because students would think that it is weird to sit in Circle and talk about learning.

This is a story worth telling. It was a moment that encompassed all things of importance in research: positionality, questioning, observing, interpreting, and producing. This was an important moment in my own reflexive research process – how do human beings construct knowledge? How do they come to know – anything? Education is a socially constructed profession, and students, and teachers, learn from one another through the sharing of narratives. Like Crotty (1998) reminded us, “social realities are socially constructed in something of a truism...What distinguishes constructionism...is its understanding that *all* meaningful reality...is socially constructed” (p. 55). Therefore, with respect to a teacher who commented that they do not do this “kind of thing,” I wondered, does this mean that their reality has been socially constructed to believe that conversations do not happen in Math class? And was this reality formed by experiences over time that have produced this knowledge? How does anyone come to understand anything? If we consider social phenomena, where people construct and reproduce their thinking and that this thinking involves interpreting, does this mean that all people develop

meaning together? And for me, as the researcher, if I am going to study people, school administration more precisely, and I am going to consider their perspectives, how will I come to view and understand their broader culture? As Crotty (1998) wrote:

social constructionism emphasizes the hold our culture has on us: it shapes the way in which we see things (even the way in which we feel things!) and gives us a quite definite view of the world. This shaping of our minds by culture is to be welcomed as what makes us human and endows us with the freedom we enjoy. (p. 58)

I wonder how school administrators view themselves through their own socially constructed reality? For myself, I make sense of the world around me through conversation and dialogue. I also recognize that I am shaped by my lived experience which is revealed here as knowledge that is generated in this research and in the data generated by the research subjects. There is not one single way of knowing or doing anything. I am also aware that stories get told and retold, and if story is how I come to know and make sense of the world, then quite possibly it is how others make sense of the world as well. Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) insisted that people create meaning through the sharing and constructing of stories, whether they are heard, read, or created through personal storytelling. I recognized myself in the stories that teachers have shared over time, in their experiences, shared emotions, and responses to the complexity of teaching, more specifically, designing curriculum. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) outlined, people lead “storied lives” (p. 2).

Mi'kmaq scholar Marie Battiste (2013) recommends that to decolonize education, story must play a key role. She suggests that “storytelling is a way of Indigenizing the curriculum, building the socially constructed context of prior learning and meaning making” (p. 184). Justice (2018) contends that “relationships are storied, imagined things; they set the scope for our

experience of being and belonging” (p. 74). Archibald (2008) highlighted that, “sharing what one has learned is an important Indigenous tradition. This type of sharing can take the form of a story of personal life experience and is done with a compassionate mind and love for others” (p. 2).

My own stories have become intertwined with the stories of teachers and school administrators. I question how stories hold a place in education, and whether common or shared experiences can provide deeper understanding into the real work of decolonizing education. I have considered how the purposeful construction of individual stories, gathered through one-on-one conversations, provides rich data to be interpreted and shared.

Researcher Assumptions

I am working through the challenge of confronting and accepting that the public world may be understood through one knowledge system, a Western colonized view of the world, and that this has shaped and re-shaped the current education system. As a researcher, I have located myself in this time and space. I understand that all research reflects a certain point of view and that what is asked of me as a researcher is that I reflect on who I am in the inquiry process and that I am sensitive to my personal story and how it shaped the study that I have engaged in. I write as a teacher, as a school administrator, as a system leader, as a parent, as a partner, and as a researcher. If “positionality is understood as the way that one’s position in the social hierarchy vis-à-vis other groups potentially limits or broadens’ one’s understanding of others” (Reid et al., 2017, p. 48) then I must closely consider where and how I locate myself. As a White woman, I accept my limitations in how I might view the world, and how I have come to know and make sense of the world around me, because who I am and where I come from will make a difference to the knowledge that I produce. In coming to know myself as a researcher, I have come to question the nature of reality, the worldviews, the ethical considerations and the way I have

represented my thinking and learning. As part of that process, I have reflected on my positionality and my responsibility to do research that considers who I am as a person, in addition to who and what this research study entails.

What are my epistemological concerns at this point? What is knowledge? Kovach (2018) reminds us:

Postcolonial and decolonizing theoretically imbued methodologies...concern themselves with examining economic, social, racial, cultural, and gendered relations of power. They see the formulaic, anti-relational approach to research as a neocolonial proposition... These allied methodologies have their theoretical roots in Western critical theory. Indigenous methodologies, founded upon Indigenous knowledge systems, are another form of Indigenous research. (p. 215)

The ideas that Kovach points out caused me to question my intentions as a researcher and how I am coming to understand myself, and what it means to know. Either way, I am being asked to explore my identity, be open to new ways of knowing, and consider who I am in the research.

Summary

The development of public education in which society is now a part, and has been *marinated in*, is so embedded in what and whose knowledge is important, that interrupting this mindset may require years and decades of unlearning. This is more than a nuisance; this is an overwhelmingly daunting task that requires peeling back layers of colonial influence. The way that my own mind has been colonized continues to play out in how I work through a problem: logical and rationale thinking – locate the problem, come up with a plan, practice, adjust, gain feedback, and repeat, instead of attempting to learn something in a way that may be more

holistic, embodied, and spiritual. I, too, fall into this same colonized notion of how I come to learn and know things.

In embarking in this research, I asked myself, how do I do good research knowing that social problems and policy priorities continue to change over time? I am guided by knowing that the types of concerns that a given society considers important, worthy of research as well as of policy interventions, are neither “given” nor already “out there.” They are socially and politically constructed, and therefore variable” (Mottier, 2005, p. 6). Inevitably, research questions change over time, social problems change over time, policy priorities change over time, because these are all socially and politically constructed; “rarely are conversations engaged about the ethics and responsibilities of educational research as itself part of a system that perpetuates inequities through schooling and research about schooling” (Patel, 2016, p. 15). Without zooming out and unlearning, how can I zoom in on something that is an ethical calling of sorts? The aggravation is in how our minds have been colonized, or as Smith (2012) explained, “the knowledge gained through our colonization has been used, in turn, to colonize us in what Ngugi wa Thiong’o calls the colonization ‘of the mind’” (p. 62). This presents a barrier to unlearning and re-learning in new ways. This research was designed to encourage school administrators to consider who they are as humans, different ways of knowing, and an openness to a changing landscape in curriculum conversations and design.

Stories, for me, are the most influential way we can come to know. I believe that providing stories as windows and mirrors (Bishop, 1990) to see into, and reflect back shared identities, is one way we can begin to decolonize our education system. As a researcher, I believe it is my moral imperative to do research through storytelling, with an emphasis on telling stories differently. Whose stories can I tell? How can I ensure that these stories are interrupting the

common, colonized story? How do I ensure that the stories told do not uphold certain structures and systems of oppression?

In addition to thinking about why research, and how to research, I also considered the act of writing things down. As Yanow (2006b) expressed, “good interpretive writing can be as engaging as good fiction, sometimes with turns of phrase as beautiful as those found in poetry...readers are responding to...the character of the expositional logic, along with the ‘music’ of the text” (p. 102). Like there is an art to teaching, there is an art to writing. Before engaging in this research, I had not considered, to this extent, the serious implications and responsibility of research and the role of research in society; the importance in what we say and how we say it. I recognize my own power and privilege and see research as a great responsibility in our society. How do I best orient myself and my research in a way that opposes oppression? Yanow (2006a) asserted that, “attention to language’s persuasive elements brings in considerations of power and power relations, as well as privileged speech and silences in collective, public discourses” (p. 22). Herein lies a new responsibility.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to highlight the work of critical curriculum theorists in relation to existing research and scholarship about decolonization. It is through curriculum, and our understanding of how topics are, or are not, taken up in schools, that influences what it really means to be and become someone: “To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin” (hooks, 1994, p. 13). This literature review considers the literature in the field of anti-oppressive education and decolonization to inform and guide this research study, inspire reflection and action on the part of educators, and to make visible the necessary self-reflection that must occur to decolonize our schools in an ethical and meaningful way. In beginning this section with a focus on the critical curriculum discourses, I am drawing upon the literature in the broader field of anti-racism and anti-oppressive education. The second section will review and describe the literature on the various components of decolonization and what is required for a more socially just Canadian curriculum. Settler colonialism situates the research, and from this perspective I outline components of decolonization, such as: Whiteness, Settler identity, ethical relationality, and story.

Critical Curriculum Discourses

Freire’s (1970/2014) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was first written to raise awareness of the Brazilian lower class, providing the reader with the critical tools to reflect on and understand “the fragile relationship between the colonizer and the colonized” (p. 11). Freire (1970/2014) contended that the pedagogy of the oppressed, as a humanist and libertarian pedagogy, consists of two stages. In the first stage, the oppressed reveal the world of oppression and through praxis commit themselves to its transformation. In the second stage, the pedagogy ceases to belong to

the oppressed and becomes a pedagogy of all people in the process of liberation; “in both stages, it is always through action in depth that the culture of domination is culturally confronted” (p. 54). In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Freire rejected the idea of teacher as transmitter of received knowledge. He contended that education takes place when there are two learners who occupy different spaces in an ongoing dialogue, each bringing knowledge to the relationship, offering opportunity to explore what each knows and what they can teach each other.

Banking Concept of Education

Since the advent of public schooling in Canada in the early 1900s, the Canadian curriculum and schooling processes have been based on what Freire (1970/2014) referred to as the banking model of education; teachers held the information that would be deposited into the minds of young people. Consequently, this has led to a teacher – student – content contradiction where what students learn about and talk about is based on what the teacher predetermines as valuable knowledge. Freire contended that “education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students” (p. 72). Filling students’ minds with information that educators value as important, from a critical perspective, limits the perspectives that can be considered more holistically and inclusively. Freire explained that in the banking concept of education, “knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (p. 72), projecting an ignorance onto others; a characteristic of the ideology of oppression. “The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of the world” (p. 73), he contended, and Freire’s idea of the *banking concept of education* called attention to a different way of thinking and being known

as *praxis*. Freire defined praxis as “reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed” (p. 126). Freire provided educators with an orientation to human activity that is both theory and practice; reflection and action; indeed, “the world is not finished. It is always in the process of becoming” (Freire, 1998, p. 72).

Developing a Critical Consciousness

Freire (1970/2014) suggested that telling and understanding historical truths allowed for deeper consciousness of one’s own situation. According to Freire, this was a key step in developing critical consciousness so that it was possible to imagine a future free from oppression, a term that Freire coined *conscientization* (1970/2014). Teachers and students with a critical consciousness conceptually step back from their lived reality to gain a new vantage point on who they are and how they have come to be this way (Kincheloe, 2008). Given that the Canadian education system is based on a White, heteronormative, male perspective, it is not difficult to determine that, from this point of view, schools and education systems exist in ways that continue to oppress and silence (Dei & Simmons, 2010; Kincheloe 2005, 2008). Freire (1970/2014) suggested that “problem-posing education, responding to the essence of consciousness...embodies communication” (p. 79). He described that the practice of problem-posing education requires dialogical relations, and through dialogue the teacher is no longer simply “the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself [sic] taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach” (p. 80). It is through problem-posing education that people develop the skills to critically consider “the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves...as a reality in process, in transformation” (p. 83). By developing a critical consciousness then, teachers and students can work towards solidarity. These notions of

the banking concept of education and critical consciousness are particularly important in this study, as will be discussed further in the review of the literature regarding decolonization.

Hegemony

Joe Kincheloe was a Canadian educational researcher dedicated to a praxis of social and political activism rooted in students' development as citizens and workers. In Kincheloe's (2008a) book, *The Critical Pedagogy Primer*, hegemony is highlighted as a key component to be understood and addressed when discussing issues of race, class, and gender in schools and society. According to Kincheloe (2008a), Antonio Gramsci first described the notion of hegemony as understanding that dominant power is exercised through attempts to win people's consent to domination through cultural institutions such as the media, the family, the church, and the schools. This domination resulted in all people being hegemonized given the field of knowledge is structured and limited to these institutions. Hegemony involves the process used by dominant power owners to maintain power, with a key component being the manipulation of public opinion to gain consensus, or said a different way, when the public begins to look at dominant ways of seeing the world as simply common sense; "our notion of hegemonic ideology leads to a nuanced understanding of power's complicity in the constructions people make of the world and their role in it" (p. 55). In learning to understand the way that education acts to reproduce aspects of inequality, there is also a more thorough understanding of how "institutions of cultural preservation and distribution like schools create and recreate forms of consciousness that enable social control to be manipulated without the necessity of dominant groups having to resort to overt mechanisms of domination" (Apple, 2012, p. 20). Apple contended that hegemony refers to an organized assemblage of meaning and practices that are effective, and dominant systems of values and actions which are lived and need to be understood on a different level than

just opinion or manipulation. He explained that the basic day-to-day movements of schools contribute to students learning about dominant interests in society and that these ideologies are reflected in the perspectives that educators themselves employ to guide and give meaning to their own ideologies. In describing hegemony this way, Apple further exposed the ways in which a curriculum, which he referred to as the hidden curriculum in school, has the potential to lead to political quiescence and acceptance by students which in turn acts to maintain the existing distribution of power and rationality in society.

Hidden Curriculum

Hidden curriculum – “the tacit teaching to students of norms, values, and dispositions” (Apple, 2012, p. 29) is highlighted to students simply by their living in and coping with the institutional expectations and routines of schools each day. The notion of hidden curriculum calls for an understanding of how the kinds of knowledge that schools organize and select are related to and encompassed by a concern for power (Apple, 2004). As Gottesman (2012) pointed out, “there has been, so far little examination of how the treatment of conflict in the school curriculum can lead to political quiescence and the acceptance by students of a perspective on social and intellectual conflict that acts to maintain the existing distribution of power and rationality in a society” (p. 574). This is problematic because a curriculum that ignores conflict, masks the reality of the social world to students. Giroux (1982) described the hidden curriculum as the “unstated norms, values, and beliefs transmitted to students through the underlying rules that structure the routines and social relationships in the school and classroom life” (p. 26). Giroux explained that schooling must be analyzed as a societal process where social groups accept and reject the complexities of culture, knowledge and power that give meaning to the process of schooling. He stated that “schools should be viewed as sites of both domination and

contestation” (Giroux, 1982, p. 27) and that what is needed to unravel the fabric of school culture is a theory of ideology that presents teachers with a tool to examine critically “how their own views about knowledge, human nature, values, and society are mediated through the ‘common sense’ assumptions they use to structure classroom experiences” (p. 28). Giroux continued by noting “this is particularly important for students who know the pain of humiliation and powerlessness because their own lived experiences and histories are at odds with the dominant school culture” (p. 28). “What is needed,” according to Giroux, “is a hidden curriculum that encompasses all the ideological instances of the schooling process that ‘silently’ structure and reproduce hegemonic assumptions and practices” (p. 29).

Critical Pedagogy

Kincheloe (2008a) maintained that Henry Giroux’s work in the 1970s and 1980s gave rise to the concept of critical pedagogy as it is known today. Bringing together Freire’s work, Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of *cultural capital*⁵, and the critical theory of the Frankfurt School⁶,

⁵ Cultural capital is described, in the similar way that money is a form of ‘economic capital’, membership in the dominant culture affords individuals ways of knowing, acting, and being (cultural capital) that can be ‘cashed in’ in order to get ahead in the lived world. These ways of knowing, acting, and being often are thought of under the categories of manners, deportment, taste, style, accent, proper grammar, level of affect, and so on. Those who are socially and culturally located outside of dominant culture may possess particular abilities; however, *they* are marginalized because *they* do not understand the codes of dominant cultural capital. (Bourdieu, 1996)

⁶ The Frankfurt School was a group of scholars connected to the Institute of Social Research at the University of Frankfurt. In its beginnings, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and Walter Benjamin initiated a conversation with the German tradition of philosophical and social thought, especially that of Marx, Kant, Hegel, and Weber. Focusing their attention on the changing nature of capitalism, the early critical theorists analyzed the forms of domination that accompanied this change. Critical pedagogy clearly reflects these dimensions of critical theory. (Kincheloe, 2008a)

Giroux (1982) “established critical pedagogy as a domain of study and praxis” (p. 77). Thus, diverse theoretical traditions (those that call into question the work of the Frankfurt School theorists) have “informed our understanding of critical pedagogy and have demanded understanding of diverse forms of oppression including class, race, gender, sexual, cultural, religious, colonial, and ability-related concerns” (Kincheloe, 2008a, p. 49). Therefore, critical theory, in the spirit of critical pedagogy, is always evolving. With this in mind, an evolving critical pedagogy is suspicious of theories “that fail to critique the blinders of Eurocentrism, that cultivate an elitism of insiders and outsiders...and that fail to discern a global system of inequity supported by the diverse forms of hegemony and violence” (p. 50).

Curriculum-as-Lived and Planned

When using the word curriculum, it simultaneously refers to both the written plan and potential experiences that could play out in school classrooms. Like Freire, Aoki (1986) recognized the tension that exists in a school classroom when he described the tension of two curricula. The curriculum-as-planned lays out the goals and objectives of the school year: programs of study, assessments, learning intentions, and objectives. This curriculum may not be concerned with the diversity among students or their own lived experiences. The lived experiences of students and teachers is another type of curriculum; a curriculum-as-lived, according to Aoki (1986). This curriculum-as-lived asks that students and teachers come with their desires, looking for something in the curriculum that encapsulates their hopes, curiosity, experiences, and their stories and histories. If the quality of curriculum-as-lived is the core as to why teachers exist, curriculum planning should have as its central interest a way of contributing to the aliveness of school life as lived by teachers and students. Aoki (1986) indicated that teaching is not just repetition and recitation of a government mandated program of studies

document; it is bringing curriculum to life anew each day with learning emerging from unique combinations of students, activities, and moments as well as from the written plan.

Aoki (1983) asked educators, “What does it mean to become a teacher?” (p. 325).

Considering this question and the current Alberta landscape, I wonder what exactly the future of Alberta school curriculum may bring? How different is curriculum now as compared to almost forty years ago when Aoki first asked this question? Are educators still “governed by rules of conduct and socially accepted behaviours which are presumed to be ‘becoming’ of people called teachers...which sets out the bounds within which typical teachers are expected to act out their typical roles in typical ways?” (p. 325). In an increasingly diverse landscape in Canada, it is an understanding of others’ lived situations that will have implications for enhanced teaching practice. A practice that is elevated through a critical consciousness, where matters of hegemony, inform teachers critical pedagogy requiring them to critically examine the ways that worldviews are enacted to examine and explore various cultures. This may help to support students in developing a critical understanding of the world around them and the ways that power and privilege work themselves out in the classroom.

Othering

If public schools reflect the very fabric of our diverse communities, and act as a window through which to examine the opportunities for equitable and inclusive environments, then they, from a critical orientation, must also interrogate the practices that exist inside the walls of the institution, especially those that encompass knowing, being, doing, and being together. A review of educational literature indicated that scholars have been researching the notion of *othering* for several decades. In “Introduction: monsters, machines and sociotechnical relations,” Law (1991) began his essay by noting:

We founded ourselves on class; then at a much later date we learned a little about ethnicity; more recently we discovered gender; and more recently still we learned something – perhaps not very much yet – about age and disability...this was a sociology always driven...by a concern with distribution. (p. 1)

He outlined through a sociological perspective that, in order to understand the world, and how human beings live together, three ideas must be considered: the character of knowledge, especially scientific knowledge; the character of society which is premised on heterogeneity; and the character of the differences between the classes of actors in the world. Law (1991) continued:

Something like this seems to happen: first the dispossessed have no voice at all. Then, when they start to create a voice, they are derided. Then (I am not sure of the order), they are told that they are wrong, or they are told that this was something that everyone knew all along. Then they are told that they are a danger. Then finally, in a very partial form, it may be that their voices are heard and taken seriously. And it has been a struggle all the way. (p. 2)

Accepting that the current Canadian education system is based on a dominant White male perspective and considering the role of schools in perpetuating societal norms, it is possible to see who these silenced actors are inside of the four walls of the school. The silent actors, the ones who have no voice, are the *others* in our education system. It is through this notion of othering that schools continue to further marginalize these actors while continuing to generate inequality. Edward Said (1991) wrote about the notion of othering and the shame that was a direct impact of being treated as the *other*: “Our culture was felt to be of a lower grade, perhaps even congenitally inferior and something of which to be ashamed” (pp. 8-9). In Said’s (1993) book, *Culture and Imperialism*, he expanded on the idea of power to narrate, or block other narratives from forming

and emerging. Said contended that dominant culture continues to *other* through the use of stories, and novels:

You read Dante or Shakespeare in order to keep up with the best that was thought or known, and also to see yourself, your people, society, and tradition in their best lights. In time, culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state: this differentiates “us” from “them,” almost always with some degree of xenophobia. (p. 1)

John Willinsky (1998), in writing about the impacts of imperialism on the education system, proposed that “schools turn a self-critical eye toward its own practices and histories, to how it has both participated in and managed to obscure the privileging of the West” (p. 257). This way teachers and school administrators, and those who write curriculum, may begin to see how matters of identity and difference have changed and have been retained.

For schools to move towards an anti-oppressive model of education and to eliminate the sense of the *other*, is to be more curious, more inclusive, and more intentional in establishing relationships with the families of students whom teachers are teaching. In Canada, this is especially true for Indigenous families. Teachers and school administrators can provide the welcoming, caring, safe, and respectful school environments that have been promised to Indigenous students and their families. As noted by Apple (2012), Giroux (1982), and Kincheloe (2008), if the oppressive social controls are not questioned, and acted upon, they will continue to perpetuate oppression in the education system. Subsequently, if curriculum-making can be understood as life making (Aoki, 1983), and broadened to acknowledge that curriculum making occurs both in schools and outside of schools, then it may be possible to intentionally engage with more generous questions about children and their families, their lives, and value what they bring to the learning environment. The cumulative effects of colonization, residential schools,

and the Indian Act have all had a negative effect on Indigenous peoples, especially the youth, who are, in a sense, the *other* in our schools and society. A characteristic of the ideology of oppression is to project an ignorance onto others. In becoming less ignorant; consequently, less oppressive, educators need to first acknowledge the detrimental effects of colonization, understand what is meant by decolonization, and embrace the role that every educator must play in transforming the education system for a more socially just society.

What is Decolonization?

Educators must reject colonial curricula that offer students a fragmented and distorted picture of Indigenous peoples, and offer students a critical perspective of the historical context that created this fragmentation. In order to effect change, educators must help students understand the Eurocentric assumptions of superiority within the context of history and to recognize the continued dominance of these assumptions in all forms of contemporary knowledge. (Battiste, 2013, p. 186)

Decolonization does not have a simple definition. MacKinlay and Barney (2014) explained that Indigenous scholars position decolonization in parallel and contested ways because of the complex nature of the concept and diversity of Indigenous peoples and their experiences. In her book *Decolonizing education: Nourishing the learning spirit*, Mi'kmaw scholar Marie Battiste (2013) described decolonization as a long process that belongs to everyone, it is not simply the work of Indigenous peoples. In *My Conversations with Canadians* (2017), Lee Maracle, a member of the Sto:lo Nation, described decolonization as “taking back the land, space, territory and governance, as well as the economy of your original country” (pp. 123-124). Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012) maintained that *decolonization is not a metaphor* to be swapped or used as a symbolic representation for something else. Mohawk

scholar Sandra Styres (2019) continued that decolonizing is an “unsettling process of shifting and unraveling the tangled colonial relations of power and privilege” (p. 30). I draw upon these diverse definitions from Indigenous scholars to frame the complex work involved in the decolonization of curriculum in Canada and to carry out my own inquiry into how school administrators make sense of their work towards decolonizing education. Within this dissertation decolonization is being used as an umbrella term that also encompasses anti-racism and anti-colonialism. With the aim of developing a better understanding of decolonization, there must first be an understanding of colonialism and its impacts on society, schooling, and education.

Colonization

Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) noted that colonization is an expression of imperialism⁷, a concept that is derived from global economic expansion. Smith continued that imperialism and colonialism are crucial concepts to be used and understood but have meanings that are often taken for granted. She explained:

The two terms are interconnected and what is generally agreed upon is that colonialism is but one expression of imperialism. Imperialism tends to be used in at least four different ways when describing the form of European imperialism which ‘started’ in the fifteenth century: (1) imperialism as economic expansion; (2) imperialism as the subjugation of ‘others’; (3) imperialism as an idea or spirit with many forms of realization; and (4) imperialism as a discursive field of knowledge...Initially the term was used by historians

⁷ In John Willinksy’s (1998) book *Learning to divide the world: Education at empire’s end*, he explains that ‘European imperialism’ does not in any sense represent a systematic movement, sustained campaign, or a coherent body of thought... The empire was made up of a makeshift assortment of Crown colonies, white dominions, mandates, naval bases, trading ports...To name what was common to all of these arrangements is difficult, and so the term *imperialism* will have to operate as a loosely conceived historical phenomenon that covers a myriad of ventures directed at extending the dominion of Europe around the globe. (p. 10)

to explain a series of developments leading to the economic expansion of Europe.

Imperialism in this sense could be tied to a chronology of events related to “discovery,” conquest, exploitation, distribution and appropriation. (p. 22)

Smith maintained that there is a relationship between research, knowledge, and imperialism and that “western knowledge and science are ‘beneficiaries’ of the colonization of indigenous peoples” (p. 62). Battiste (2013) described colonization as a theory of relationships of power, voice, and legitimacy. Papachase Cree scholar Dwayne Donald (2016) suggested that colonialism is a process of denying relationships with the land, self, and others. Tuck and Yang (2012) described colonization as an apparatus that orders relationships among peoples, lands, the natural world and civilization. Below, I outline key components of decolonization with respect to curriculum in Canada with these definitions.

Settler Colonialism

For many educators, not knowing about decolonization, and not having learned about this previously, presents an opportunity to engage in unknowing and unlearning. Educators like to feel planned and prepared for the questions and inquiries that arise from the students; however, as Grain and Lund (2016) contended, the notion of ambiguity can stand in direct contradiction to some social justice approaches: “The social justice turn recognizes the limitations of pre-defined notions of justice and emphasizes in its conceptualization the important role of ambiguity” (p. 8). Settler societies that have been established in the past three hundred years have all maintained basic, similar features as Settler states – the structural privileging of Settlers at the expense of Indigenous peoples, and the normalization of Whiteness as the marker of rights and political agency (Dalley, 2018). The concept of Settler colonialism should not be seen as an event in the past, rather as an ongoing structure, especially since the basic tenets of Settler colonialism still

exist and continue to shape race, class, and gender (Glenn, 2015) in our schools and classrooms, pointing to the necessary embedding of Indigenous pedagogies to bridge the gap between the Eurocentric worldview and Indigenous worldviews. Tuck and Yang (2012) described the relationship between Settler societies, the land, and resources by explaining that for the Settlers to make a place their home, they must destroy and disappear the Indigenous peoples that live there:

For the settlers, Indigenous peoples are in the way and, in the destruction of Indigenous peoples, Indigenous communities, and over time and through law and policy, Indigenous peoples' claims to land under settler regimes, land has been recast as property and as a resource. (p. 6)

Settler societies have created the conditions that exist in the current education system. The Eurocentric model of teaching and learning has impressed upon young minds notions of difference, perpetuating a sense of the other: "Canada is a state founded on stolen land, predicated on the elimination of Indigenous peoples, and a nation steeped in racism, violence, and denial" (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 79). Through decolonizing education, there may be an opportunity to put into practice the attitudes and behaviours necessary for systemic change in schools and society. In order to decolonize education, teachers and school administrators may have to consider their own Settler identity.

Settler Identity

Lowman and Barker (2015) explained that Settler identity is not predicated on the experience of any specific type of privilege that may be derived from other power hierarchies that exist in Canada. They stated:

Some have used ‘settler’ as equivalent to ‘white,’ even conjoining the two - ‘white settler’ – to describe all colonizing people in Canada. Others have used settler as a synonym for ‘non-Indigenous,’ a catchall for anyone on the continent that does not claim an Indigenous identity and connection to an Indigenous community. (p. 69)

These social constructions highlight groups that hold power and they also point to important questions about colonialism and the legacy of Canada as racially stratified and economically exploitative. “Settler colonialism has a long history of deploying racism...and playing on other structural inequalities as tools to both motivate expansionist settlement and justify colonial dispossession and violence” (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 70). I, like Lowman and Barker, contend that being an English speaking, White, Canadian brings high levels of privilege within the Settler society. Styres (2019) noted that the term Settler makes the necessary distinction between the Indigenous people of a particular place and those whose roots originate elsewhere, usually Europe, but it can also refer to anyone who benefits from the privileges of colonial relationships and those who are wanting to live on Indigenous peoples’ traditional territories.

Whiteness

Styres (2019) suggested that Whiteness is not about racial profiling based on skin colour, instead, it is a structural-cultural positioning of relations of power and privilege. She explained, “it is not about *who* is whiteness but rather *how* whiteness is perpetuated and maintained through networks and relations of power and privilege within and across societies and...within educational contexts” (p. 31). DiAngelo (2011, 2018) described an insulated environment of racial protection that builds White people’s expectations for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress, leading to what she refers to as White fragility. It is this state of White fragility that triggers a range of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt,

along with behaviours such as argumentation and stress. According to DiAngelo (2011), White people are almost always racially comfortable because they have not had to build tolerance for racial discomfort; therefore, when discomfort arises White people typically respond as if something is wrong and blame the other person or event that triggered the discomfort. White people's insistence of racial comfort insists that racism will not be faced. This racial arrogance and desire for racial comfort explains why White people are the least likely to see, understand, or even consider their worldview; "in dominant society, interruption of racial belonging is rare and thus destabilizing and frightening to whites" (p. 62). Given this evidence that inequality exists and is "deeply structured in society in ways that secure its reproduction" (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 1), how does knowing this provide an opportunity to open and offer space to engage in conversations with teachers, students, and families? Finally, "Whiteness, like race, is but another social construct that is connected with the privileges of the elite from which they come" (Battiste, 2013, p. 135).

Sleeter and Zavala (2020) explained that schooling is a process that is lived and experienced and therefore is engrained in students' bodies and memories. Ethnic studies can be framed as part of a broader process of decolonization or "delinking that leads to de-colonial epistemic shift and brings to the foreground other epistemologies, other principles of knowledge and understanding and, consequently, other economy, other politic, other ethics" (p. 4). The authors explained that, for educators and scholar-activists who see themselves as part of this movement, these insights about the privileged position that minoritized voices hold prompt us to ask fundamental questions about the potential in re-centering nondominant perspectives and knowledge traditions – that is, "not just in replacing the Eurocentric curriculum with one that is 'non-Eurocentric' but in setting the conditions for de-linking from colonial domination" (p. 5).

This is where there may be resistance. Instead of a simple de-linking from colonial domination, some educators believe that their opinions and positions might be removed and will be replaced with new ways of knowing and being. The literature supports that this work is not about replacing as much as connecting with other worldviews and making space for this in classrooms.

Sleeter and Zavalo (2020) explain that it is possible to rewrite curriculum from the perspectives of people who have been oppressed by racism and/or colonization, grounding curriculum in counter-narratives that offer historical accounts and interpretations that question dominant narratives. Traditional school knowledge conveys a perspective or narrative about the world that makes unjust power relations appear natural. This occurs by presenting White narratives to the exclusion of anyone else's or, more commonly, "representing diverse racial and ethnic groups within White narratives that erase the experiences and knowledge of peoples over whom White people exert control" (p. 9). The concepts of Whiteness and Settler together are rooted in the relation of power and privilege, and the assumption that everyone has access to the same resources, is on the same playing field, and starts from the same starting line (Styres, 2019). For change to occur in education, educators may consider being more responsive to students and draw from their lived experience (Aoki, 1986).

Cognitive Imperialism

According to Battiste (2013), "education has its roots in a patriarchal, Eurocentric society, complicit with multiple forms of oppression of women, sometimes men, children, minorities, and Indigenous peoples" (p. 159). By outlining the relationship and history of Indigenous peoples and the education system, as well as treaty relationships, she advocates for a new model of education which lifts Indigenous ways of knowing in schools. Battiste explained that it requires unlearning on the part of educators which challenges their conscious and

subconscious notions of what is superior, and which has been learned in life and society. By drawing on international law and policy to provide global examples related to decolonization she provides a holistic picture of the negative effects of colonization on Indigenous peoples and the responsibilities that all of us carry in making schools and society better places. One of the reasons why addressing issues related to colonization is so hard is because of what Battiste referred to as cognitive imperialism. She further suggested that cognitive imperialism is a form of manipulation used in Eurocentric-based educational systems. Educational curricula and pedagogy are built on monocultural foundation of knowledge, assumptions and imperialist knowledge, and continue to privilege these through public education. Cognitive imperialism depends on the colonial dominance of language, values, and foundation of thought as they are reflected in school curricula, texts, and discourses. (Apple, 1982, 1997; Bear Nicholas, 2008; Farmer, 2004 in Battiste, 2013).

When unpacking the idea of cognitive imperialism, it is important to consider contextual factors such as the discipline, and the power relationship between the teacher and the students. In doing this, teachers must consider the Eurocentric elements in terms of cultural power dynamics and the relationships between the teacher and the students. There is a process to decolonize, and it involves many layers, making it extremely complex and systemic. Battiste (2013) maintained that cognitive imperialism leads cultural minorities to believe their culture and racial origins causes poverty and powerlessness rather than the power relations that are at the root. Only one tradition of knowledge (Eurocentric) has been embraced even though our perceptions of ourselves as Canadians is one of being open-minded, multicultural, and diverse. The current education system represents a colonial legacy that privileges certain people and ways of knowing while silencing others.

Ethical relationality

It is important to understand White Settler identity with the intention of reconsidering both the historic and current relations between Settlers and Indigenous people in more ethically relational terms (Donald, 2012; Regan, 2010). A core idea of curriculum is working through, and with, tensions to counter misunderstandings and to illuminate other possibilities. Donald (2016) advocated that curriculum should be developed with an emphasis on Indigenous ways of knowing and that, “we need stories and mythologies that teach us how to be good relatives with all our relations – human and more-than-human” (p. 11). As it stands currently, most schools commit to a kind of secular curriculum and methods of instruction; what could be offered is the centering of a praxis that, at the very core, is sinewed to understanding and becoming human (Bouvier & MacDonald, 2019; Cajete, 2017; Justice, 2018). Donald (2009) used the concepts of colonization and forts to reduce the separation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous content in the curriculum. He called attention to unquestioned mainstream narratives in education and society that reflect deep-rooted views of colonization and advocates for our shared responsibility to consider broader relationships as we begin to create our future together. In Donald’s (2016) view, ethical relationality does not deny difference, nor does it promote assimilation of it. It guides educators to seek deeper understandings of how different histories, memories, and experiences position themselves in relation to one another. Informed by Cree and Blackfoot teachings, Donald (2012a) explained that “ethical relationality is an ecological understanding of human relationality that does not deny difference, but rather seeks to understand more deeply how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other” (p. 103). He emphasized that ethical relationality is positioned in a way to unlearn colonial logics that disregard Indigenous peoples’ knowledges, perspectives, and experiences (D. Donald,

lecture/personal communication, March, 2021). In his writing, Donald stated that the ethical imperative of relationality requires “attentiveness to the responsibilities that come with a declaration of being in relation” (Donald, 2012b, p. 535). With Donald’s (2009, 2012a, 2012b, 2016) description of ethical relationality, how groups of people face one another and acknowledge their difference, there is no requirement of an agreement or of sameness; instead, there is a requirement to recognize and be responsible in all our relations. Donald’s notion of ethical relationality provides a sense of hope with respect to decolonizing education.

Unlearning Colonialism

In addition to his notion of ethical relationality, Dwayne Donald also suggests that the term decolonization is best understood as an unlearning – critically analyzing our work to ensure we are disrupting patterns that perpetuate systems of oppression (Ng-A-Fook, 2020). Donald (2022) describes that it is about changing the language from decolonizing education to unlearning colonialism. He explains that “colonial ideologies have got ‘in the way’ of schooling practices in the sense that prevailing curricular and pedagogical approaches perpetuate colonial worldview” (para. 5). He notes:

The complex task of unlearning colonial forms of relationship denial does require learning more about colonial worldview and the ways in which the cultural assumptions of that worldview deeply inform the structure and character of the common-sense conventions of educational practices...The field of education has become so fully informed by the assumed correctness of colonial worldview that it has become difficult

to take seriously other knowledge systems of ways of being human. (Donald, 2022, para. 7)

The suggestion of unlearning colonialism is a key consideration throughout this research study. Just as Battiste (2013) also asserts, there is an unlearning required on the part of educators to challenge their deeply held conscious and subconscious ways of knowing.

Éamonn Dunne's (2016) concept of unlearning is described as “a kind of originality and invention, of finding something new and discovering something old within the new for the first time” (p. 1). According to Dunne, unlearning asks us to take risks, “opening ourselves up to the event and hoping that something might come to help you stage the becoming of another you and another us” (p. 18). Unlearning is concerned with leaving something behind and can often be uncomfortable, as it requires us to confront and reconsider our underlying beliefs about identity, gender, nationality, colonialism, and pedagogy by challenging the status quo. In turn, unlearning calls upon educators to imagine new ways of living that honour old ways of living, so that educators are in tune relationally and ethically with the more-than-human world. Dunne (2016) writes:

Once unlearning becomes a question for learning, we are in a very difficult place indeed. We are in a place we don't necessarily want to be. This is precisely why we need to think about what we mean by this wonderfully allusive, even elusive word. It ought to be enough then to mention that when we speak of unlearning we are...not in the realm of simplistic barriers or structured hierarchies in the artifice of education. To think of unlearning is to begin to think about how we have become used to learning, so used to in fact that we failed to even question it. (pp. 14-15)

Unlearning recognizes that people have now learned something that they are now calling into question. It indicates a willingness to encounter and reimagine past learning, new ways of education, and thinking about wisdom and knowledge. Decolonization can be defined as an unlearning, or an unraveling of the current structures in place that create disparities, promote racism, and are inequitable. Decolonizing Canadian education requires us to dismantle and rewrite not only our systemic narrative, but also, our personal story.

Re-storying

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, in her 2009 TedGlobal talk, explained the danger of a single story that shares only one perspective, offering risk for critical misunderstanding (Adichie, 2009). Colonialism propagates a privileged single story. Objive author and journalist, Richard Wagamese (2019) offered the gifts of stories for our planet. Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) shared that the land and stories are gifts to be cared for. A failure to allow for re-storying would be to continue to perpetuate colonial ideologies while continuing to deny Indigenous humanity. “Stories can push at the existing order of things” (Dunlop, 2002, p. 25) and remind us of who we are (Kovach, 2009). Paulette Regan (2010), in her book *Unsettling the Settler Within*, makes clear that Canadians need to “‘restory’ the dominant version of history” (p. 6). She continued by explaining:

For Indigenous people, the past is a painful chronicle of broken treaties, stolen lands, Indian residential schools, and the Indian Act. For non-Indigenous people, the past is a celebratory story of settling new lands, nation building, and helping unfortunate “Indians” to adjust to a new way of life. (Regan, 2010, p. 20)

I am hopeful that there will be opportunity to “re-story” the dominant versions of Canadian history by making space for all voices.

Summary

There is an opportunity to create coherence in the education system if we “risk interacting differently with Indigenous people – with vulnerability, humility, and a willingness to stay in the decolonizing struggle of our own discomfort” (Regan, 2010, p. 13). Decolonizing education asks us to reflect on whose voices are being heard, who is being silenced, whose experiences are considered as mainstream, how educators deconstruct decisions about curriculum, and whose knowledge is considered most valuable (Battiste, 2011). Moving beyond a checklist approach of how to take meaningful action as a Settler (non-Indigenous) educator can be challenging (Attas, 2019). It is through respect for pluralities and diversities, and engaging in dialogue (Battiste, 2013) that educators can begin to make the necessary changes in schools and school districts that will inevitably impact change in society. The stories that have often been told, the ones that deeply influence what has often been learned in school, are idealized versions of history. These versions of history, which begin as cultural and contextual interpretations of events, morph into hegemonic expressions of existing value structures and worldviews of dominant groups in society (Donald, 2009). It is important to be careful of these stories and to think critically by considering who has been silenced and othered along the way; “the implication here is that colonialism is a shared condition wherein colonizers and colonized come to know each other very well” (Donald, 2009, p. 6). Smith (2012) wrote that decolonization “is recognized as a long-term process involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic and psycho-logical divesting of colonial power” (p. 101).

At this time, the province of Alberta continues to develop a new curriculum following the recommendations of the current United Conservative Party (UCP) government. In the creation of this new curriculum, Alberta teachers are experiencing a mandated re-orienting, a pivot, in what is an expected approach to curriculum design. This approach to curriculum, one with increased standardized testing, mandated topic delivery, and a divergence from inquiry and personalization, emphasizes output and similarity instead of engagement. It is remarkable that the current provincial leadership suggests this notion of curriculum at a time when what the world really needs is a re-positioning towards issues of justice, equity, and inclusion as highlighted in the *Calls to Action* in the TRC. Sustained social dialogue focused on a broad Settler Canadian identity and the foregrounding of the enduring power of Settler colonialism in Canada is a necessary part of any social justice effort (Lowman & Barker, 2015).

In undertaking this literature review, it is evident that curriculum scholars, anti-racist scholars, and Indigenous scholars are all coming to understand and find meaning through their own constructed experiences. For the purposes of this research and through this literature review, I have explored concepts to provide a foundation for what has been addressed in the literature to date related to the research question, while leaving space for my own inquiry into school administrators' understanding of their efforts towards decolonizing education. I have also provided examples of how story guides our socially constructed realities and supports each one of us in coming to understand the world that we live in. In the next chapter, I outline how narrative inquiry, as methodology, provides the necessary data to support an understanding of school administrators' efforts towards decolonizing education.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand the experiences of school administrators in addressing anti-racism in schools. I was particularly interested in how school administration realize their efforts towards taking up the work of decolonizing education. By increasing understanding of the kinds of knowledge that are considered valuable, the types of academic experiences that are considered equitable, and the moments of unlearning required to approach curriculum in a more holistic way, there may be a shift in teaching and learning practices that ensure decolonization and equity in schools. The study highlights opportunities for positive change in curriculum design. In this chapter I discuss in detail Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) methodology of narrative inquiry and how it pertains to this inquiry into school administrators storied lives of experience towards decolonizing education. I provide a rationale for interpretivist research and the social constructivism paradigm, drawing on Dewey's pragmatic ontology as it relates to Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) relational ontology.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is a relational methodology (Clandinin, 2013). In narrative inquiry, researchers are intentionally placing their lives alongside an other's life, telling their own stories and hearing others' stories, while considering the places and contexts where lives meet. This research study draws on a narrative inquiry into the curriculum-making experiences of teachers and school administration. As Clandinin and Connelly (2006) wrote:

People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is made personally

meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study. (p. 375)

People learn by telling stories in the relational spaces of narrative inquiry (Lessard, 2014).

Narrative inquiry is also a methodology that provides an ethical space for me to inquire into my own experiences but to carefully attend to, and inquire into, the experiences I share with others, as I make sense of storied experiences. Thinking narratively has become the natural way that I come alongside others, through the inquiry process, to help all of our stories come more alive.

Clandinin (2013) described narrative inquiry as a relational methodology, a relational living alongside that speaks to the ontological commitment that a narrative inquirer is making. In narrative inquiry, knowledge is created, acquired, and communicated through storied experiences being uncovered. It is an invitation into the meaning-making that is offered when others tell their stories alongside my story, making sense of this place and the lives within. Dewey (1938) first described the idea that learners develop knowledge through experience, acknowledging that, “meaning is found in the continuity of developing experience” (p. 41). A key component of being and becoming a good teacher and/or school administrator is paying attention to, and committing time to, a personal reflective practice. As Sealock (2019) also highlights, I was curious how the participants in this research study might recreate their experiences by way of story if they were given the time and space to reflect and then discuss in conversation, providing a deeper understanding of themselves through the re-storying of embodied experiences.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained that thinking about an inquiry in narrative ways provides an opportunity to conceptualize the inquiry experience as a storied one on many levels.

They asserted, like Dewey, that the “principal interest in experience is the growth and transformation in the life story that we as researchers and our participants author” (p. 71). It is in the living, telling, retelling, and reliving of stories that students, teachers and school administrators engage in the construction of narratives of experience. Narrative inquirers study a participant’s experience in the world, and through this experience, seek ways of enriching that experience for themselves and for others. Beginning with a respect for ordinary lived experience, the focus of narrative inquiry is not only a valorizing of individuals’ experience but also an “exploration of the social, cultural, and institutional narratives which individuals’ experiences were constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted – but in a way that begins and ends that inquiry in the storied lives of the people involved” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 42). With this in mind, and following Dewey’s ontology (Hutchinson, 2015), the narrative inquirer takes the human experience as the most fundamental reality we have. Following this ontology, narrative inquiry is a description of human experience, acknowledging that each person’s description adds meaning to this experience. The narrative inquirer privileges individual lived experience as a source of insights. This approach to analyzing human experience is grounded in a pragmatic relational ontology; “it takes the immediacy of lived experiences, specifically its narrative qualities, as a fundamental reality to be examined and acted on” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 49).

In narrative inquiry researchers see small, as Greene (1995) described, seeing trends and patterns, and also seeing up close into the particularities of lives unfolding. Researchers look at individual lives, narrative accounts, as it is with intentional understanding of what’s going on with the individual. It is the individual’s story within a social construct and an institutional construct that makes this research important. King (2003) shared that, “the truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (p. 153). He wondered about dominant narratives shaping our schools and

institutions and he encouraged all educators to think about ethical behaviour and actions. He also encouraged his readers to tell a different story. In so doing, he embraced Okri's (1997) message about personal stories:

One way or another we are living the stories planted in us early or along the way, or we are also living the stories we planted – knowingly or unknowingly – in ourselves. We live stories that either give our lives meaning or negate it with meaninglessness. If we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives. (p. 37)

The reflections of Okri's and King's words provide a starting point for thinking of narrative inquiry as relational inquiry. Both King's and Okri's ideas helped me consider how thinking narratively about experiences opens new understandings and calls me to be attentive to my own storied life and the lives of those whom I engage.

According to Goldberg (2010), writing is ninety percent listening. The listening goes so deeply into the space around us that it fills us up. Like narrative inquiry, in considering the time and place, writers listen to the past, future, and present all at one time. To write well, people listen with their whole bodies. With this in mind, I think of the interconnectedness of stories. I live in stories of school and these stories of school have profoundly shaped who I am as a researcher and as a person. Learning from previous experiences of teachers (Clandinin & Connelly, 1986; Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Huber et al., 2013), I have come to understand that stories are future-oriented. I understand the call to narrative inquiry and to people's experiences to what we might learn and how we may change some of the larger, dominant narratives. There starts to be a sense of ways forward, and this, I am invested in personally.

As Huber et al. (2013) share, narrative inquiry offers spaces that embody potential for shaping extraordinary pedagogy in education. This potential of narrative inquiry to remake life in schools and classrooms is situated in an understanding that attending to and acting on experience allows us to tell, retell and relive stories of experience. Clandinin and Connelly (1998) wrote:

For us, education is interwoven with living and with the possibility of retelling our life stories. As we think about our own lives and the lives of teachers and children with whom we engage, we see possibilities for growth and change. As we learn to tell, to listen and to respond to teacher's and children's stories, we imagine significant educational consequences for children and teachers in schools...No one, and no institution, would leave this imagined future unchanged. (pp. 246-247)

As a school principal, identifying as Settler, I am especially intrigued by what Cruikshank (2010) described as “the potential of stories to make us re-evaluate situations we think we understand” (p. 79). With narrative inquiry also comes great responsibility, to the participants in this research study as well as to myself.

Clandinin (2010) highlighted the possibilities and potential for narrative inquiry. She posited that storied experiences are told; that we, as researchers, are part of the stories being told. There are three arenas or commonplaces that act and specify dimensions of an inquiry space – temporality, sociality, and place, and that conceptually, inquiry is a recursive, reflective, and reflexive process – there is a “living, telling, retelling, and reliving” involved. Procedurally, work is characterized by phases that involve composing various kinds of texts, and ethics pervades the whole of inquiry and is at the heart of all endeavors. This framework provides the context for this narrative inquiry into the storied, curriculum-making worlds of school administrators as they describe and come to understand their efforts towards decolonizing education.

The Three-Dimensional Inquiry Space

What drew me to this research approach was an understanding that I am with others who are trying to understand an experience. In starting with myself, I understand that this was not simply a study of the other; instead, this inquiry into the experience was co-created and took time. In narrative inquiry, researchers must consider the context, place, and time. It is what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe as the inward-outward-forward-backward situatedness that leads to a genuine re-telling of experiences. Narrative inquirers, working within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, can begin their inquiries either with engaging with participants through telling stories or through coming alongside participants in the living out of stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

Whether inquirers begin with telling stories or living stories, we enter into the midst of stories. Participants' stories, inquirer's stories, social, cultural and institutional stories, are all ongoing as narrative inquiries begin. Being in the field, that is, engaging with participants, is walking into the midst of stories. As we enter into narrative inquiry relationships, we begin the ongoing negotiations that are part of engaging in narrative inquiry. We negotiate relationships, research purposes, transitions, as well as how we are going to be useful in those relationships. These negotiations occur moment by moment, within each encounter, sometimes in ways that we are not awake to. The negotiations also occur in intentional, wide awake ways as we work with our participants through the inquiry. (Clandinin, 2006, p. 47)

The three-dimensional inquiry space of temporality, sociality, and place, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described, is a key component of narrative inquiry as it allows for the reflective

practice when the researcher goes away to read and reread field texts in order to interpret and make sense of others' narratives in context:

As we worked within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, we learned to see ourselves as always *in the midst* – located somewhere along the dimensions of time, place, the personal, and the social. But we see ourselves in the midst in another sense as well; that is, we see ourselves as in the middle of a nested set of stories – ours and theirs.
(p. 63)

In considering the first dimension, temporality, I can attend to life and stories by considering the past, present, and future. As a narrative inquirer, I listen carefully to the stories of school administration as they share their personal accounts of their perspectives on how they understand their work towards decolonizing education. Through the relational inquiry process, researchers and participants co-compose the stories that are created.

Within the second dimension of sociality, the narrative inquirer is aware of the personal and social conditions, along with the constantly changing landscape that continues to shape the inquiry process. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained the personal and social conditions as feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions, and moral disposition of both the inquirer and study participants.

A third dimension within the narrative inquiry space is place. It is the “specific concrete physical and topological boundaries of place, or sequence of places where the inquiry and events take place” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 49). Place is the physical location where stories are both lived and told but also includes the places that we have travelled to and in-between within our experiences. The sharing of stories and learning to listen to them is shaped by place.

Clandinin reminds me of the physical places within stories and that the sharing of stories occurs in many physical places which shape the inquiry process. In some ways, the physical place shapes the conversational space between the researcher and participants based on past experiences (Lessard, 2014). Tuck and McKenzie (2015) situate all research as connected to place, chronologically, geographically, and spatially. Patel (2016) suggested that attending to context, to place, and to temporality, are perhaps the strongest ways that educational researchers can interrupt coloniality. Understanding that all research is placed does not mean that it cannot connect across spaces, but that “there is not an automatic transferability to knowledge, skills, or dispositions” (Patel, 2016, p. 61). Knowing that research is a relational, cultural and political practice requires me to consider my own positionality in this research as I work alongside the participants. Reflecting on the importance of place within experience, and the multiple meanings within its definition, helps me inquire into the stories that are shared.

The Research Approach: A Rationale for a Narrative Inquiry into Experience

In selecting narrative inquiry as a methodology, it is important to consider that narrative inquiry has affinities to Indigenous methodology (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012).

Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) contended that, “narrative inquiry is an old practice that may feel new to us for a variety of reasons” (p. 35). Human beings have lived stories and have told stories for as long as we could talk. It is with these stories that we make sense of our lives, in relation with one another. Engaging in narrative inquiry means “being attentive to thinking with stories in multiple ways, toward our stories, toward the other’s stories, toward all the narratives in which we are embedded as well as toward what begins to emerge in our shared lived and told stories” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 30). It is in this thinking *with* stories that I share the embodied experiences of school administrators. Research is a relational and ontological practice, entangled with

specific researchers in specific places (Patel, 2016). Because of this, and because of my position as a researcher working from a dominant cultural background, I have a responsibility to understand and to contribute to existing research.

Interpretivism and Social Constructivism

The philosophical worldview, also known as a research paradigm, is both social constructivism and interpretivism. Within social constructivism human beings construct meanings as they engage with the world they are interpreting (Crotty, 1998). In interpretive inquiry, the researcher approaches the study by paying attention to the lived experience of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Since relationships and life experiences are at the heart of education, as is the case in many other professions, such as medicine and social work, transferability of this study and its findings is possible. With respect to ontology, participants in this study locate self and others in relation to experiences of time, place, and social contexts. Epistemologically, participants construct and interpret meaning through experience, opening a space for reflection which in the end enhances their practice. Interpretive research requires the pursuit of thick description (Geertz, 2008) by “encouraging elaboration, reflection, and illustration” (Soss, 2014, p. 170). For this interpretive research study then, participants construct meaning based on the conversations and reflections required for inquiry. Knowledge is constructed from the re-storying of their narratives and reflections of how they see their efforts towards decolonizing education. This approach to research considers constructivism (Kincheloe, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978) to be at the heart of the paradigmatic orientation because it highlights that, ontologically, “we construct knowledge through our lived experience and through our interactions with other members of society” (Lincoln et al., 2018, p. 114) and epistemologically, “people construct their own understanding of reality based on interactions with our

surroundings” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 as cited in Lincoln et al., 2018, p. 116). As researchers and participants are shaped by their lived experiences, this knowledge reveals itself through narrative processes and analysis. It is the notion of social constructivism, then, and how understanding is relational, that we come together and make meaning as we organize our thinking.

Participant Involvement

The participants included in this research are school administrators from a large, metropolitan school board in Alberta, Canada. These participants were selected because they could provide the data to the research question being asked. Purposeful/judgmental sampling was a viable option for this study because potential participants were selected based on readiness and experience. Additionally, in blending together the topics of anti-racism and curriculum, having the participants who reside in a specific, common place is intentional in seeking to better understand the phenomenon. My intent as a researcher was not to generalize from the sample; instead, I searched to explain, explore, describe, interpret, and understand. I included three research participants for this study representing three different contexts and professional experiences. This is important because it offers a sampling of people who are working in the same organization but who approach the work of decolonizing education through different lenses. I used my own experience and judgement in selecting the participants that I believed to be the most useful in this study.

Data Gathering

For this research I selected semi-structured interviews as the primary method for data collection because it offered the potential to gather rich, thick descriptions about how school leaders understand their work towards decolonizing education. After the first interview, a one-

on-one conversation was included, using guiding questions where participants were asked to reflect on their experiences towards decolonizing education and how they came to unlearn in the face of new knowledges. Participants were encouraged to reflect on the experience and provide a written or visual narrative to situate me within their own experience. The second interview further discussed their experiences through conversation, and identified the meaning being derived by the participants from re-storying their own experience and new learning. The final interview was an opportunity to clarify and confirm the stories that had been shared.

By using semi-structured interviews, I was able to clarify what has been shared and through careful listening, I was able to dig deeper for more information, as semi-structured interviews offered a more focused exploration of the topic. The success of the interviews depended on the nature of the relationship between myself and the participant as well as my ability to ask good questions. The generativity of the interview depended on both partners and their willingness to engage in a deep discussion about the topic (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). It is also important to acknowledge the limitations in a semi-structured interview. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2016), interviews do have both strengths and limitations. It is important to note that there was a possibility that not all participants would remain cooperative throughout the research. There was also a possibility that not all participants would be able to articulate their ideas. Additionally, the interviews required skill on the part of the interviewer. There was a nuance in conversations and interviews, from being able to read body language, to knowing when it may be appropriate to push deeper into the questioning. Finally, interviews are the result of the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee and the context where they take place (Seidman, 2006). I was able to conduct multiple interviews with the same person to gain the depth needed for this narrative inquiry. I used a semi-structured interview for the first one, an

open interview for the second one, and the third interview was confirmatory. This allowed me the opportunity to build on previous stories and establish strong relationships with the participants.

Brinkman (2018) explains that semi-structured interviews make better use of the knowledge-producing potential of dialogue by allowing more flexibility for following whatever opportunities are deemed important by the interviewee. Additionally, the interviewer has a better chance of becoming known as a knowledge-producing partner in the research process itself. As compared to unstructured interviews, the interviewer has more ability to keep the conversation focused on the issues that are considered relevant and important to the overall research project. By using a combination of semi-structured interviews, an open interview, and confirmatory interview, I was able to reach new areas of reality that would have otherwise remained inaccessible, such as participants' attitudes and experiences. The interview process was a way to overcome distances in both space and time, and past events and experiences.

This approach to research allows for both a focus and structure, while attending to an openness that provides space in responding to participants. It was important for me, when thinking narratively, to ask myself, how am I considering the time, place, and relationships as well as the emotional experiences for the participants and myself as researcher. This type of data gathering requires a type of wakefulness (Greene, 1995) because we cannot be wakeful to others' stories if we do not know our own story well. I was able to honour all participants as we re-storied our experiences.

Interview questions

This research seeks to understand school administrators' experiences of unlearning, of approaches to decolonizing education and to the moments when there has been possible new

learnings and breakthroughs. To provide both a focus, while considering an openness in the interview, I selected questions to respectfully invite participants into the research. Some of the interview questions used were:

1. What experiences have shaped who you are and who you are becoming as a school administrator?
2. What is it in your work that you believe most strongly about when it comes to decolonizing education?
3. Tell me about the opportunities you see in your work towards decolonizing education.
4. Tell me about the dilemmas you see in your work towards decolonizing education.
5. What do you believe about knowledge production and who or what has informed your thinking?
6. Describe how you design curriculum through a decolonizing lens.

Data Analysis

Since narrative inquiry is the focus of this study, and data was based on the narratives of the participants, it is fitting that I analyzed the data through a narrative inquiry lens so that I could examine the nuances of story, and of experience. Toward that end:

Narrative inquiry is a way of inquiring into the experiences that attend to individuals' lives but remains attentive to the larger contexts and relationships within which lives are nested. Stories are lived, and told, not separated from each person's living and telling in time, place and relationships, not seen as text to be separated from the living and telling and analyzed and dissected. (Clandinin et al., 2017, p. 91)

I engaged in the following four forms of narrative analysis: structural analysis, thematic analysis, dialogic analysis, and interpretive analysis. By considering these lenses, I was able to examine characteristics of story, study the substance of the story and determine what motifs are present in the stories, examine certain issues that are at stake in the telling of a given story and how the story speaks to the larger discourses at play in a given community or culture, and identify the purpose of a storytelling moment by asking questions such as: “what does this story do as a result of its telling?” and “what is the significance of how/when the story was told?” The central research question that I used for this study was: How do school administrators understand their practice as efforts towards decolonization? The following three sub-questions were also used to support this inquiry: how do school administrators describe the bottlenecks and breakthroughs?, what types of unlearning do school administrators experience in addressing anti-racism in school and classroom environments?, and what are school administrators approaches to decolonizing education? In gathering and analyzing data in this way, I adhered to trustworthiness and dependability in this qualitative study. With the intention to ensure a triangulation of evidence, I collected three forms of data from three different participants located in three different schools and who come from different experiences. I transcribed all narratives, and one-on-one conversations, which provided with me an opportunity to revisit conversations and recall the forgotten moments from the interviews. In order to understand each participant uniquely, I kept detailed notes and journal entries after each conversation and to ensure trustworthiness, all analytical decisions were recorded in separate notes and on the transcripts. Narrative analysis was a useful method for this study.

Trustworthiness

In all research it is important to establish trustworthiness. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) outlined specific criteria of verisimilitude, plausibility, and transferability as a way to assess the quality of a narrative inquiry. It was important that I considered verisimilitude, plausibility, and transferability for me to establish trustworthiness.

Verisimilitude

Verisimilitude is defined as “a criterion for a good literary study, in which the writing seems ‘real’ and ‘alive,’ transporting the reader directly into the world of the study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 250). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) noted that verisimilitude is an important criterion in judging the value of narrative inquiries. Because narrative studies consider the interpretations of personal realities, it is necessary that the inquiry meets the criterion of verisimilitude. In order for the study to have trustworthiness, it must achieve verisimilitude and believability (Loh, 2013). Verisimilitude, the idea of something being real or true, is important because it “allows others to have a vicarious experience of being in the similar situation and thereby being able to understand the decisions made and the emotions felt by the participants in the study” (p. 10). In order to ensure verisimilitude in a study, the study must seem plausible. I used member checking to meet the criterion of verisimilitude which is explained further in the next section.

Plausibility

According to Creswell (2009), member checking is a process whereby “the final report or specific description or themes are taken back to the participants” (p. 191). It is important to take the time to provide this opportunity to the research participants because they have the context in which the experiences occurred, as well as their own personal responses. Member checking is a form of follow-up given by the participants and is included in the analysis and interpretation of

the experiences, and as Loh (2013) described, “it is ethical to allow the participants to have a look at their data and the interpretations derived from it, and offer their views regarding them” (p. 8). Because this is an interpretive research study, it was important that I considered what Riessman (2008) wrote about the interpretation of facts, namely that, “a narrative is not simply a factual report of events, but instead one articulation told from a point of view that seems to persuade others to see the events in a single way” (p. 187). Polkinghorne (2007) highlighted that the researcher is seeking to learn about realities, the emotional and mental responses to the realities, and that the goal is to learn the meaning made through the stories.

Storyed evidence is gathered not to determine if events actually happened but about the meaning experienced by people whether or not the events are accurately described...

Storyed texts serve as evidence for personal meaning, not for the factual occurrence of the events reported in the stories. (p. 479)

It is important that narrative researchers demonstrate the procedures used to ensure that its methods are reliable and that its findings are valid (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008) and this can be done through peer validation. I accept that, “peers in the similar field, or working within a similar branch of research, would have some familiarity with the relevant research literature, research methods...and would be able to provide some sort of corroboration with regard to the...data” (Loh, 2013, p. 6). I ensured that the data collected was plausible by ensuring sequencing in the narratives that have been shared.

Transferability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) expanded the concept of trustworthiness by including transferability as criteria towards reliability. Transferability of the study “refers to the

generalizability of inquiry” (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 3) in addition to the extent to which the findings can be found and applied to other contexts (Cope, 2014). Interpretivism identifies transferability of the meaning determined by the individuals who find meaning with the broader field of education. Since education is a profession that is founded on relationships, transferability of the findings in this research study to other relational professions such as medicine, nursing, and social work was possible. I recognized that there was transferability in this research study into how school administrators understand their efforts towards decolonization, because this inquiry occurs in other disciplines and professions as well.

In maintaining integrity as a qualitative researcher requires, Merriam and Tisdell (2015) suggested reflexivity as a way for the researcher to affect the research, while at the same time being affected by the study. In explaining “their biases, dispositions, and assumptions” (p. 249) researchers can clarify and articulate their own worldview, experiences and theoretical orientation to the study. The reason for making your perspective, bias and assumptions clear is not to “eliminate the researcher’s theories, beliefs, and perceptual lens. Instead, qualitative research is concerned with understanding how a particular researcher’s values and expectations influenced the conduct and conclusions of the study” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 124). In order to ensure integrity, I engaged in reflective journaling to document how my observations and understandings evolved throughout the research study.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations

According to Loh (2013), there are limitations in narrative inquiry because of the subjectivity of the researcher’s interpretation. I considered this in the design of this research study. For example, there was a possibility that the participants may only tell partial truths, or

that the stories shared are only pieces of a larger experience. As with all narrative inquiry work, findings are captured in a moment in time, “in the midst” (Caine et al., 2019 p. 7) of participants’ alongside my own experience, which were reflected in the final project. I addressed my personal bias by engaging in a reflective practice and conferring with peers about the themes that arose from the stories being shared, while keeping participants anonymous. Another limitation was the time of data collection. For example, the study occurred while Canada was still *in the midst* of a global pandemic; therefore, I had no control over the pandemic or constraints in place. Lastly, although the intent of the study was to engage participants in reflective process where possible, participants’ wishes in terms of level of involvement were respected; therefore, there were varying degrees of reflective work on the part of the participants.

Delimitations

One delimitation is related to my selection of participants. I recruited three participants who were willing to engage in conversation about their understanding of decolonization and how it relates to their own practice. This decision was made to target a smaller group within the large district. A delimitation was the selection of research methods. Interviews and questions were designed as open ended to allow for thick description of concepts and experiences of the individual school administrators. The number of participants was limited to three to facilitate the relational responsibilities of the research and the depth of analysis required by a narrative inquiry methodology.

Ethical Considerations

At the heart of narrative inquiry is relational ethics; indeed, “they direct us to see ethical action as suited within, and central to, relationships with participants” (Clandinin et al., 2018, p. 1). When working from a relational ontology, I considered how relational ethics influenced this research. In considering Nodding’s (2002) ethic of care, and Arendt’s (1958/2018) notion of

personal and private spaces, I paid special attention to how I care for the participants and their stories. In caring for the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants' stories I ensured that I kept transcripts stored in locked spaces and in password protected digital environments. People's stories have to be cared for in a way that continues to consider the relational ethics. Stories also have a way of moving into the future; therefore, this research considers the ethics of a future-oriented re-culturing of what may come:

Ethical matters need to be narrated over the entire narrative inquiry process. They are not dealt with once and for all, as might seem to happen, when ethical review forms are filled out and university approval is sought for our inquirers. Ethical matters shift and change as we move through an inquiry. They are never far from the heart of our inquiries no matter where we are in the inquiry process. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 170)

I was cautious about many moving parts in this research. Knowing that narrative inquiry relies heavily on the self-reported stories from participants, I was cognizant of the need to create a safe space where participants felt they could reveal their truth. I carefully considered how the individuals may feel if their stories are repeated in a way that offers negative reactions from future readers. In the working alongside, I hoped to provide an ethical relationship that protected the participants as they shared their stories, while being attuned to the vulnerabilities of the participants (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Clandinin et al. (2018) describe five dimensions of relational ethics that live at the heart of narrative inquirers:

Of imagination that calls forth world-travel and improvisation; of coming alongside slowly to attend closely to the stories lived, told and not told; of attending to the

ongoingness of researchers' and participants' lives in motion, attending that is only possible by seeing each moment as within unfolding lives; of co-creating spaces with participants in order to attend to their and our not knowing and liminality; and of bodies in relation within places of stillness, places where we attend to, and with, silence and contemplation. (p. 173)

I imagined that these spaces were not separated; instead, they were intertwined as part of the experience of paying close attention and caring for the participants' and their stories. As I moved into the research landscape, I was mindful of each action and that working in a relational ethical space required continuous negotiation and respect. Reflecting on King's and Okri's earlier words, it is important to attend to the stories told and to the stories we, and others, might tell. This is significant because it speaks to the necessity to work within a sense of trust and loyalty, which is not only given to the participants, but also extends to ourselves (Clandinin et al., 2018).

After ethics approval was obtained from both the University of Calgary as well as the Calgary Board of Education, I emailed potential participants and requested an opportunity to share the purpose of the research. I provided each participant with the relevant context, the questions that guide the study, and an email to contact me indicating their interest. Participants who demonstrated an interest in the study were invited to meet with me via Zoom. This meeting provided an opportunity to offer clarity about what is meant by *efforts towards decolonizing education*. Participants were provided an opportunity to review and sign the consent form. After consent was obtained, participants were invited to participate with me in a brief semi-structured, one-on-one conversation guided by ethics approved interview questions and asked to reflect on a powerful moment where they experienced their own unlearning. They were given an opportunity to select a pseudonym for the study. As well, they were informed that they can withdraw from

the study at any time. Engaging in narrative inquiry is an emotional undertaking (J. Clandinin, personal communication, February 10, 2021) and there were significant amounts of unpacking of emotions as part of the research experience.

Summary

By inquiring into our own stories, telling and re-telling our narratives, and through a relational process, narrative inquirers compose stories to be shared in hopes of impacting future discourse. The following five chapters offer insight into the storied lives of the participants in this study. I have chosen to give each participant their own chapter, paying special attention to their personal narratives so that you could hear the participants' stories and so I could maintain the richness of the narratives at the same time determining which motifs were present in each story while remaining attentive to the larger societal contexts. I incorporated analysis into chapters four, five, and six as a way of attending to the three-dimensional narrative space of temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) so that I could interpret the participants' stories in context, and as they relate to my own stories of experience. Chapter seven offers a discussion and analysis weaving the three stories together to determine resonant threads as they emerged in each narrative. In learning to think with the stories and uncover findings, chapter eight, as the final chapter, suggests recommendations for both professional practice and future research, as well as conclusions. For this research study, it is my hope that the stories that have been shared lead to a re-culturing of school curriculum design, as school administrators understand and apply their knowledge towards decolonizing education. Situating ourselves in the living, telling, retelling, and reliving of experience and relationships helps remind us of how story shapes our lives, requiring attentiveness and response to both the stories that are created and shared, as well as those that are silenced. As Huber et al. (2013) reminded us:

As we see the present unfolding, we begin to imagine the future, and we see that through seeing narrative inquiry as holding potential for shaping extraordinary pedagogy we can shift the practices and pedagogies within education, within teachers, but most importantly in the relationships we encounter as educators, citizens, and strangers. (p. 236)

Chapter 4: Catherine's story

Decolonization as a Matter of Personal Preference

Donald (2021) reminds us that we need a new story, and “that the stories that are typically told in schools continue to perpetuate the damaging and divisive colonial legacies that result from relationship denial” (p. 55). In the first narrative shared as part of this research inquiry, I recognize how Donald's (2009, 2012) notions of ethical relationality, and his (2021b, 2022) discussion of unlearning colonialism have surfaced in and through Catherine's understanding of her role related to decolonizing education. In her reflections about where she comes from, how she describes the bottlenecks and breakthroughs in the work, her leadership role, and her own (un)learning, it suggests that one cultivates sensitivity to situations, which always depend, and that knowing how to behave or act in particular times, and in particular places with others, is linked to an idea that relies on an openness to what is otherwise, or could be, different. These reflections highlight who she is becoming, and how she is developing different ways of experiencing and understanding the world. I think of Greene's (2001) notion of being open to being surprised rather than affirming preconceived ideas. To begin Catherine's story, she shares where she comes from:

I was born here (Calgary) in 1973. My dad was born in Kamloops, BC and his family came from southwest Saskatchewan. My dad's father came from Scotland. My mom immigrated and was driven from Germany just like the Ukrainians right now. They ended up in South America, which wasn't very stable. My grandmother picked Calgary off a map because of the geography, the mountains and the prairies, and that was as close as she could get to Budapest and the hills and the countryside there, so they settled here.

I was raised in the south part of the city by Fish Creek, so I spent a lot of my time as a child there. My Canadian grandmother would take us on hikes in Fish Creek and she told us stories of the land. I've always had exposures to other worldviews through my grandmother and then of course, through the European lens, and trauma through my mom's family. I went to Catholic school. My mom said the reason we went to Catholic School is because they had full day kindergarten and the public school did not. We never went to church except for at school during mass. When I was in high school, I went to Bishop Grandin, there were kids from Tsuut'ina, but they always seemed to be in separate classes. They let them drum at mass, and sometimes they would hoop dance at assemblies. When I played basketball there was one girl on the senior team, grade 11, she was really good, and I was like, oh, are you going to go play basketball at university. And she was like, nope. I'm like, well where are you going to go to school? She said, "I'm done". And I remember being so confused. I told my mom and she said, well people have different paths and there are different cultures, and you have to respect that, but I always remember that it really bothered me. She had so much potential, and I don't know what happened to her. She was from a prominent family in Tsuut'ina, so I'm figuring that she had a good life.

I remember Catherine talking about this in our conversation and my desire to pause the recording, right then and there, to unpack what was shared. It was a moment where I thought to myself, thank you – for sharing this perspective, and thank you - for providing an opportunity to connect what was shared to significant topics as they relate to decolonizing education: social controls, othering, white privilege, hegemony. I listened to what Catherine reflected on and wondered if she even knew about the significance of her own statements as they related to both

narrative inquiry, and to this research topic. Her comments drew me back to Freire's (1970/2012) concept of telling and understanding historical truths allowing for a deeper consciousness of one's own situation, and to Kincheloe's (2008) suggestions that teachers and students with a critical consciousness can step back from their own lived reality in order to gain a new vantage point. I reflected on what Catherine shared as an example of how hegemony, through its manipulation of public opinions, influences society to see dominant ways of seeing the world as commonsense, and how Apple (2012) exposed the ways in which the hidden curriculum in school maintains the existing distribution of power. It was interesting for me to reflect on Catherine's story through this lens, and to consider how she described where she came from as it related to newcomers settling the land, escaping persecution, about attending a catholic school despite any religious affiliations, and about how she perceived a teammate who came from a prominent family. All of these leading me to a greater realization about social controls, White privilege, and how our own stories and perspectives shape who we are, and who we are becoming.

Catherine explains that she was "brought to teaching by accident." She had completed her undergraduate degree in Kinesiology at U of C and had, for a time, considered going to medical school. She explained that her mom, who was a teacher in the Calgary Board of Education (CBE), helped to get her an interview. She was eventually hired on by both the Calgary Catholic School Division (CSSD) and the Calgary Board of Education (CBE). She stated that "she never pictured going into leadership" though she had been a leader on her soccer and basketball teams, and as a captain "led more by example." One principal had encouraged Catherine to do her master's degree, and after that she landed what she described as "the ultimate position to be a science specialist with the CBE", and eventually went into school leadership. Early in her career,

Catherine described that she had “a great teaching partner” and so she experienced what it meant to “be on a team.” She shared her observation that “there was inequity in giving the most difficult students to the most inexperienced teachers” and that has always bothered her. She reflected on one principal who made leadership very intentional, offering “distributed leadership as a structure – leading teams, leading PLCs, leading team planning sessions – all meetings were around pedagogy and were very rarely managerial.” For a short time, Catherine worked for the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AIS), and then when the positions were cut, moved into an area learning team in the CBE. She noted two Education Directors who supported her in fostering effective relationships by mentoring her and bringing her into conversations.

In our conversations, I had asked Catherine to describe the professional learning that she has done with respect to decolonizing education. She responded:

I don't know if I have done any that's intentional to decolonizing education. I went and saw Suzuki speak, it was the 90s, and he acknowledged the land, and I didn't understand and I didn't ask anyone. I did not know about Treaties back then, but it caused reflection. I remember thinking, of course, they were on this land before, their history is here, and stories. I also heard Dr. Vandana Shiva speak, and she talked to us about wastewater and environmental things...she said something that night that was interesting. She said, science education is created. The system in which we live is so disconnected from the land, so completely disconnected, that the only science realm that makes sense where you see everything's interconnected in quantum theory, or quantum physics, I don't remember exactly what it is. Why is that? Why does it have the reputation of being the most difficult science? Everything must be broken down into parts, and you never see the whole again. You just see the parts and that's how we are raising our children, and

through high school science, everything is broken down into parts, and they don't see the big picture. So, you know, it's always been my goal as a leader to show that everything is interconnected.

I spent a significant amount of time thinking about this passage from Catherine; the system being disconnected from the land, "everything must be broken down into parts, and you never see the whole again" and that this is how we are raising and educating children. Catherine raises the ideas of a disconnected curriculum, and fragmenting narratives, ones that are broken down into parts, and not able to see the big picture. It resonates with me as a juxtaposition of an Indigenous sensibility – severing and breaking apart – leaving children with a disconnected view of how the world fits together. I thought about my own experiences as a student, loving history class, especially Ms. Chapman. She was a young teacher at the time, in a faculty full of men twice her age. She provided the space for students to make connections between stories: the Russian Revolution, Cuban Missile Crisis, the black plague. I spent hours cramped in the desk in her classroom with one small window, on the main floor of the high school, right next to my locker. One day, Ms. Chapman went off script. She shared stories of Indigenous people whom she had lived with and learned from. She described concepts of decision-making and power that were not reflected in the stories of the Russian Revolution, Cuban Missile Crisis, or the black plague. She did not sit down at her desk, she wandered the room, confidently acknowledging a narrative that we, as students, had never been privy to. Her energetic teaching style and her desire to engage students were clear to me. She was trying to highlight how the world is broken down into parts, with these narratives that had been left out of discourse in public education. And it worked. We were engaged, we talked about it in the hallways after class, and the learning transferred to other classes as well. These were stories that students had never heard before. She offered a space for

students to reflect on what narratives of history were the most compelling, given our understanding of the context. At the time, I was not aware of how immersed the narratives were in the ideologies and identities of historians, the history curriculum, the school, and my teachers. Definitely, in Saskatchewan during the 1990's, it included what Gibson and Case (2019) would describe as an “ethnocentric Western epistemology” (p. 253). I recall, too, how a friend of mine had shared that another teacher in the social studies department addressed his own class by announcing that they would not be learning about the same things as what was happening in Ms. Chapman's class. And then I recall how we were, as Ms. Chapman referred to it, as “back on track” a couple of days later. Her lessons “continued as planned”, following the checklist approach so that she could stay at the same pace as the other social studies classes. Ms. Chapman wanted us to have our own opinions, and she encouraged discourse and debate, but it was clear that the focus of the social studies department at that time, in that place, was focused on memorization and regurgitation of a curriculum that had remained unchanged for years. Ms. Chapman left the next year.

Regardless of subject area or discipline, considering ethical discussions, and obligations, guiding students to a fuller understanding of the need to address past wrongs, and provide space to make meaningful connections that consider more than the Western worldview, is particularly important in approaching the history of marginalized groups and Indigenous people in Canada, where notions of right and wrong are often oversimplified. Cutrara (2021) suggests that current education in Canada imposes a *Settler grammar* over past events, and that this grammar misses the significance of oral storytelling and the circular notions of time in Indigenous thought. The work of education, then, moving forward needs to address this *Settler grammar*, regardless of subject area. When I asked Catherine about her understanding of Indigenous pedagogy, it was

made clear, that in her perspective, matters of Indigeneity within a school setting is additional to the regular work, and in her example, only happens when the guest Elder arrives,

Well, I've always seen things as pretty connected and then I got to this school, and I was like, whoa, it's pretty traditional here; besides going on field studies and writing in journals, it's pretty traditional. It seems that our work of Indigenous ways of knowing is solely tied to our work with an Elder. Some teachers are doing it really well in the absence of having him (Saa'kokoto) and some are not doing it at all. I always stayed away from it because I don't want to do something offensive.

Catherine's statement of "I always stayed away from it because I don't want to do something offensive" is one that I have heard time and time again in my work with teachers and school administrators. Hanson's (2016) research, *"Reading for resurgence: Indigenous literatures, communities, and learning"*, uncovers a similar source of tension as teachers question their own Canadian identity and confront their own feelings of uneasiness. When working with teachers in taking up Indigenous literature in the classroom, participants in the research study indicated feeling an awkward discomfort. As Hanson states, "analogous to these struggles with uneasiness are teachers' articulations of fear or anxiety around making mistakes" (p. 292). An interesting finding from this research study is that despite the possibility for teachers to make mistakes, it was not suggested that non-Indigenous teachers should not be taking up the work of engaging with Indigenous texts in the classroom. Instead, there was a strong suggestion that "teachers need to find their way forward, because there is a great deal of work that needs doing, and that responsibility cannot sit entirely on Indigenous shoulders" (p. 295). This uneasiness is described in the passage above as Catherine describes a challenge in the work of decolonizing education by indicating that it (the work) is the responsibility of the Indigenous person, and then

it becomes a matter of personal discretion whether any of the work gets picked up or not, instead of suggesting that educators are all involved, and that the work belongs to all educators. In terms of unlearning, Catherine's perspective is that approaching the work of decolonization is a personal choice, a preference:

I think, the most interesting bottleneck recently, was when we lost Saa'kokoto as a consultant as an Elder, and with our community. And then I saw that some teachers equated their work on truth and reconciliation with having an hour with him, and then journaling about it.

Catherine explains that the work with the Elder, and the intended continued learning became another thing to do – it didn't live with the teachers, it simply became another activity in the barrage of activities. She also recognizes, as she describes a breakthrough, that a new teacher embodies a way forward with truth and reconciliation in her own practice; however, it remains with this person:

I think the one this year was a new teacher. Really young. I gave her permission to just go with it. And focus on the journey of truth and reconciliation for herself and for her class. And she went out on the land, and then had kids examine the acknowledgment of CBE acknowledgment to the land, and then why we did that. And then the kids wrote their own. And so, seeing some of the kids work from that kind of to me was a breakthrough, because I know wherever she ends up in her career, she'll keep moving forward with it.

Catherine reflected, "sometimes I wonder, should I just go back to teaching and have those relationships with kids?" This was a question that arose in one of our conversations; however, this is not the first time that I have heard colleagues express this same sentiment. It has

been described, as Catherine also noted, that “being a teacher is where I had more influence on pedagogy.” At what point does this shift take place? Where instructional leaders recognize that the mandates and directions deposited to school administrators begins to interfere with what is important about curriculum – that way of organizing the knowledge and skills necessary for children to have a result of their school experiences? Catherine described it as follows:

There are all of these accountabilities we have like collaborative response model. We're stepping back from literacy and numeracy. The framework is beautiful but how does it fit in? I honestly believe that when we were doing the curriculum prototyping stuff and the inspiring education stuff, it was aspirational, and it felt possible. Now it doesn't seem possible and I layer in that teachers are tired, morale is low, and we are demanding so much in terms of data, we are all like, how are we going to remember everything? Everything is managerial, it's not fulfilling intellectually. I think we have shown that curriculum doesn't change teachers. It's the leaders that change teaching practice. The ones who care. Kids need to be thinking differently about the world around them.

I was struck how this narrative was rife with contradiction; how it demonstrated confusion and conflation interrelated with moral and ethical obligations. The passage above is example of the dynamic tension at the core of the grammar of schooling and resistance to reform (Larabee, 2021) highlighting the difficult work of school-based leadership when there are too many initiatives to respond to and evidence to produce. I wonder about the work required, on the part of school administrators, in how the leaders are balancing their own learning with the aim of leading others? Do all school administrators understand colonialism, its impact on education, and the possible resistance to reform? As Shah (2018) describes, “it is imperative that all educators

engage in the ongoing interrogation of their intersecting forms of privilege and power as an important attempt to counteract the hegemonic structures that dominate school practices” (p.2).

I asked Catherine about her own understanding of colonialism, her role in it, and her approach to decolonizing education:

I think it means that our country was formed on a British model. I see it in police, in the structures in our society, our courts, and you know, I've always been attuned to it. All these things we grow up with become the basis of who we are. I think I'm part of the system because I am white, and I am privileged. I do understand trauma personally and I understand the impacts that it has on people's lives. I ended up in education because I'm an activist and I needed to change people's lives. Suzuki said, you have to work from the inside to change things. You can't work from the outside. So, for me, it means questioning things so it's all those little conversations with teachers. So, it's like little provocations until you change. I think big picture, like where I live, and what I have, is a result of my mom and dad's families that settled on the land. This land saved my mom's family, otherwise, for sure they would have had nothing. I don't know if I could articulate what my approach is. I have the critical thinking skills, but I think it's for me the strategies are, or my approach would be, how you would lead teachers in designing learning experiences. But I think my first step has to be building relationships with teachers. So that I can provoke them to think differently.

When Catherine expressed “I don't know what my approach is”, I thought about the many colleagues and leaders with whom I work, and with whom I have engaged in conversations about decolonizing education, and how they may provide the same response to the same question. As mentioned in Chapter two, the term decolonization is best understood as an unlearning, critically

analyzing our work to ensure we are disrupting patterns that perpetuate systems of oppression (Ng-A-Fook, 2020). It is about unlearning colonialism and renewing kinship relations, and that Settler colonialism should not be seen as an event in the past, but an ongoing structure. And taking a stand of critically analyzing our work with the goal of making sure we are disrupting habitual patterns of thinking that perpetuate systems of oppression (personal conversation with supervisor). Catherine shared, “I don’t think that it’s on people’s radar – decolonizing education.” She reflected on her time working “downtown” when she felt she could take on the world, but now she asks “do people really want this change? I’m so exhausted with all these little things that we have to do.” Perhaps, as Donald (2022) describes, it’s about changing the language from decolonizing education to unlearning colonialism. And perhaps, this shift in how we think about the work of decolonizing education may lead to stronger practice in schools so as not to surface the assumption that Catherine shared:

I think we assume, at least those of us who are leading the work, that everyone wants this. There are a lot that don’t want it. This includes teachers and students, and then another assumption is that I don’t think we are critically minded enough to think about it. We have been taught to think a certain way about our society and when you can’t question that, I don’t think people are smart enough, or wise enough to do that. We can’t really have discourse anymore, everything is so polarized, you’re either here or there.

Throughout Catherine’s story, I continued to rely on Tupper’s (2019) description of a Settler colonial narrative that dominates the Canadian historical consciousness, and weaves itself into stories of school, and stories of identity. She identifies elements that are deployed within the Settler colonial narrative and that fit within Catherine’s understanding: pioneer nation building, Settler as peacemaker or heroic saviour of Indigenous peoples, Indigenous people as problems to

be solved, the Settler as peaceful colonizer. For Tupper (2019), it is essential how educators, especially those from a white Settler background, recognize that narratives are linked to personal stories of identity. It is difficult for every educator to articulate how their understanding of their own efforts towards decolonization has changed or improved. Catherine shared it as follows:

I think the biggest theme of it is perseverance. I mean it hasn't been that long and I'm starting in a new building where it's not even on the radar at all and so how do you turn down the noise of the 'busyness' - the student behaviours, teacher well-being, and all the literacy and numeracy testing - to actually make sense of pedagogy and challenge people's thinking. And I think we had a new curriculum program of studies meeting with our system this past week, and it seems very factory model. So that also is demotivating, but also could be motivating. I'm going to have to leverage the new curriculum. I don't know how I'm going to do it but I think work with key concepts is my hope. I don't know, it's like how do you find it within something that's like there's no front matter that I could see in the curriculum.

In sitting with Catherine's narrative, reviewing the zoom sessions, re-reading the transcriptions, I was able to interpret much of what Catherine shared, her individual responses, and how this narrative represents and speaks to the overwhelming nature of what school administrators are experiencing in their roles, their own stance towards decolonization, and their own efforts or lack thereof towards decolonizing education. I was able to begin to make sense of Catherine's story through the lens of curriculum, planned and lived, written and taught, hidden and exposed, and highlight the challenges that school administrators face in leading Competency 5 as it is written in the Leadership Quality Standard (LQS) (2020), specifically, "enabling all school staff and students to gain a knowledge and understanding of, and respect for, the histories,

cultures, languages, contributions, perspectives, experiences and contemporary contexts of First Nations, Métis and Inuit” (p. 4).

In the province of Alberta, the Teaching Quality Standard (TQS) (2020), and the Leadership Quality Standard (2020) provide a framework for decision-making regarding optimum learning for all students. All teachers are required to demonstrate competency in six major areas as they relate to quality teaching and learning: fostering effective relationships, engaging in career life-long learning, developing a professional body of knowledge, establishing inclusive learning environments, applying foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit, and adhering to legal frameworks and policies. Additionally, all leaders are expected to demonstrate competency in nine major areas: fostering effective relationships, modelling commitment to professional learning, embodying visionary leadership, leading a learning community, supporting application of foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit, providing instructional leadership, developing leadership capacity, managing school operations and resources, and understanding and responding to the larger societal context. In both documents, competency five is the same, applying knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit. For teachers, achievement of this competency is demonstrated when a teacher:

(5a) understands the historical, social, economic, and political implications of: 5a.1) treaties and agreements with First Nations; 5a.2) legislation and agreements negotiated with Métis; and 5a.3) residential schools and their legacy; (5b) supports student achievement by engaging in collaborative, whole school approaches to capacity building in First Nations, Métis and Inuit education; (5c) uses the programs of study to provide opportunities for all students to develop a knowledge and understanding of, and respect for, the histories, cultures, languages, contributions, perspectives, experiences and

contemporary contexts of First Nations, Métis and Inuit; and (5d) supports the learning experiences of all students by using resources that accurately reflect and demonstrate the strength and diversity of First Nations, Métis and Inuit. (Teaching Quality Standard, 2020, p. 5)

For school leaders, achievement in this competency is similar and achievement of this competency is demonstrated by:

(5a) understanding the historical, social, economic and political implications of: treaties and agreements with First Nations; legislation and agreements negotiated with Métis; and residential schools and their legacy; (5b) aligning resources and building the capacity of the school community to support First Nations, Métis and Inuit student achievement; (5c) enabling all school staff and students to gain a knowledge and understanding of, and respect for, the histories, cultures, languages, contributions, perspectives, experiences and contemporary contexts of First Nations, Métis and Inuit; and (5d) pursuing opportunities and engaging in practices to facilitate reconciliation within the school community.

(Leadership Quality Standard, 2020, p.5)

The work of supporting the application of foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit will need to include extensive and ongoing work with teachers, a primary role of how the competencies with the LQS are meant to be viewed within the whole of the standard.

However, the LQS articulates Competency 5 as a requirement for all school and division leaders.

This policy is clear in its intent. The fulfilment of Competency 5 is not a matter of personal preference. And like the LQS, the TQS also commits teachers to meet the requirements of Competency 5.

Teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions are critical factors in the success of curricular reforms and innovations in teacher practice (Kanu, 2011). Working together through professional learning, over time, may provide teachers with opportunities to work through areas of strength to determine how to embed Competency 5: Applying Foundational Knowledge About First Nations, Métis, and Inuit into their practice. (Friesen, et. al, 2022) Perhaps, as Donald (2021) has mentioned, it begins by shifting the language from decolonizing education to unlearning colonialism in order to renew kinship relationships.

Chapter 5: Anne's Story

In Pursuit of Things Worthwhile

“I wanted to do things differently,” Anne stated as she sat, poised, in an empty home, with framed walls and torn insulation hanging behind her. “My dad was a professor of Math at the University of Saskatchewan and I think that is where I had my first inclination of wanting to be a teacher. He was always provoking us, my sister and I, with questions as a way of helping us to seek a better understanding, and this became instilled in me. Also, I was a student who was bored in class, certainly in elementary school I was very bored, and I did not do particularly well with worksheets and paper and pencil activities. I made it through though, but I became one of those people who wanted to do things differently.”

After pursuing a teaching degree from the University of British Columbia, Anne relocated to Calgary, Alberta, first as a music teacher, then as an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher. After years of teaching, Anne was offered the opportunity of working alongside whom Anne referred to as the “Galileo people”, where she was exposed to different ways of teaching, that inspired inquiry and helped Anne to really look at quality teaching as a pedagogical imperative. Through the work with the Galileo Educational Network, and Anne being inspired to work in new ways with new questions, she saw the influence she could have on particular groups of people who were interested in transforming the way they were teaching in the classroom. She realized at that point that she wanted to “do better” and so she pursued a career in leadership within the Calgary Board of Education.

It is important to note that in this narrative, you will read about Anne's frustrations as she moves from broader pedagogical concerns towards specific questions about equity, Indigenous education, land-based learning and leadership. This movement also mimics the conversations we

had as we moved from general frustrations toward a more pointed dialogue about what it means (and requires) to decolonize education.

Anne is currently the principal of an elementary school in the northeast quadrant of Calgary, Alberta. The student profile includes a high number of newcomer families, refugee families, English language learners, as well as a high population of low socio-economic families. In my time with Anne, I could hear her subtle desperation in wanting to make things better for students, and her promise of action that may make the work of teaching more expansive. She spoke about the need for more discourse and conversation, and then we need to “ask questions and think about what needs to change.” Some of her own description can be found in Freire’s (2014) analysis of dialogue. He viewed “the word” of dialogue as “more than just instruments which make dialogue possible” but constitutive of “reflection and action” (p. 87). Anne does not separate reflection and action in her practice; she describes herself as “a reflective person”. She believes that there is space to impact positive change and movement in schools, yet, she described a particular struggle:

Students bring their own background, their own passion, their own information to the learning. And the curriculum becomes...a guide - what you are trying to unpack and uncover with your students. Freire talks about that problem-posing way of educating students. You bring those provocations and you ask those questions and from that you will elicit a direction and an interest and curiosity within the students as to what they would like to learn more about so teachers become more of facilitators. One teacher said, ‘I just don’t know how to engage students anymore’, well, that was an eye opener for me. That’s your job.

When I asked Anne to elaborate on what she would want to see for change to ensure quality learning, she described a tension with the reality of what teachers experience in their day-to-day lives, and what it means for her to be a leader in the Calgary Board of Education. Anne noted:

All the leadership models that I have seen and the ones that I work with don't quite fit... What I want to do is create a really strong culture of learning through the values of education, and create an environment where the students really do feel safe taking risks, and not only students, but the teachers as well. I want them to just investigate more culturally responsive ways of sharing knowing with students.

While she described herself as a “transformative leader,” she noted it was difficult to know where she could impact change. She expressed the desire that she and her colleagues would “survive” the current political situation in Alberta, a province that she named as “redneck and backwards,” and that “we all just need to persevere at this time.” Another issue, that Anne mentioned, is that, on the one hand, principals are asked to be kind and compassionate and that we are to take care of teachers’ mental health; on the other hand, “we (principals) always just add more to their plates.” She described, in detail, how she wants to inspire the teachers at the school to be more creative, think differently, do differently, but instead she observes their exhaustion and the way they revert back to what is “easy.” Anne stated:

They're there for hours planning lessons and creating activities to spoon feed students information, printing off worksheets, and basically just telling students what they need to know. There's no learning, or at least, not the way that I envision learning.

As I listened to Anne share her story, I was taken aback by her candidness. In some ways, throughout our conversations, it was as if she was reaching through the computer screen for

something to hang on to, something to inspire her own leadership, her own learning. The way Anne leaned into the conversation, sighing, head nodding, smiling, and sometimes even gasps of frustration, helped me feel her energy and her desire to make things better. With such big topics for us to discuss, there was always the possibility of it becoming philosophical and abstract, long-winded, and never getting closer to what you wanted to say, but with Anne's honesty and trust in the relationship that we had developed, I was able to follow the nuances in our discussions, and my own instincts allowed me to ask more. There were times when, after a long time of her talking about her understanding of decolonization and leadership, I would observe her take a deep breath and lower her shoulders. She relaxed. Like, as if, this conversation about the struggles, realities, and tensions in this work, was just what she needed for herself. I was willing to listen to anything she had to say, and though I would suggest that it is better to walk side-by-side, instead of staring at one another face-to-face, via Zoom, the space that was created allowed her to be neither frightened nor embarrassed, certainly not shy. Anne expressed her frustration:

I was so frustrated on Friday because the teachers blame the students, they blame COVID, there are so many excuses. We looked at our report card data on Friday and, you know, sixty percent of our grade one students received an indicator of 1 (need footnote) for reading comprehension. I tried to open up a conversation around that and the responses were "it's the student's fault," "it's because they are coded". I was frustrated. Then in a conversation that I was having with the assistant principal I realized that I was speaking of the teachers the way that they were speaking of their students. I need to reflect on my leadership practice because if teachers are not doing well in the building, and I mean, doing well with quality teaching and learning, finding exciting new ways to

engage students, it should come back and sit on my shoulders. What am I not exposing them to as a way of transforming their practice so that they can then transform the way they are teaching, and the way students are learning in their classrooms? That is what I need to reflect on, and I know this is what I need to change. I need to expose them to different professional learning and I don't feel like I am doing a good enough job with that.

When I listened to what Anne described, I was reminded of my own thinking, and the ways that I perceive good work. In sharing my own story alongside Anne's, I reflected on what I considered high quality teaching and learning. I thought about William E. Doll's (1993) rich, rigorous, relational, and recursive task design, and Friesen's (2009) description of what makes work worthwhile and what is required when designing experiences with and for young people. It was Chambers (1996) that inspired my first thinking about story, and that educators must learn ways of asking particular questions, beginning with themselves, in how to uncover meaning.

Importantly, Chambers' notes, "there is no quick way, and there is no way but practice" (p. 2). Not only was I making connections with what Anne was describing, from her perspective as an instructional leader as to what constitutes good teaching and learning, I was also making connections to the questioning and living alongside as part of narrative inquiry. Anne began to wonder if she needed to consider differently her role as instructional leader of a school. With a sense of desperation, she asked, "(sigh) what am I going to do?"

What was evident to me through my conversations and reflections with Anne, was that her orientation to leadership was through a learning lens and that she was open to new ways of thinking, and unlearning, to support new (old) ways of teaching and learning. In *Student-centred leadership*, Robinson (2011) suggests that there are five dimensions on how leadership impacts

optimal learning in schools: establishing goals and expectations, resourcing strategically, ensuring quality teaching, leading teacher learning and development, and ensuring an orderly and safe environment (p. 9). Of these five dimensions, Robinson explains that leading teacher learning and development has the largest effect size; “when leaders provide high-quality opportunities for teachers to learn those practices, student-learning goals are more likely to be achieved” (p. 11). In Anne’s own practice it was clear that she was craving more professional learning for herself so that she could provide opportunities for the teachers to learn as well. She explained that she “values students as co-creators of knowledge” and that she “believes in the importance of creating those rich and rigorous learning experiences”. When I asked Anne about what she believes it will take to promote positive change in decolonizing education in particular she noted:

I think there is a desire to change some practices but I truly don’t think that they (teachers) know how to do it and while we make baby steps and small progressions forward, they continue to slip back into the ways of doing what they know how to do. It’s the way we were taught and so they continue to teach in those ways.

She described a type of listening and learning that demonstrated her own reflection of being a person of privilege:

I am coming from white privilege myself. I think I’ve had to unlearn a lot of those advantages, or at least acknowledge the advantages that I have had. I didn’t really struggle with anything educationally, as I grew up, so there’s that piece again. I came from a very traditional middle class white environment so racism wasn’t really something that I experienced. I think unlearning some of those assumptions that I have definitely seen myself, and I think again unlearning those traditional ways of teaching and learning

that I've experienced, I've been in the profession long enough that even when I went through my own educational degree experience I wasn't learning any of these different ways of educating students. There was nothing about multidisciplinary practices. For example, there wasn't anything about rethinking the way we assess students, and allowing students to have voice and choice in how they either choose what it is they're interested in, or even allowing them to be part of the feedback process. I've had to unlearn a lot of what I experienced myself as a student to then how I was taught how to be a teacher, and even later on, how I envisioned leading in an educational setting. I think I've had to unlearn the power differential. I'm trying to take away some of that ego within my own practice, and allow teachers to have voice and choice, and in how we structure the environment, how we present the teaching and learning to students. I would say on all levels there is a number of things that I've had to unlearn, but at the same time there's been little snippets and bits within my own learning and teaching and leading, that I have had privilege as well to experience.

It was not any one experience that Anne spoke about that clarified her thinking, it was in how she recounted all the learning that she had experienced in her life overtime, that has helped her find her way in the midst of pressures, various challenges, and personal struggle. She talked about her love of music and her early passion for teaching when she was given the freedom to help students learn the importance of having a desire to work hard, develop skills, and love learning. It became part of who she is in the world, and it is different from what she can simply apply to leadership and her understanding of decolonizing education. Who she is, and who she is becoming, has allowed her to be reflective and be with others in this work.

After our first conversation, I had asked Anne if she had reflected on our time together. She said that she had, and that she had become even more frustrated as she really thought about what educators are doing (and not doing) in the school system. She asked:

Is it that teachers are burnt out, that they are just done right now, and they just can't put any more into the profession than they already are? And then how do I, as the instructional leader and as the person who exposes them, or brings learning to them, how do I do that in a compassionate way, yet in a way that will create change? I really become quite overwhelmed when I start talking about it and thinking about it.

I think about the spin leaders put on their work in leadership roles as a way of convincing themselves and others about the interests that are served. What leads people into the work in which they find themselves and what keeps them there? I imagine that in turning toward something, like in Anne's case, wanting to do a better job of impacting quality teaching and learning by influencing practice through her own understanding of decolonizing schools and education, she is always turning away from something else. Anne mentioned:

I feel like there is this accountability piece, even though they say don't worry about it. I really do think that, you know, that has been the big shift over the last three or four years, where now everything is just data and accountability. Everything we do is recorded and tracked and sent in somewhere. I just think, what would it be like if principals were just allowed to lead? There's this big gray area between what it means to have a system vision with, prove everything that you're doing right and don't worry if you have nothing to put on the spreadsheet, but still send it in anyway and just say, I haven't done this yet.

My interpretation of what Anne is connecting to is that when the entire endeavor becomes one of managing, you lose your heart, with nothing left to feed your soul. Teaching and leading is hard, and if the work involves the wrong ‘stuff’ and you *know* it is the wrong ‘stuff’, you lose the passion. What Anne has described is how it has been played out and has become the curriculum for the school division, and has become tangential to the work of decolonization.

Is it possible that as leaders are being asked to turn towards data and accountability, local measures, system measures, provincial measures, that they are turning away from what sparks their soul in the field of education - worthwhile learning, creating and collaborating around quality task design and assessment, through the lens of equity and inclusion, to ensure that all students are engaged every day. Though I do not believe in this simple dichotomy, I do think it is important to pose the question to confront the space in-between. It is interesting that turning toward that which leaves an impression, or is compelling, is not always easy to do, as it not only asks to turn toward something, but to accompany an ideology along the way. The idea of accompaniment is echoed by Freire (1970/2014) and that when you sharpen your ability to listen to what people are telling you, you become susceptible and able to respond, as suggested by Greene (2001), that learning how to listen arrives or is achieved by a certain effort. Part of what led me to this study was the desire to hear other people’s stories about topics that I, too, consider important in contemporary educational contexts, and to ask myself, what are you doing here and why? I am equally moving away from something and moving toward something at the same time by pursuing this doctoral study. I, too, needed an interruption and a reminder about what is important in this work. Throughout our conversations, there was a type of listening that I became attuned to, a listening that I was encouraged to find, especially when she took her risks in sharing, quite frankly, her thoughts about what needs to be done in our education system. It was

in this reflection, listening to Anne speak, that caused her, and me, to become attuned to our memories and our capacity to know, what is necessary and what is right. Anne asked, “how do we help students understand the whole process of decolonization *and* that we still have this very Eurocentric idea of schooling? (sigh) - that’s what they are currently experiencing”.

Anne reflected on her work and her understanding of how to lead the work of decolonization in schools:

I think part of what has lingered with me is the land-based learning that we were doing and wondering, how well are we actually doing with that? In having a look at the new curriculum that is coming forward, and again, thinking, how do we as leaders within the educational setting, support that as part of our professional obligation? At the same time as presenting that as a way that students still have some agency and some voice within what they’re learning. Again, in thinking about Freire’s work and without getting frustrated, or kind of throwing your hands up in the air. Is the problem in the environment structure itself? Students don’t have agency and voice in their learning? Is this the sort of state of where we are in our education system right now with all that’s been going on in the world?

Anne drew a parallel to Freire’s (2014) description of the “banking concept of education” (p. 72) where deposits are made by the teacher and consumed by the students.

I think the bottleneck pieces I would say are those everyday lived experiences that I’m not seeing change and progress in what we’re doing. So, when I walk into classrooms and I’m still seeing the whole class experience with worksheets, the pencils, even the books where everyone is reading the same book. For me that is where I don’t see progress it just

continues to be the old traditional way of teaching and learning. Even though we have done some professional learning, they continue to go back to that place of comfort for them. And so, that again, as I said, they just can't do anymore than they're already doing.

I asked Anne to explain further where she had experienced breakthroughs in her leadership practice. She took a ten second pause, leaned back in her chair, and started:

Some of the breakthroughs that I've seen, I had a small group of teachers come to me, we decided to create an Indigenous learning team. Who would take on that leadership role and bring forward some of that learning to the staff, and they really took that on, and they created resources. They did some professional learning with teachers. They did an amazing June 21st day, where we kind of, again, broke out of what we had always done or what they had always done, and we had some different experiences with the students. They were taking groups of students outside when they could, and just doing some sit spots and some land-based learning. We have a really nice park just down the block from the school that they had never really, well, they had never gone to, and just experienced some learning outside and taking the curriculum outside of the building. So there have been some pleasant surprises and some breakthroughs. I would say that staff is more open to bringing in the land-based learning in those Indigenous ways of knowing again. It's still very surface level, but there has been minor progress.

Anne continued to explain that they had worked alongside an Elder for the month in spring, working with students. The teachers became very engaged in learning and in the work, sparking new ways of knowing and doing, and they continued some of that work in the classroom after the Elder was no longer in the building. She mentioned, "that was a really pleasant thing to see as well, that they had embraced that experience, continued that learning in

the classroom, and dove a little bit deeper.” As Anne described her thoughts, I listened for ways the invitation, call, demand, desire in the work, continued to pull her further into wanting to have more impact. I heard through her voice, and saw in her gestures, a sense of responsibility in which she felt bound.

According to Pratt and Danyluk (2018) “Reconciliation requires humility, understanding and active listening” (p. 206). Encountering challenges as a school leader can be disorienting and without an understanding of how colonialism affected, and continues to affect Indigenous people, school administrators and teachers are likely to be ineffective and ill-equipped in the classroom and in the school community in general. Supporting teachers who are better able to understand the complexities as they relate to curriculum and schooling, meaning shifting an understanding of an educational gap from a deficit perspective to their own gaps in knowledge (Pratt & Danyluk, 2018). There is much work to be accomplished.

A recent study (Friesen, et. al, 2022) conducted in “36 Alberta school jurisdictions, several public charter schools, and a number of Independent schools” (p. 10) has shown that despite efforts to increase knowledge and understanding, teachers and school administrators are still expressing Competency 5 as a major area of focus in their own professional learning. Alberta teachers indicated they seemed to be accessing a variety of professional learning opportunities and many of these are discernably impacting their practice. On the other hand, results could also be interpreted as the professional learning teachers are accessing is not helping to further or deepen their practice at higher levels as articulated by the Teaching Quality Standard (2020). As Anne mentioned, in her experience, what is required is “more professional learning, with a focus on how to decolonize education”. She explained that in response to this need for increased competency, her school was provided an Indigenous Education Learning

Leader (IELL) to improve practice, and provide resources to the teachers. Though, she mentions, this may look different in different schools, her experience was that there was a person (who was not Indigenous) placed in the building, with the intention of supporting the learning environment and increasing achievement for students. In reality, the situation looked very different than what was intended. Meetings were established so that they could look over data on spreadsheets and teachers were given opportunities to read about more resources. Anne stated, “this wasn’t helpful, I wasn’t interested in looking over data. I wanted to know how to better support teachers in finding ways to improve their practice.” Anne was referring to a need for professional learning to enhance competency in how to “accurately reflect and demonstrate the strength and diversity of First Nations, Métis and Inuit” (Teaching Quality Standard, 2020). Without professional learning for school administrators, in taking up this work as pedagogy, understanding worldviews, engaging in conversation about knowledge systems, and how this impacts teaching practice, it may be determined that many are finding they feel ill-equipped to confidently lead this work. The role of a school leader is to make a considerable difference to student achievement by focusing on teaching effectiveness and improvement (Robinson, 2008). When teachers are engaging in professional learning, about relevant pedagogy, in professional learning communities there can be higher outcomes for learning (Timperley, 2011, 2020).

Ensuring that teachers are receiving high quality professional learning by highly qualified personnel is essential to ensuring the fidelity of implementation of the Teaching Quality Standard... Many teachers report that they have a low level of need to continuous professional learning as it relates to the implementation of the standards; however, in reporting on the forms of professional learning they are accessing, they appear to be

missing the forms of professional learning that build collective efficacy. (Friesen, et. al, 2022, pp. 25-26)

As the study suggests, and in response to Anne's desire for different and "better" professional learning, she shared how she understands her own role in leading the work of decolonizing education:

Oh, my personal approach to decolonizing education is to take those baby steps to really change the way we are educating students today at all at all levels of learning. It's about engaging students in learning in a different way. It's about shifting the power so the power is no longer sitting with the adult and the teacher in the classroom being that all knowing individual and allowing students to have choice and agency within their learning experiences into have teachers co-create those experiences with students, and I have even been thinking about restructuring the whole learning environment. So even just restructuring the whole learning environment for teachers and students. There's just so much that I would like to do, and again, bringing some of those Indigenous ways of knowing, bringing more spirituality into the learning, the caring, the just the freedom I guess for students and teachers to be able to express freely if there's just so much like going on just changing the whole culture of my learning environment. Well, I get overwhelmed, as I mentioned, but I also, as I start speaking like this, I know that I overwhelm people, too, because basically the way it's being done now would have to change, change the pedagogy, and the way we present that to students, and how students learn, the whole assessment practice, and the shift in the way we organize for learning. It would all change.

What Anne is discussing is the turn towards cultural inquiry in curriculum. This turn finds rationalization in the works of scholars of cultural politics in education (Apple, 2012; Grain & Lund, 2016, Freire, 1970/2012) who have shared the ways in which school knowledge is deconstructed in the interests of power groups. The contention is that the purpose of school is to create a form of consciousness that enables the inclusion of the knowledge and culture of dominant groups as the official knowledge for all students, thereby allowing dominant groups to maintain social control (Kanu, 2011).

While I was re-watching the interview video, I held an image in my mind of Anne leading professional learning with her staff, about the topics she had raised as important to her: students as co-creators of knowledge, worthwhile work, breaking down structures, providing opportunities to do things differently. I envisioned the staff whom she would lead, turning toward one another (Wheatley, 2002) in conversation about how to best decolonize our education system. In conversation, not because there is a TQS and a LQS guiding them, but because it is what school is for (Orr, 2004). I envisioned them gathering toward something in which they are oriented because they have the energy and passion for the work, uninterrupted by data checks and deadlines. In Anne's perspective, this is the work required in schools.

Chapter 6: M's Story

Unlearning

Battiste (2013) writes, “Every school is either a site of reproduction or a site of change” (p. 175). If what schools are doing is continuing to marginalize students, there is a responsibility to change this system, and there is a lot of work to do. A school principal’s story, who has requested to be called “M”, surfaces complexities in our world: the role of newcomers and their experiences of trying to fit in to a society; the role of government in determining where funding is allocated in public schools; the role of teachers, school leaders, and system leaders to ensure schools are welcoming, caring, safe and respectful; the role of curriculum, both hidden and taught; and the role of families to provide insight into an otherwise unknown world. This story highlights the need for teachers to learn to confront racism and other biases in schools. M’s story reveals the importance of learning as much as possible about the process of decolonizing education and its impact on all students, teachers, leaders and families, and the role of curriculum in changing education in becoming more inclusive, honouring all voices and considering all worldviews, and specifically about the experiences of newcomers. Most important to this story, is what M describes as an emergency, the reality of what happens when an Elder passes and with their passing is the reality of losing access to more teachings and knowledge. M also describes her own realization that she has been relying on learning that occurred over fifteen years ago and, as she explained, this process of being included in a narrative inquiry has been the most impactful professional learning she has engaged in in over a decade.

M comes to this story positioned by different lived experiences, stories, and histories that intersect to reveal her own defined privileges. M is a white Settler descendent whose heritage can be traced back to Norway, Sweden, England, and Scotland; a family that settled the land in

Canada over four generations ago. M explained, “I come from a white, Protestant, liberal family.” She was born and raised in the northwest of Calgary, in a family she would describe as academics and professionals. M shared how she came to teaching and eventually school leadership.

How did I come to teaching? Well, teaching has always been a thing for me. I kept coming back to it. As a younger person I was a leader and camp counsellor. When I went to Sunday School as a kid I became a Sunday school teacher. Just kind of always worked in education. I have always felt that learning is the most important thing that humans can do. And I want to contribute to that. Learning has saved me in a lot of different situations that either I didn't want to be in, or weren't really good for me, or in a way that wasn't good for other people. Especially when I think about reading. I thought, you know, if I can help kids learn how to understand, that's really what brought me to education. From teaching, I moved into a role as a learning leader, then I kind of stumbled into a specialist role just because I continued to be interested in learning. In my specialist role I was able to work with many very diverse school leaders and I saw the way that some of them were able to impact entire schools and teachers. I thought, I want to strive towards creating a school culture where teachers realize the impact they can have where they can really enable and empower students. That's how I came to leadership, but I haven't been able to do this yet. I am in a building where a lot of work needs to be done, and then Covid hit.

M's reflection here resonates with my own personal story. I see the similarities in our past experiences that led us both to teaching and eventually school leadership: Sunday school, a passion for learning, stumbling into positions, striving to create change. Additionally, I, too,

descend from Settlers who arrived from Scotland, England, Norway, and Sweden. It struck me as interesting that that we have such a similar background. Through our conversations it was apparent that both M and I have spent significant time sitting with the truth about Settler colonialism and how it has afforded both of us significant privilege. Tuck and Yang (2012) stated “settler colonialism can be visually understood as the unbroken place of invasion, and settler occupation, into Native lands” (p. 25). Coming to know and understand colonialism and its place in education, also can be understood as Simpson (2014) describes, “within the context of settler colonialism, Indigenous peoples are not seen as worthy...part of being colonized is having to engage in all kinds of processes on a daily basis” (p. 15). Both descriptions are identified in M’s own interpretation in her own role in colonialism:

My role in colonialism is that I speak the two colonial languages that dominated this country which is why the next language I learned, and am learning, is Blackfoot. I decided that’s where I will start. Knowing French and English are both privileged languages, they get me around to a lot of places around the world where a bunch of white people live. I think colonialism is when one country establishes dominance over another country, often by force. What we see now is colonialism continues to live and thrive because of the colonial voice and language; the colonial culture is what is privileged. It’s privileged in a secret way now where it’s just normal. The norm is colonial white. It’s privileged. We don’t say it’s privileged; we say it’s regular. It’s normal. When we talk about difference in school, we think that’s helpful, but the word difference just means not white, not straight, that’s what difference means.

M’s example of difference in school reminds me about what Willinsky (1998) wrote, “we are schooled in difference great and small, in borderlines and boundaries, in historical struggles and

exotic practices, all of which extend the meaning of difference” (p. 1). In considering my own story alongside M’s I continue to ask myself important questions in how I too, support teachers in acknowledging their racist past and privileged positions. How do I best support educators in confronting their own biases to shift the current landscape in education? What about my own biases? Students will come forward and tell their teachers a lot with their words and through their actions, and educators often see their communication as threatening because they are fearful, or defiant, because they are controlling (Baker, 2017). Duchscher (2018) described their own experience by commenting, “I found that I have only learned of one race in school. I have learned of white history, white authors, white scientists, white musicians and artists” (p. 137). Considering this perspective then, one that reflects the experiences shared by countless students, does it then encourage teachers and school leaders to open up space to engage in more meaningful conversations with students and families? M described her own thoughts:

The worst thing you can do is make something so insurmountable that people say, we aren’t going to be able to do this anyway. There is racism in schools, and we aren’t going to fix it right now, but we are doing something better than what we did yesterday, and we can get people to commit to that and so it is slow, but it’s better than nothing and I think that’s where I am at with leadership. Just a little bit every day. It’s like that parable of the little hummingbird. Teachers will always be driven by a question and will try to solve that. So, if the question you are asking yourself is what are we going to ‘do’ on Monday, then the answer is activity planning and then focus is on the task because the activity is there and your job is to do the activity. Whereas, if the focus is on meaning and learning, then the question is, what meaning are the students making? What are they learning? What are they figuring out and what’s next and it’s not because teachers are not smart.

They don't have the time to think about it and I haven't had the opportunity to carve out that time with them because they are all at a place where we are still coming out of a pandemic, so they are just trying to survive. So, we're in activity mode and 'are you on task' mode. We are not in experience, learning, and what are you figuring out? We are not in that place right now and that is my next step as a leader. People need time to reflect and look at what their values are and ask if the actions they are taking are bringing their values to bear. If you say you value equity, like I'm sure most people do, then you need to take action on it. I see a ton of opportunity in decolonizing education because of that slow little step. We are going to purchase a whole bunch of new texts for our learning commons because the parent council gave us money to do this. So, there's something. For me, as a leader, the opportunities are in the people who are on their way, and I need to invest in those people in the school. The dilemma is that we work with humans. Lots of humans. Vulnerable little humans. I think most leaders have a moral imperative to serve children and make sure they are learning well. We also work with adults, who most of them want that for kids as well but sometimes those adults are doing things that are stopping that, and so we step in and have a conversation about a choice of book as an example. The adults are probably putting in a lot of work and effort but it's not okay for me as a leader to let things go if they aren't ethical. The dilemma is that when things are racist, or inequitable, or unfair, that we name it and point it out. The dilemma is who is the priority, and the priority is the children.

M's articulation of the moral and ethical imperative of a school principal to name and address oppressive and racist acts within the school are evident. Anti-oppressive education is based on the notion that many of the ideas considered commonsense in teaching and learning

contribute to a continued cycle of oppression in schools, and therefore in society (Freire, 1970/2012; hooks, 1994; Kumashiro, 2004). In Paulo Freire's (1970/2012) seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he writes that "an act is oppressive when it prevents people from being fully human" (p. 57), and that oppression is "initiated by those with power" (p. 58). Kumashiro (2004) explains that schools do address oppression but that they do it in ways that continue to reinforce it and allow it to play out unchallenged. He explains that there are number of approaches to anti-oppressive education. Firstly, a focus on improving the experiences of students who have traditionally been treated harmfully and that schools are often spaces where harmful interactions (discrimination, harassment, exclusion) characterize the experience of some students and that a failure of school personnel to intervene and a lack of attention by educators needs to be addressed. This first approach is echoed by M. Secondly, Kumashiro states that educators need to broaden students' understanding of difference by integrating richer conversations and experiences into curriculum, and that oppressive social dynamics are sustained by various social structures and ideologies (racial hierarchies, gender stereotypes, heterosexist cultural norms). Finally, he explains that educators often find comfort in repeating what is already considered common sense even if these ideas are oppressive and that educators need to address their own desires and resistances to teaching and learning certain things. M identifies these calling them normal practices. Looking closely at these ideas, with respect to current structures, there is potential to reveal that what many educators are doing in schools is continuing to oppress students and families, intentionally and unintentionally. Some of these well intended actions are enacted under the guise of inclusive education.

As M shared her story, I reflected on my own experiences of how teachers and school administrators, though seemingly well-intentioned, continue to oppress students and families

through their self-proclaimed acts of generosity, and their misunderstanding of inclusion. There have been many times in my own experience that I have listened to teachers and school administrators describe themselves as the reason why a student is successful, statements such as, “if it wasn’t for me, who knows where this student would be?”, or “luckily, I was able to help [student] explain to their parents why they need to play on the basketball team. If it wasn’t for me, who knows where she would be now.” Maxine Greene (2015) describes this as malefic generosity, a term she states she borrowed from Freire, that points to the idea of the kind of person who desires to lead others out of the valley of darkness. The concern, as she notes, is that there is no intention to equip them to liberate themselves, but benevolently to liberate them, and that is malefic. As she explains, it is a question about empowering people to change their own worlds in light of their own desires, not to change it for them (Museumofed, 2015). Lund and Grain (2018) similarly describe a self-congratulatory notion that occurs when well-intentioned, privileged educators, consider their acts of compassion as the determining factor or reason why students from marginalized communities could be successful. However, if we only move from compassion to charity, the act of giving (e.g. donations and hand-outs), then as a society we are never reaching solidarity, the end goal of what Freire (1970/2012) would call emancipatory education.

When asked to describe the professional learning that M has engaged in with respect to decolonizing education, it was revealed that she has had the extreme fortune of learning alongside Elders and academics for many years:

It actually started when I was doing my graduate work at University of Lethbridge. My U of L cohort was called reading and writing the world and that helped me to understand.

You heard me speak earlier about reading. Reading is a really big deal. It is tremendously

empowering if you can read. When I was in this cohort I realized, oh, there are a lot of texts. The late Narcisse Blood came and actually read the land to us. And I thought, what is happening? It was great because I didn't know the land was a text. I am a white Anglo-Saxon protestant that grew up with two university professors as parents and one as a university research scientist. We read all the time and I didn't know that you read things other than books, so that helped me go, oh, there's a lot of texts out there and there are a lot of things out there that we can interpret and actually this person who is coming to show us how he reads I thought, oh, he just knows so many things that I actually didn't know because all I've ever done is read words, and maybe films. That opened my eyes to the idea that there are a whole bunch of different knowledges and I didn't know that until now. And if I'm finding out now that you can read the land as text, maybe there are a whole bunch of other ways of knowing as well.

During an interview with Leroy Little Bear in 2008, Don Hill, a “thought leader in the Banff Centre’s Leadership Development Program, wrote that Little Bear, a renowned Blackfoot Elder, educator emeritus at the University of Lethbridge, and former director of native studies at Harvard University, believes that there is “an unspoken language that makes it possible to bridge every worldview, a language that can be learned through dialogue – the willingness to set aside preconceived ideas and listen not only with your mind but with your heart” (Hill, 2008, p. 41). In starting to bridge gap that every worldview can be learned if we set aside preconceived notions, M makes the following connection:

I realized there is so much privilege. Reading is privileged, and I'm discovering through trying to be a better teacher that written text is still privileged, the fact that this person could come and read us the land. I don't know if many people in that course cared, but I

sure did. Narcisse Blood was killed in a car accident three years ago, and I can never get that knowledge back. So that is an emergency to me. I know there is privilege in that, and I know it's not just in text, but that is when I started to realize there are some things we consider more important, and there are some things that we throw our resources behind more than other things, and they continue to be colonial texts. They are things that we value as colonial people – even now our government is throwing money behind gaps in literacy and really it is still reading and writing and numeracy because we are worried that if our kids can't do that they won't be successful and no one really cares that our kids don't want to get outside and don't know what to do with themselves when they are out there and that's just as big of a problem. I'm seeing that there's privilege everywhere still. My masters was in literary métissage and Narcisse sort of started me on that and then I worked with Cynthia Chambers. I wanted to study reading and writing the world more. It's a gift from the universe to me that Cynthia dropped in, and Carl Leggo dropped in. And now Carl Leggo is gone too.

What M shared resonates with me because I understand her positionality as a privileged White woman, and, that she is clear on who she is, and how she lives her role as instructional leader. In my interpretation, M is a good example of someone who demonstrates curriculum-as-lived (Aoki, 1993), and a very good example of someone who had the extreme privilege to learn from Canadian curriculum scholars, who shared important worldviews early on in her career. Her influence by scholars such as Cynthia Chambers, Dwayne Donald, Carl Leggo, Narcisse Blood, all contribute to who she is today and highlight how much she has benefitted from exposure to such important and influential scholars, and that her own learning about decolonizing education began years ago in a classroom at the University of Lethbridge. Chambers' (2006) names four

challenges for Canadian curriculum theorists: write from this place; write in a language of our own; find interpretive tools that arise from and fit for this place; and create a topography for Canadian curriculum” (p. 30).

In M’s story I can identify these challenges as Chambers described them. A curriculum of *métissage* (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009) seeks a reunion between divergent identities and histories (Donald, 2012), and works toward a reconciliation between the identities and histories, especially Indigenous and non-Indigenous traditions (Blood et al., 2012). I can hear M’s own conciliation as she untangles her understanding of what she knew reading to be, as it lived out in her experience of being raised by two scholarly parents, and then how her understanding was interrupted and disrupted when learning alongside curriculum scholars and Elders’ teachings, especially associated with reading, in particular, reading the land.

When considering curriculum, and the question of who gets to decide what knowledge is of most worth, it is important to first look at anti-racist approaches to schooling. As Zine (2010) explains, an anti-racist approach to schooling and curriculum considers the social, cultural, economic and political relations of privilege and marginalization that occur among different groups in society showing that categories of social difference are intrinsically linked. Race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, and disability are the layered identities that people inhabit. Recognizing and challenging the forms of oppression based on these identifications is central to the rupturing of systemic oppression. Multi-centric education acknowledges the multiple ways of knowing and making sense of the world, represented by different knowledge systems. Even though there are many different centers of knowledge, the Eurocentric approach to what is considered legitimate knowledge has dominated education for generations; this has de-legitimized other ways of knowing that shape the multitude of realities, identities, and

worldviews of the learners in our diverse classrooms (p. 38). There is an opportunity in schools to engage in a multicentric model that could potentially de-center the Eurocentric knowledge so that other knowledges could be considered. It is important that teachers understand that this does not mean that they must do more, rather, that they will do things differently with the intention of challenging the status quo of education and beginning to pull apart the many layers of oppression that exist in our schools today. Through her own experience as a school leader M explains the importance of not only considering what texts to use, but how to include more than just Eurocentric models:

The discussions need to change and the texts need to change. A lot of our French stuff comes from Quebec and France. It's funny because there is French all over the world but we don't have French texts from Africa, or Creole. We have students whose families speak French because that's the colonial power in the part of the world that they come from. I think the texts need to change because kids are still seeing white as the norm. It's often the Caucasian skinned children in the books that we are looking into which leads to another conversation about microaggressions that we are seeing in the school. Kids are starting to notice each other more since masks have come off and they are curious. They are saying things that are unkind and we need to move beyond "oh, they're just kids!" Kids feel different. I do think that the conversations are starting to change. Where I am stuck as a leader is that our students need more exposure to students with different backgrounds. We can find that on YouTube – it's not that hard. It does get harder when things need to be in French because then it becomes this highly European thing that we're showing them. There are many other French speaking countries that we need to start figuring out. We have hired a French speaking woman from Burundi and her French is

beautiful, it's just a different French. Kids need to hear there's more than just European French. Our education assistant is from Morocco and she speaks beautiful Moroccan French and there are all of these countries where French is the language of education. They aren't writing a lot of storybooks and they don't have videos on YouTube.

What M is describing here is that we all live with a legacy of the violence of colonization in unacknowledged ways; in our laws, histories, institutions, economy, and education systems; additionally, she is speaking about other epistemologies standing beside those of who colonized Canada – the French and the English. Why would Moroccan French not be valued in the same way? Is it because it is not Quebec or France French? Including Moroccan French is not negating Western traditions. Then, is it possible for Indigenous knowledges and ontologies to stand side-by-side, to be considered knowledge systems seen as equally legitimate, with an appreciation that one knowledge system does not hold hegemonic authority over the other? M's story surfaces the need for educators to seek deeper understanding of how different experiences and histories position themselves and bump up against one another. Her story brings forth this notion of unlearning and highlights the difficult work required in order to be responsible in all our relations (Donald, 2012b).

With respect to the education system more specifically, Battiste (2013) explains that “cognitive imperialism is about white-washing the mind as a result of forced assimilation” and what is being called for is a decolonized education “that seeks to reconcile contemporary education with the past and with the peoples' present” (Smith, 2012, p. 26). Within the context of M's story is a reminder or a direct connection to how the system has been whitewashed to accept as normal, as given, the knowledge systems that owe their legacy to Greek and Roman traditions.

Even though several students in this school would represent visible minorities, the school is still selecting resources that are representative of white people. This would seem then to be an area that needs to be focussed on in the education system. Not only is it about locating and selecting resources, in the French language, that represent the full range of students that are in schools, it is about accepting and including other epistemologies.

To create real systemic change, educators can begin by considering those who have been silenced in schools and provide opportunities to engage with families in positive ways. One way to address systemic oppression and racism in school is to look at the role of curriculum, particularly the familial curriculum, and the hidden curriculum. There are many worlds that exist within children, families, and communities.

Those of us who work in school curriculum-making worlds often do not understand how the experiences of youth in their familial curriculum-making worlds sustain them in schools. If curriculum making can be understood as life making and if an understanding of curriculum making can be broadened to understand curriculum making as occurring in multiple worlds, both in schools and outside of schools, then we can more intentionally engage questions and wonders about the multiple curriculum-making worlds that any one particular child/youth lives with. (Lessard et al., 2015, p. 210).

There is a wealth of knowledge to draw on when educators engage families in their child's learning at school. When doing so, educators also need to consider the role of the hidden curriculum in schools to positively impact change. The hidden curriculum refers to the unintended outcomes of the schooling process. This includes the messages that are transmitted to students by the environment, structures, expectations, and procedures (McLaren, 2009). What

work needs to be done to insist on a truly inclusive school that provides opportunities for all students to see themselves represented in the discourse? M explains her perspective:

I know my whole family is white, my in-laws are white. I read and listen to podcasts. I try to listen more and colonialism privileges education. It privileges certain things. It privileges literacy of print, men, mathematical memorization, not fluency. And our government is showing us that with its dollars. We must start valuing more things. I know that I have to start widening my lens. I'm going to have to figure out where my blind spots are.

One part of the leadership tension in this work is the very real suggestion that there is an incredible amount of learning on the part of both instructional leaders, and teachers. How can school principals lead the challenging work of decolonizing education if they themselves are ill-equipped to carry on difficult conversations that challenge assumptions and push practice? One of the research questions guiding this inquiry asks participants to describe the bottlenecks and breakthroughs in this work. M offered the following when asked specifically to describe a bottleneck:

I'm experiencing one now. I'll give you an example of one teacher. I have one who is really only ever calling home for parents whose children are not the same culture and skin tone as her. I imagine she calls home to all parents like this but when she is calling home it's just a list of all the stuff their kids are doing wrong or missing or needing. It's never here's what I observe and how can we work together? Because here's what they need to be able to thrive in the classroom, it's always just, well they're out in the field, and they stay behind the doors, and they don't come in on time. And they aren't prepared to go outside, and they don't put their own coat on. They don't know they're cold and so I see

the pattern, and I am having a very difficult time having a conversation around that, because what she's saying are facts. She doesn't say those facts about other kids who match her skin tone as much. And I find myself ill equipped to have that conversation because she is saying things that are true. Yeah, that kid hides a lot in the school yard, and we have to go make sure he comes in. Yes, those kids show up with no coats. Yep, that kid is in flip flops in February or in April, because parents heard it was spring. And I can't argue with that, I can't say, why are you phoning families for that? But I also find myself ill-equipped to say it certainly seemed to be only pointing that out about children who are different from you. I know I should say it. I do not know how to start that conversation, cause it's so sticky to me.

What M describes as “so sticky” highlights how difficult it is to address racism. She has to walk a fine line as she does not want to make matters worse; however, she also wants this teacher to reflect on and change her work. These are not just problems for this teacher, but for all teachers, because there are cultural norms of how to do school that are new or foreign to some children and their families. These norms manifest themselves in the smallest ways, for example, what footwear to put on and when, what food is considered appropriate for school lunches, and whether to enter first through a door or hold it open for someone else. After sitting with M and listening to her story, and considering my own story alongside hers, I was reminded of the importance of our structures and processes in the work of school leadership. When there are particular processes in place, such as frequent meetings with teachers, professional learning communities centered on equity, inclusion, and achievement, when there are opportunities for teachers to challenge one another, engage in professional reading and discourse together, and when the culture of a school is guided by a desire to support a generation of young people who

care deeply about the land, human rights, and their education then there may be less feelings of being ill-equipped in this work. In reflecting on her story about a bottleneck, M was able to share an example of a breakthrough in this work as well.

I had a breakthrough with the same teacher. I had a parent meeting with her because she did phone home for a child. There was a kid that didn't get all fours on her report card, and the dad was actually very clear with her (the teacher) that she's a mixed race student. So, dad is black, mom is of European descent. Dad actually said straight out to the teacher, look, my kid is mixed race. You do not understand what this is like, and she is smart and I'm shocked that she doesn't have fours because she goes to Kumon and she knows how to do everything. And you need to know. This kid needs fours, and I can understand the dad's point. He is flat out saying, like, no, things are going to be tougher for her because of his experience. It is essential that she's getting fours, and she's not, and he came into the school, and he said he just needed to know why, and he was fairly forceful about it. But he wasn't rude or disrespectful but the teacher was like, "this is a race thing and they're saying I'm being racist – they don't understand that they don't understand Kumon." And I suggested that we meet and they said, OK. So, let's have a conversation just around learning and the child, and what the child does, and we can help them understand assessment in the CBE and we can help them understand how Kumon works, and that you have a plan to help her move forward. So, I was able to get that same teacher into a conversation where she thought they were saying she was being racist. It works to keep the conversation on the child and her learning because that's actually what parents were asking about. They think their kid is smart as a button and they are but they think that should translate to all fours, and it didn't, and so that's been a breakthrough,

just to be able to say, “let’s talk about the kid, let’s talk about learning, even though dad seems to have thrown it out.” He didn’t call the teacher racist, the teacher thinks there’s a race thing happening. We can just focus on the kid and learning and that’s what I hope all our conversations can be.

Though M is describing a breakthrough in being able to engage a teacher in conversation, she is also sharing here about how racism works in school: the defensiveness on the part of the teacher, the inability for the teacher to produce evidence from the student’s learning to help the father under his child’s learning - it is clear that he sees math as something to be memorized and values the perspective of Kumon - the missed opportunity to share about equitable assessment practices that effectively communicate achievement. Are there ways to educate and not just move into defensive mode? As M shared her story, I continued to think about the bottlenecks and breakthroughs as she described them. She highlighted a bottleneck in her story – the obvious struggle in moving work forward in schools, insisting on inclusive practices, and supporting teachers in uncovering their own biases. She also describes a breakthrough in her description of supporting a family and a teacher in bringing together two worldviews. I think about the work that was central to the TRC – truth-telling and believing that truths are related to the lived experiences of residential school survivors and the legacy of colonialism in Canada. “Colonial epistemology, and the accompanying systems of politics, law, and policy, have traditionally set the terms for truth in ways that prevented the experiences of Indigenous peoples from being believed and respected” (TRC, 2015, p. 47–48). I imagine the image of a bottleneck in M’s story, how she struggles in her relationship with reconciliation, creating space for truths that may be different from what educators have traditionally been able to hear or believe. Alternatively, she was able to lead and influence both a teacher and family by engaging in conversation, sharing

individual narratives, practicing active listening and in doing so was able to demonstrate that when situated in a broader epistemology of story and story-telling (Cruikshank, 1990), truths shared can be attended to differently as a way of knowing (Tuhiwai Smith, 2008) creating space for small steps towards unlearning the colonial narratives that have historically guided how school leaders and teachers make decisions about what and how to communicate with families about their child's learning.

According to Styres (2019), "decolonizing requires developing a critical consciousness about the realities of oppression and social inequalities for minoritized peoples" (p. 32). It is further explained that all educators must develop a critical discourse that explores the ways colonial relations are and continue to be perpetuated and maintained through relations of power and privilege. "Decolonizing praxis, by its very nature, resists mainstream approaches to teaching and learning as well as challenging the taken-for-granted assumptions embedded in the hidden curriculum within classroom practices" (p. 32). In thinking about the teacher that M has had to support with parent conversations, there is a connection to what Styres is describing. Both the teacher, and M, though nuanced, demonstrated feelings of guilt and shame (M) and denial and resistance (teacher). This is particularly what makes the work of decolonization difficult in schools – emotional responses, both positive and negative, highlight how this works, as Tuck and Yang (2012) indicated, requires more unpacking and exploration given "the reluctance of some settlers to engage the prospect of decolonization" (p. 32). In and through our conversations, it became apparent to me, that as I listened to M share her story there was a very sincere need to figure out how best to support families in understanding schooling. Though she was not suggesting that schooling should be about maintaining a colonial system, there seemed to be some tension in how to best proceed *given* that the reality for students and families is that

schools *are* part of a colonial system and legacy. In order to uncover M's understanding of her own efforts towards decolonizing education, I asked her about the types of unlearning she has experienced, or that she feels she needs to experience.

Unlearning...Unlearning, I think, really looking at where my privileges, and comforts are and realizing that you know, when we're seeing people behave in a different way, it's actually not necessarily because their culture, or necessarily because of their skin colour, it's because of all sorts of different things because humans are all complex so I think in terms of unlearning it actually for me is just more getting focused on the person, how they're oriented in my world, it's how they're oriented to education that comes off in a lot of people like. For example, we had families dropping students off in hoodies, the morning of the snowstorm - hoodies and flip-flops. They still don't understand that the weather changes; they just arrived here. It's not that because they have a different skin colour, they are less intelligent. It's because they just moved here, and they don't understand how the weather works in Calgary. They're not neglecting their children so really, I would say for me, learning, getting deeper to who these people are, and how I can help all our families understand what they need to help their children thrive. And we all say it, but like really understanding that's what everyone wants for their kids. And one of the things I can do to welcome people is just help them understand how to do that.

As mentioned previously in chapter two, Donald (2022) asserts that unlearning colonial forms of relationship denial requires learning more about the colonial worldview and the ways that cultural assumptions inform the common-sense structures in education. M's story as described above points to the importance of unlearning these colonial structures that are considered common-sense in schools. Indigenous and Western epistemologies cannot easily fit

together without being honest that the colonial grammar of one has delegitimized the other and M is specifically stating that that is her goal – to “help all families understand what they need to help their children thrive.” Donald (2022) goes on to describe that “colonial ideologies remain mostly uninterrogated in Canadian education contexts and continue to be ‘in the way’” (para. 5). Aoki (1983) asks us, “What does it mean to become a teacher?” (p. 325). He describes teaching as living in the “uncomfortable space of tension between the curriculum-as-plan, and the curriculum-as-lived in actual schools and classrooms” (p. 2). In sitting with this question and description, and considering the landscape in which I currently find myself as an educator, I wonder how different it is now as compared to forty years ago? Are educators still “...governed by rules of conduct and socially accepted behaviours which are presumed to be ‘becoming’ of people called teachers...which sets out the bounds within which typical teachers are expected to act out their typical roles in typical ways?” (Aoki, 1983, p. 325). I may determine that these expectations of teachers acting out typical roles in typical ways are still part of a conversation in 2023, as Donald (2022) has already pointed out. In thinking about anti-racism in education, I can consider this idea of re-indoctrinating to see how we can move our collective work forward. This will require a certain type of unlearning to occur. “It is not education, but education of a certain kind, that will save us” (Orr, 2004, p. 11). This idea of a *certain kind* of education implies that it is not the *kind* of education that teachers are experiencing now. For this certain kind of education to appear, what more needs to be done with respect to becoming a teacher? What kind of unlearning is required for teachers to address anti-racism in education? How do we (the collective ‘we’) dismantle generations of oppression, racism, privilege, and violence? How do teachers and school administrators ensure they are approaching conversations with humility and patience? What role does schooling play in the process? Until this time, schooling has not been a

redeemer of prejudices. Knowledge that denies representation of others circumvents the other's humanity and given our human history, a difficult unlearning is required involving untold violence, domination and devastation. (Mishra Tarc, 2011) I *can* imagine a school system that looks very different than the one that I currently work in. I consider my role as an instructional leader as someone who is here to support a generation of young people who care deeply about the land, human rights, and their education. If this is the case then there is a real need to figure out how to create the strength and fortitude necessary in the minds, bodies, and spirits of these young people. In order to do that, we need to open the space for conversations, and appropriate actions, about how to confront race and racism among educators, students, and families.

Asking educators to unlearn dominant ways of knowing and unlearn assumptions about oneself and others requires a willingness on the part of all educators to confront these widely held assumptions. M's story above emphasizes how teachers hold the power, especially with respect to grades, how they determine achievement and how they communicate this with families. Perhaps M did not confront the teacher or acknowledge the racism on the part of the teacher, but she builds out the situation with deep care so that the teacher can confront her own racism. The first step is in reflecting and recognizing, and a principal's role is to intervene and offer the space; however, this is a difficulty that cannot be underestimated. McDermott (2013) explains that educators need to learn to listen differently; they need to unlearn the dominant ways of knowing. "The political nature of anti-racist education means that it will cause disruption...it involves unlearning some of the most closely held assumptions about oneself and others" (McDermott, 2013, p. 216). What is required of educators to do this? In thinking about the humanity of young people, and acknowledging the complexity, beauty and the sophistication of childhood, then maybe educators can start to see the possibility to open spaces for conversations

about complex topics that resist easy answers and quick solutions. According to Claxton and Rodriguez (2019) the principles of learning that embrace emotion and the spirit are key to students' understanding of themselves: learning is embedded in memory, history, and story; learning involves patience and time; learning supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors; learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational. I would suggest that this is the kind of unlearning and relearning that needs to take place in schools. There is a need to provide space for story, well-being and experience and educators must be provided the opportunity to learn new knowledge systems and put this into practice. In considering personal stories, the stories of young people, and story as a way of knowing, then there may be opportunity for this kind of unlearning and relearning to occur. Bringing heart and mind together in story is necessary to make meaning. Sometimes, one's intuitive power helps with this (Archibald, 2008). As Markides (2022) notes, "we learn from stories, we are moved through stories, and we remember stories, it's such a powerful teaching tool...we have a responsibility then to carry them forward and live differently" (Ng-A-Fook, 2022).

M makes another connection between unlearning and relearning:

I've learned it's important just to say where you are at because you are going to grow, and I'll tell you what I know, and it's probably very reductionist, but for me, Indigenous pedagogy is like embodying Indigenous ways of knowing in the teaching, so we aren't going to get better if we keep talking about Indigenous ways of knowing, or Indigenous peoples as though they are a topic. It's good for us to sit in circle and listen. That's really foundational to Indigenous ways of knowing and that's something as a leader that I really hope to develop more, my ability to listen, and not just being quiet when others are

talking because it's rude to interrupt – really listening to people. Everything in my work with Saa'kokoto and Narcisse, though it was very short, was just listen. Listening cures everything, he [Saa'kokoto] said to us that kids need to learn to listen and they need a beautiful place where they can listen to the earth.

In thinking about the future of schools from a different perspective, I was inspired to reflect on my own context, and my current role as system principal of core curriculum and assessment. Curriculum reform should include the knowledge and wisdom of people who have been living on these lands for millennia. (Donald, 2022). Donald (2022) shares in the podcast that it is imperative for educators to connect with the wisdom that exists, in the places where they live, and to understand that people lived well before the current era, and that there is a lot of wisdom there that we can rely on these days to address the problems being faced today. This is promising for education, and the ethical responsibilities that exist, as well for me personally, being able to engage in this narrative inquiry is a promising focus for education and I am hopeful that we can take up this kind of dialogue more in school settings, in particular, ethical relationships with the more-than-human-world and having these values taught, considered, and prioritized. School administrators need to find ways to discuss more sustainable and ethical ways of being in the world and with each other. Just as Donald (2022) describes, when I think of curriculum I tend not to think in terms of courses, but in the underlying philosophies that guide how educators think about knowledge and knowing, and about teaching and learning. I, too, am interested in iterations of curriculum that honour other ways to be a human being, understand wisdom traditions, beyond conventional common sense classroom practices that most of us are very familiar with. Donald (2022) goes on to encourage listeners to think of particular places, and the wisdom that exists in those places, and has existed in those places for a really long time. The

logic of place-lessness that has governed education - in the sense that there is assertion associated with power and control, an assertion that says knowledge is everywhere the same, and therefore, education should be everywhere the same. As a way to recover from that, Donald describes a place-based wisdom associated pedagogy. I can hear M describing the bottlenecks and breakthroughs in this work, as if there is resistance to doing the important work, and that this resistance comes from generations and colonial logic, hindering educators' abilities to consider different worldviews. Donald (2022) explains the concept of something being in the way, something we continue to struggle with, and though he is referring to colonial logic and relationship denial associated with Treaty 4, this concept also connects to this research, to narrative inquiry, and to the work that school leaders are trying to take up the work of leading Competency 5 in the Teaching Quality Standard (Alberta Education, 2020a) and the Leadership Quality Standard (Alberta Education, 2020b). Donald (2022) explains that relationship denial, specifically in terms of education, manifests itself by insisting that the mental aspect of a human being is much more important and much more reliable than any other aspect of a human being. We are expected to hyper-focus on the intellectual side, in the expense of our spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being. Colonial worldview is focused on dividing the world, mostly based on race and culture and this is what we need to recover from. M's story highlights that the process of unlearning is an ongoing journey of reflection. I had inquired into how M's understanding of her own efforts towards decolonizing education had changed throughout the narrative inquiry process and being invited into conversations, and how she reflects on her own approaches to decolonizing education. This was her response:

Well, what am I supposed to do? How do I fix this? How do I do the right thing?

I feel like actually I'm in in this process, I may be a little bit more confident in what I'm doing in that I'm trying to take steps where equity and access to things are just embedded in what we do. Like it's not just about race inclusion, it's about absolutely everyone getting access to education because we're all better for it. I see that some of the things I can do are also in our processes, right? What are the big things I need to do versus what are the everyday systemic structural things that I can change and make sure that when I change those, I am changing them, so that more kids get access. Everyone gets access to what they need and it's not going to be perfect. For me, it's what I can do. It's kind of what I talked about when we started making sure I'm expanding my horizons right like I'm very well aware that Facebook and Pinterest show me more of what I've already looking at so I have to get out of that. I have to go find articles, read articles. Listen to podcasts from people I don't know about talk to my friends? Who are you reading? What are you reading? So I have to be active that way so I can sort of keep my mind open and my perspectives broadened. And then for me, knowing that one of the issues with colonization is all the systemic problems. What I'm starting to look at in our school, then, is okay, so, what are the structures and systems that we need to build in a way that they're going to serve everybody, not privilege some and continue to exclude others. I guess mine is like just really looking at systems and structures in our school to make sure that those things are in line. So how is this a welcoming place? And so that's something that I'm starting to look at. What are the systemic things the funding that's needed so that every kid gets access, and every kid gets the practice and time they need, so that they can belong and not feel like they're behind all the time. That's one of the things I find where it's hidden is in structures and our systems. And so that's what I'm

trying to look at right now is, well, where are our structures and systems contributing to either excluding kids or to us, just missing kids like kids under the radar?

As Tanya Talaga (2020) writes, waiting for any future time to make change only amounts to further complicity, and that the time is now. Throughout M's story, I continued to return to Battiste's (2013) notion of schools as sites of reproduction or sites of change. I can hear M's desire to do this work *in a good way* and her realization that schools often assume they are doing things *the right way*. "We are going to have to shift how we interact with the more-than-human-world, and how we treat the planet, and Mother Earth, and that begins with relationships. (Ng-A-Fook, 2022).

Chapter 7: Discussion

At different times while writing this dissertation, I became aware of the similarities between the process in which I was engaged as a writer/researcher and experiences I have had when playing the piano. On the one hand, I had to get in shape, to play for long periods of time. Getting in shape requires hours and hours of practicing, for example, playing scales and studies, working on specific sections of a piece, recording, and listening back, cultivating memory, playing under pressure, moving past the aches in my lower back and upper shoulders, listening to the piece of music for hours, putting little sections together, bit by bit, even if they are out of order. This embodied response (McDermott, 2013), reflects what I now know about the narrative inquiry process. I am no longer thinking about putting together certain sections in the right order, instead, I am remembering what is required to write (play). From time to time, I forget the pain in my lower back and upper shoulders. When I play the piano, it's like time disappears, and at certain moments, I must look around, check the time, and remind myself of where I am. These acts of looking around (relationships), checking the time (temporality) and reminding myself where I am (place) all relate to the three-dimensional inquiry space (Clandinin, 2013). Eventually, I moved into the writing differently, as I held on to other's stories and considered my own experiences alongside. Each story sounds different, like playing many songs, and each one required thoughtful playback, practice, listening, and performing.

In this thoughtful playback, as a way of attending to what resonated across Anne, M, and Catherine's narrative accounts, I laid the stories alongside one another, re-reading through the lenses of time, relationships, and place, paying attention to the similarities and to my own experiences. In this meaning making and wakefulness (Greene, 2001), I surfaced resonant threads as they intersected the individual accounts and stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin,

1999). In order to ensure that I remained attentive to the “temporal, unfolding, contextual nature of the threads rather than the certainty of the threads as fixed, frozen, or context (life) independent” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 143), I practiced what I now know to be part of the narrative inquiry process: conjuring images, putting little sections together bit by bit, reading aloud and listening back, cultivating memory. The narrative threads of unlearning colonialism and learning a Settler identity, engaging in intentional and thoughtful professional learning to build leadership capacity, and embracing ambiguity, are all contextual and part of my own reflective process as well. They became visible to me as I looked across Anne, M, and Catherine’s narrative accounts and attended to the overarching research question of how do school administrators understand their efforts towards decolonization? Subsequently, I share these narrative threads, the patterns that emerged through the stories, as they also present the findings and recommendations from this research. In drawing heavily on the work of Wheatley (2007), Lowman and Barker (2015), and Regan (2010), this final section of the research emphasizes that “whenever humans need to change a deeply structured belief system, everything in life is called into question – relationships with loved ones, children, colleagues, authority, and major institutions” (Wheatley, 2007, p. 72).

Resonant Thread: Unlearning Colonialism and Learning Settler Identity

Lowman and Barker (2015) insist that the term Settler voices relationships to structures and processes in Canada, to the histories of people on this land, to Indigenous peoples, and to our own day-to-day choices, and actions; that is this word turns us toward uncomfortable realizations, difficult subjects, and potential complicity in systems of dispossession and violence; that it represents a tool and a way of understanding and choosing to act differently; and that it is analytical, personal, and uncomfortable. “It can be an identity that we claim or deny, but that we inevitably live and embody” (p. 2). A large part of this narrative inquiry has been in uncovering a

Settler identity, what it means to be a Settler, and how Settler colonialism is understood and has influenced the current education system. Perhaps because of the nature of the questions, or how each participant interpreted the question, all three participants made connections and reflected on their own positionality and privilege, a key component to unlearning colonialism, and learning to embrace a Settler identity. In reflecting on the three narratives, each shared similarities of being from European family descent, of being Settlers on this land and the role that colonialism has had in shaping their own identities.

As I sat with the three stories and contemplated the similarities, I saw how Anne, M, and Catherine's stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) informed their early life stories which have impacted who they are as leaders today. To highlight this, Anne explained "I am coming from white privilege myself...I've had to unlearn a lot of those advantages," M echoed this same sentiment by describing her experience of being raised in a family of scholars and academics, while Catherine highlighted her own privilege of growing up playing varsity athletics, and benefitting from being in the know of a system where her mother already worked. I heard this thread resonating between the stories as M described her family, and how Catherine spoke about spending time in Fish Creek. I remembered wondering about Anne's movement from one province to the next, always moving, always searching and how it connected to my own story, and through all of the stories, I considered the similarities that each participant spoke about what they were able to do, and how it helped them to be who they are today. I also reflected that neither Anne, M or Catherine shared experiences of learning the rules, or losing out on an opportunity because of who they were or where they came from. Lowman and Barker (2015) take up ontological questions of what it means to be Settler because "social injustice is grounded in cognitive injustice" (p. 19). The authors refer to ontology as "ways of being and

knowing in the world” (p. 19) and that “it has long been argued, especially by Indigenous scholars, that Indigenous and Western (newcomer or Settler) peoples have vastly different ontological frameworks and philosophies” (p. 19). I think that Anne, M, and Catherine learned ways of thinking, feeling and acting long before they engaged in conversations with me but that throughout our time together, these ways of relating, even when considering time, relationships and place, all shifted.

M described her understanding of colonialism as “when one country establishes dominance over another country, often by force” and her own role in colonialism correlated with speaking “the two colonial languages.” Anne explained “it’s about shifting the power so the power is no longer sitting with the adult and the teacher in the classroom being that all knowing individual and allowing students to have choice and agency within their learning experiences.” Catherine shared that she thinks “it means that our country was formed on a British model” and provided examples such as, “I see it in police, in the structures in our society, our courts...all these things we grow up with become the basis of who we are. I think I’m part of the system because I am white, and I am privileged.” This was an important moment in each of the interviews, talking aloud about how each person comes to understand colonialism as well as about one’s Settler identity. At these times in the interviews I observed each person sitting in discomfort, which I would describe as discomfort because at that moment each participant had down cast eyes, as if to acknowledge a type of shame or maybe guilt, in accepting privilege and naming identity. Because of this experience, in moving forward with the work of decolonizing education, and more specifically, how school administrators understand their efforts towards decolonizing education, I believe that first we must start with what Donald (2021, 2022) refers to as “unlearning colonialism”. For an institution to feel the shift in practice towards decolonizing,

to support the instructional leaders' desires to impact teaching practice to support decolonizing (a curriculum, a system), to see the impact of how curriculum, lived and planned, influences the identity of students and teachers, it is imperative that the work begins with the individual in the process of unlearning.

“Colonialism is often understood as an attempt to control territory or resources beyond the official boundaries of a state of empire” (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 3) M provides good insight into the role of colonialism in education when referring to how the government “throws resources behind...colonial texts.” She highlights things “that we value as colonial people...throwing money behind gaps in literacy...” which surfaces for me a common thread throughout all three stories. In an attempt to “decolonize” education, it was evident in each story that the work has been about bringing in consultants, or Elders to lead the work. The unfortunate part of Anne’s story is that by bringing in an Indigenous Education Learning Leader the work turned to more data and accountability, and when Catherine shared about working alongside an Elder, the work was made visible while the Elder was accessible, but when the Elder was not in the building, the work fell off the agenda, except for one new teacher who continued to take up the work as it related to embedding Indigenous pedagogies. Regan (2010) asks an important question connected to what Anne, M, and Catherine have shed light on, “how can we, as non-Indigenous people unsettle ourselves to name and then transform the settler – the colonizer who lurks within – not just in words but by our actions” (p.11)? Regan (2010) offers insight as to how she herself interprets and understands what Anne, M, and Catherine have all alluded to as well, the bedrock of Settler identity, and how the historical narrative has provided a foundational myth of the benevolent peacemaker:

To my mind, Canadians are still on a misguided, obsessive, and mythical quest to assuage colonizer guilt by solving the Indian problem. In this way, we avoid looking too closely at ourselves and the collective responsibility we bear for the colonial status quo. The significant challenge that lies before us is to turn the mirror back upon ourselves and to answer the provocative question posted by historian Roger Epp regarding reconciliation in Canada: “how do we solve the settler problem?” (p. 11)

In this narrative inquiry, and in this experience of re-storying field texts to resonant threads by using interpretation through this three-dimensional inquiry space, I recognize now that for a long time I have been on a quest to see through as many angles and eyes as possible to understand lived experience and to learn that “it is the meaning of our experiences and not the ontological structure of the objects which constitutes reality” (Schultz, 1967, p. 231 in Greene, 1995, p. 94). Each of the participants in this research study storied their experiences from their own perspectives based on their own histories and memories, sharing vulnerably their stories about how they know and understand their own Settler identity and their own understanding of colonialism. According to Wheatley (2007), “people must be engaged in meaningful work together if they are to transcend individual concerns and develop new capacities...as confusion and fear swirls about the organization, people find stability and security in purpose, not in plans” (Wheatley, 2007, p. 118). In reflecting on this statement, and in thinking about Anne, M, and Catherine’s stories, I can connect to Wheatley (2007) as I think about understanding the purpose in terms of a need to unlearn colonialism and why this is so critical in in the work of decolonizing education. Do all teachers and school administrators have an understanding of a Settler identity and do all school administrators understand the need to unlearn colonialism so

that teachers can design curriculum, learning experiences, and equitable assessment practices to continue onward towards decolonizing education?

Resonant Thread: Leadership and Professional Learning

We need to focus people on the bigger picture, not in fractured ways where their time is divided. People who are stressed lose the ability to recognize patterns, to see the bigger picture. And as people become overloaded and overwhelmed with their tasks, they have no time or interest to look beyond the demands of the moment. Therefore, it is essential that the organization sponsor processes that bring people together so that they can learn of one another's perspectives and challenges. (Wheatley, 2007, p. 119)

Through the moments of sharing stories and writing alongside each other, the relationship between researcher and participant became increasingly important and required significant trust as is evident in this section. The stories that have been shared, especially as I weaved together the experiences of both in and outside of school places (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), helped me to think about new stories. Sentences within the narratives became threads that were made visible and helped me to clarify the temporality and relationality (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) of the ongoing lives, actions and thoughts of each participant. These threads are not generalizable, the patterns in these stories do not necessarily apply to all school administrators, but they have emerged as contextual narrative compositions. They are stories for now and ones that have been co-created. The narrative accounts, co-composed over months, all strongly included stories, a resonant thread, of leadership within them. My own concept of leadership was called into question and my understanding has expanded because of this co-composition.

In playing back the narratives of Anne, M, and Catherine, it became clear how these principals have spent so many years learning the details of the organization, its values, visions, and structures, but have all similarly felt that these details have been designed outside and then engineered in, the described mandates and competing agendas, which are becoming difficult to navigate and offer tension when it comes to prioritizing decolonizing education. Stories of leadership, as shared in the narratives, also included honouring the difficult work of knowing who you are as a leader. As each participant re-storied and remembered significant moments that brought them to school leadership; there was a desire to connect differently and to know who connects us all. I kept thinking how different, and wonderful, it would be to bring the three participants together, to share their stories in real-time, opening a space for dialogue and an opportunity to build on one another's life experiences. According to Wheatley (2007), "when a system is failing...the solution will be discovered within the system if more and better connections are created. The solution is always to bring the system together so that it can learn more about itself from itself" (p. 93). I am not suggesting, as Wheatley does, that the system is failing, rather, in writing this dissertation, I am unraveling consistencies that highlight a need to clear out the noisiness and the messiness and refocus on what is important in leadership, as has been shared in the stories here.

Each of the participants highlighted the overwhelming nature of what school administrators are expected to do, and not just as it relates to decolonizing education. It shows, for me, that there have been connections lost and a vision that has become skewed. I think about how organizations approach challenge through a colonized lens – more deadlines, more competition, more gathering of data and evidence to prove worth. I think about what Wheatley (2007) shared and how it supports the storied experiences of Anne, M, and Catherine.

No matter how well we plan, how carefully we analyze a situation, or how strong a leader we find, we don't succeed nearly as often as we need to. We put more and more effort into planning and leadership approaches that seem only to lead us ever farther away from our goals and aspirations. We have suffered from the unending fads that, like great tidal waves, crash down on our schools, creating more destruction than growth. As the most recent wave recedes, we look over our schools and see debris scattered everywhere – relationships torn apart, survivors struggling to come up for air, ideas and plans tossed askew. (p. 100)

I conjure an image of *debris scattered everywhere* and can connect this to what Anne, M, and Catherine have shared as part of their story – coming up for air, unending fads, debris scattered everywhere, not just in their thoughts but in their ideas, goals, and vision. Where does a leader start to pick up the pieces when debris is scattered everywhere? Anne storied herself by sharing that she is not seeing change and progress, rather she continues to see traditional ways of teaching and learning. M described a similar sentiment by announcing that the discussions need to change, and the texts need to change and she did this by acknowledging that we are all living with a legacy of colonization. Catherine offered the idea that everything is so polarized that we cannot really have conversations anymore, and all three mentioned that if the work of decolonizing education is a priority, then there is a need for more professional learning.

In a very frank statement, Catherine revealed (in response to her work towards decolonizing education), “I don't know what my approach is”, highlighting a need for leaders to be able to name and understand their own work as it relates to decolonizing education. I start with what I have learned throughout the narrative inquiry process and I recognize that the thread of wanting better and more professional learning for how to decolonize education was evident in

all three stories, situated across time, place and personal and social contexts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Their experiences, in many different schools, at many different times, and in many different contexts, all similarly ended with a desire for more learning, both personally, and how to lead it professionally. Nothing today, through a colonial lens, is simple or slow. Which means that we cannot make sense of the world using the analytical processes previously taught, or understand the complexity of a system, like an education system, with this approach. “In a complex system, it is impossible to find simple causes that explain our problems” (Wheatley, 2007, p. 101). In sitting with the three stories, I consider how the notions of place and time inform leadership decisions and actions. If this research was taken up in a different province, or a different country, how might the stories have shifted and presented themselves with different threads? What might be the response in a province with less data and accountability, less standardization, more autonomy? How would these narratives have sounded different had they been taken up five years ago, or what would be the responses in five more years? Where does a system that is so large, start? Regan draws on Freire’s (2013) critical pedagogy of hope as a starting point for the critical reflective work required, especially in leadership. Regan (2010) explains that:

failure to link knowledge and critical reflection to action explains why many settlers never move beyond denial and guilt, and why many public education efforts are ineffective in bringing about deep social and political change...and unsettling pedagogy is therefore based on the premise that settlers cannot just theorize about decolonizing and liberatory struggle: we must experience it, beginning with ourselves as individuals, and then morally and ethically responsible socio-political actors in Canadian society. (p. 23-24)

The experiences of Anne, M, and Catherine were significant with the relational inquiry of honouring individual experiences as the sharing of stories took on greater meaning. Both Catherine and Anne mentioned a desire to return to the classroom, where they may in fact have more autonomy in their practice. Catherine wondered “should I just go back to teaching and have those relationships with kids...being a teacher is where I had more influence on pedagogy”, and Anne questioned similarly whether or not she should return to the classroom. As a researcher, I have been consistently negotiating the experiences and the stories of these experiences in multiple landscapes. Though Anne’s narrative was the loudest in highlighting the direct, actionable leadership struggles as it relates to decolonizing education, specifically her thoughts as they pertain to not knowing where to start, and questioning the purpose of the data and accountability. All three of these layered stories produced a common thread about leadership and how to lead when teachers are, to put it in Catherine’s words “burnt out”.

This research began before the COVID-19 global pandemic and even though the interviews were conducted at a time when the government had declared the pandemic “over”, there still resonated a sentiment of exhaustion on the part of teachers and leaders. In thinking through the stories, I am struck by Wheatley’s (2007) interpretation and how it connects to the storied experiences of the school administrators in this research:

It is critical that leaders resist assuming the role of savior, even as people beg for it.

This can be extremely difficult as people grow more fearful and fragile. Sophisticated emotional skills are required, especially if people have been directly affected by external events. In these cases, the leader must simultaneously struggle to provide emotional support while also working to maintain decent levels of productivity. If the leader has also been personally affected by recent organizational challenges, it becomes very

difficult to inspire confidence. As one woman leader asked: “how do you maintain credibility when you (as the leader) are not sure you want to be there?” (p. 116).

When thinking about the temporality, sociality, and place as part of the narrative inquiry process, in weaving the stories together, it is important to mention that all three of these leaders were leading, and continue to lead, through a global pandemic. In addition to leading through a global pandemic, the stories of Anne, M, and Catherine were shared through the in-between spaces of attending parent-student conferences both as the instructional leader and as parents, home renovations, taking care of ailing parents, driving children to after-school activities, engaging in their own doctoral studies, managing emergencies, accepting new positions, volunteering in their communities, all the while learning how to lead the work of decolonizing education. This process of engaging in narrative inquiry offered space for each participant to sit and reflect, engage in the desired discourse, and admit to the need to learn more about decolonizing education. After each interview with each participant, there were rounds of thank-yous and messages of appreciation, for being invited into the research, and for being provided the time to reflect and think about this important work. There were times with all of the participants where there were sustained moments of pause, deep breaths, and skyward glances. Through the process of engaging in the inquiry, I was able to see more about who these leaders are, and who are they becoming. Through the quiet observation and paying close attention to the rhythms many wonders emerged for me.

As Anne mentioned, in her experience, what is required is “more professional learning, with a focus on how to decolonize education” and M described “an emergency” with the realization that an Elder had passed away, and Catherine was “unsure of what professional learning she had done” as it related to decolonizing education. In Friesen et. al (2022) the

researchers address this similar concern associated with an area for growth among teachers and leaders, and that working together through professional learning may enhance aptitude related to Competency 5: Applying Foundational Knowledge About First Nations, Métis, and Inuit into their practice. Given the interconnectedness of the three narratives and how all three participants storied their experience of a desire to learn more about decolonizing education, the work of supporting the application and foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit will need to include significant amounts of time and work with teachers and how they understand their work related to the TQS, and with leaders and how their work connects to the LQS. The attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of teachers and leaders will be critical factors in how successful curricular reforms may be, as has already been mentioned throughout this research with respect to competing agendas and too many initiatives. Additionally, as mentioned in Friesen et. al (2022), in an investigation of Manitoba teachers' perceptions on infusing Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum, Kanu (2005) reported some of the issues that teachers considered challenging to meaningfully integrating Indigenous perspectives and content. She documented teachers' lack of knowledge of Indigenous cultures, non-Indigenous teachers' racist attitudes, and incompatibility between school structures and Indigenous cultural values as the greatest challenges to infusion (p. 57). I would contend that Kanu's findings on teachers' perceptions support the need to work with non-Indigenous teachers to infuse Indigenous perspectives into school curricula while also paying considerable attention to how the work will also impact non-Indigenous students.

I have reflected deeply and continue to write about what Anne, M, and Catherine shared about their storied experiences of leadership and their collective desire for professional learning. I have stories on my mind when I consider these narrative accounts of the participants that I have

walked alongside. I recognize the places that live within us, many of which are recalled through memories of earlier times, and then we call them back for different reasons. Many of the stories that were shared between myself and the participants were good stories, memories of happy times, earlier times that taught us who we are and who we are becoming. And then, it is through that reflection that I can pull forward stories that move in different directions across all three narrative accounts. The stories of leadership in this inquiry were often stories of challenge, confusion and a search for meaning. In their own storied experiences, Anne, M, and Catherine all shared notions of not knowing what to do next. M was relying on professional learning that she had engaged in over a decade earlier, Anne was pleading for support and a clear direction, and Catherine explained how “everything is managerial, it’s not fulfilling intellectually”. I continue to wonder about the work required in how school administrators must balance their own learning with leading others. At times this research has painted a fairly mundane picture of how leadership in large organizations can be, expectedly, spawned by tumultuous times such as a global pandemic. However, there is a great paradox that points to the hopeful path ahead by highlighting that it is possible to prepare for the future without knowing what it will be.

Resonant Thread: Embracing Ambiguity

There was a third thread that resonated with me when I considered the experiences of Anne, M, and Catherine. This thread did not dominate or shape our conversations; however, while each participant told stories of uncovering their own identities, or shared accounts of how they come to understand colonialism, or described the bottlenecks and breakthroughs in the work, they all layered on top, expressions of not knowing what to expect, and presented uncertainty in how to move forward, a pause. This reminded me of Wheatley (2007) contends in dealing with ambiguity and unknowing:

We can't continue on this path if we want to find approaches and solutions to the problems that plague us. The world now is quite perplexing. We no longer live in those lovely days when life felt predictable, when we actually knew what to do next. In this increasingly complex world, it's impossible to see what's going on. The only way to see more of the complexity is to ask many others for their perspectives and experiences. Yet if we open ourselves to their different perceptions, then we will find ourselves inhabiting the uncomfortable space of not knowing." (p. 210)

In laying the narratives down together and making sense of the storied experiences that were expressions, at least in part, of experiencing ambiguity, in both leadership actions and decisions, as well acknowledging a Settler identity, I was also able to reflect and understand that not all stories shared are good stories or celebrations. Many stories that were shared have helped me to continue to learn from school administrators in my own organization. As Wheatley already explained, it is about considering different perspectives in order to learn about new ways of doing things. M demonstrated opening up to different perspectives by inviting a parent to a meeting to discuss assessment practices. Though the teacher had previously determined that the parent was making racist statements, in the end, by opening up and considering other perspectives, new learning emerged and new relationships were created. Anne shared her own thoughts of what it means to consider students as co-creators of knowledge, and the importance of inviting dialogue and student voice as a counter to Freire's (1970/2014) "banking concept of education". And Catherine acknowledged that even though the new curriculum in Alberta is not in alignment with how she would want a written curriculum (because it does not have a front matter), she too became open to considering different perspectives and indicated that to move forward the work with decolonization as she understands it, she is going to "leverage the new

curriculum.” “As we open ourselves to the differences, sometimes we discover that another’s way of interpreting the world actually is essential to our survival.” (Wheatley, 2007, p. 211)

I, too, have been changed in this process of re-storying narratives, interpreting the stories in a three-dimensional space, particularly associated with *place* and the landscape of school leadership. Undoubtedly, a major turning point in my own thinking about place came from my engagement here in Calgary with Indigenous Elders and their understanding and teachings that all creation around us is alive and actively trying to teach us. I began to wonder if I, too, could learn some place-thinking; was it possible for me to transfer the skills that I had learned in my own Western-bookish educations toward reading relationships that constitute a landscape, a place? I think of M’s story, of her own bookish education, and Anne’s understanding of her childhood educational experiences of being bored in school, and Catherine’s memories of being part of extracurricular athletics and I realize how similar all of our experiences of school are, as it relates to place. How do I interact with these narratives, through the dimensional space of place? What does it mean to be part of this landscape, all of us, as the stories weave together?

“By paying attention, by learning the manners of a place, you can learn a whole lot...but then shift locations, listen to a different story, pay attention to a different cricket in a different backyard in a different place, and nature changes the rules” (Coleman, 2017, p. 17). Battiste (2013) affirms that “what a new curriculum must do is replace the failed Eurocentric educational practices with a more equitable and broader theory of education that informs, includes, and builds with Canadian pluralities and identities” (p. 163). I think about this statement and consider how curriculum, lived and planned, offers opportunities to unlearn colonialism if we embrace the ambiguity and remain open to hearing new stories. The stories shared from the Blackfoot Elders are very different than the stories that I grew up with, from Little Red Riding Hood to Goldilocks

and the Three Bears, and even Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden, all of which did not conjure a sense of place or my part in any type of reciprocal relationship. When considering the notion of place, as part of the three-dimensional inquiry space, and in trying to keep track of the narratives that have been shared by Anne, M, and Catherine, I recognize that I am bound to miss an important detail or twist some meaning based on my interpretation of place, and how it resonates throughout the inquiry. However, even if what I have understood is partial at best, I will not be spreading the lie that this storied place was null and void before Europeans arrived, that educational leadership is independent of knowing your own identity, or that embracing ambiguity is not a required component in school curricula. Like Anne, I moved here for an education and stayed for a job. And even though M and Catherine were born and raised here, as I laid the stories alongside one another, it was made clear that none of us learned stories about this place from our mother's knee, which meant we all have had to seek out local stories, and engage in our own unlearning, albeit, at different times, with different people, in different places.

“Telling stories about a place...is an effort of care, a way to pay attention to its unfolding life” (Coleman, 2017, p. 241). Perhaps these storytellers did not necessarily share a story *about* a place, what they have shared is how the three-dimensional inquiry space invites interpretation into storied lives, by considering how being in a place, with or without others, at a certain time, helps to make sense of lived experiences. It is in embracing the ambiguity, the acceptance that there are so many unknowns, in this place, where these school administrators provide instructional leadership, and in embracing this ambiguity by remaining curious and opening up to new perspectives there may be opportunities to shift the landscape of educational leadership to provide a more comprehensive and robust experience, that provides opportunities to learn the Settler identity and unlearn colonialism, as well as providing more professional learning.

I think, too, about ambiguity associated with temporality and not just place. Greene (1995) explains “we are first cast into the world as embodied beings trying to understand...we bring patterns and structures into existence in the landscape...we cannot return to the landscapes of those pre-reflective days. We can only become present to them by reflecting on them (p. 73). The temporality of this inquiry reminds us that we cannot go back. There is no opportunity to return to a previous time and so we reflect on them and make sense of experiences in this way. Like Greene (1995) mentions, “looking back I find myself seeing past experiences in new ways – and I realize what it means to say that I have lived one possible life among many – and that there are openings even today into untapped possibilities” (p. 77). As a child I was always reading. I became ashamed of this in grade three when the teacher gave “golden tickets” as part of our unit and classroom novel read-aloud of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Though, I am sure well-intended to promote reading, the competitive nature of receiving visible golden tickets, placed in the top-right corner of my desk for the entire class to see, based on the number of pages I had read, only lent itself to me being known as a ‘bookworm’, which at a time when Super Mario Bros. was being played in the basements of my classmates, and I was at home reading, was in some ways, a socially awkward ‘award’ and more insightfully, an indication of my early interpretations of society and relationships. But reading for me was never enough, nor was recounting the stories to my parents or teachers. For me, it was essential to make my own sense of what I read, to learn what it had to tell me. And so, I find myself, over thirty years later, in the same place, with the same relationships – teacher-student, student-student, student-content, learning by reading, listening, and writing, making sense of the narratives shared with me to learn what they have to tell me. M shared a similar sentiment when looking back in her lived experience of being a reader and turning to books as sources of knowledge and information. And

Anne referenced a similar sentiment as well when describing her early schooling experiences, albeit being what she referred to as bored in class. As Greene has already mentioned, we cannot return to the past, we can only be reflective, and when considering the leadership actions necessary in moving forward the work of decolonizing education, it is in this reflective practice, of understanding who we are and where we come from that may have some of the greatest impact.

Chapter 8: Conclusions and Recommendations

The primary intent of this study was to open a conversation and discussion about the bottlenecks and breakthroughs experienced by school administrators as they grapple with their own understanding of their efforts towards decolonizing education. I was curious about how school administrators see their role in the work, particularly those who would describe the motivation behind their work as something about which they are passionate or find compelling. What do administrators find compelling about decolonizing education? Was I going to be able to find out? I was drawn into the research in different ways, and one thing that has remained consistent is the importance of story, hearing others' stories and reflecting on others' experiences. This is certainly a topic worthy of exploration. Throughout my work in this research study I have gained a proximity to the philosophical traditions that underpin narrative inquiry. I have also gained proximity to Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and one's connection to place. I have come to see how stories are embodied – in one's thinking, learning, leading, and teaching. Perhaps it is not so much a new learning, but a comfort in knowing that stories are who we are, in a knowledge system, stories are what connect us, and in narrative inquiry, stories reveal the deep purpose of the inquiry. It is difficult to learn and practice thinking narratively, within the temporal, personal, social and place dimensions that share narrative thinking and narrative knowing (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Over time, I learned to think with the stories of experience, the characters, settings, plot lines, and conflict. As a result, I have uncovered some findings that may help shape the way school administrators live and interact in their work with colleagues, students, and families.

In the previous chapter I shared the resonant threads of each narrative account and within each thread I also shared the findings from this research. Throughout this study and during the

conversations, all three participants addressed how this study has impacted their own understanding of, and attentiveness to their efforts towards decolonizing education. Each participant highlighted the understanding that school leaders have a responsibility to create safe spaces for learning so that all members of the school community can openly engage in conversations that disrupt the commonly held narratives that take up space in our schools. The scope of findings that came out of this study answer the central research question: how do school administrators understand their efforts towards decolonizing education? and offer an opening for a more expansive and thorough exploration of the work related to school administrators' efforts towards decolonizing education. As part of these research findings, there are several recommendations for professional practice.

Making Clear the Priorities

Anne's story provided insight into the challenges that school administrators face in trying to make sense of how to juggle the competing priorities in a school system. It was Anne who described this tension, and in and through her stories, she returned to the notion of what is worthwhile. Anne knows what she considers good leadership, and she has a clear understanding of what she considers worthwhile work; however, she surfaced the tension when trying to do "too many things" that are not meaningful that take up "too much time." In listening to and interpreting Anne's story it is recommended that senior leaders make clear the priorities and remove the barriers to achieving the work of decolonizing education. It is also suggested that principals understand what is considered worthwhile, and that perhaps, a return to prioritizing this work in the school system could be a way to move forward in the work akin to decolonizing education. Of course, this would require a consensus on what is considered worthwhile. Over time, Anne has been exposed to opportunities to engage in discourse that have led her to have a

good understanding of what may lead to a genuine re-culturing of schooling given the realities of the world. Over the course of her career, she has continued to build her competency in how she leads others in leading the work of curriculum. However, this study has conjured up for me questions such as, what about the school administrators who do not have a good understanding of what it means to do things that are worthwhile? If Anne, who was able to describe her competence of leading instruction, brought forth concerns of feeling “too busy” and being overwhelmed in doing the mundane work of data collections and populating spreadsheets, I wonder about school administrators who do not have her level of confidence in leading instruction. How are those leaders making space for the work required to decolonize education? It seems important that school administrators build into curriculums, a capacity to address and bridge connections between students, teachers, and content related to decolonizing education, and this requires significant learning and capacity building on the part of school administrators.

Engaging in Professional Learning as it Relates to Competency 5: Applying Foundational Knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit (Alberta Education, 2020a, 2020b)

Results from this study may be considered to inform system leadership priorities. All three participants shared their assumptions about the work in decolonizing education: one stated that people want to do the work but do not know where to start, one participant remarked that not everyone believes in this work, and one participant shared that everyone wants to do the work but cannot find the space to do so. This study highlighted the complex nature of leadership, curriculum, and the legacy of colonialism in Canada. A conclusion that can be drawn from Catherine’s story is that decolonizing education can be considered a matter of personal preference; however, Catherine also shared about a teacher who remained dedicated to the work even when the school had lost the momentum. This is an important part of the story about how a

leader, who expressed that the work of decolonization education was a matter of personal preference continued to support teachers in undertaking this work. It is recommended that school administrators continue to mentor new teachers who are willing to take up the work. It is also recommended that school administrators acknowledge the idea that decolonizing education can no longer be simply a matter of personal preference. Schools and school districts must commit to working towards decolonizing education together. Therefore, it also seems important that school administrators and teachers continue to engage in professional learning as it relates to Competency 5: Applying Foundational Knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit (Alberta Education, 2020a, 2020b). It seems reasonable that a recommendation from this research study would suggest that professional learning connected to Competency 5 deserves more attention and consideration. If schools commit to sustained learning over time, to advance the work of building foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit, then there may be a way to move from decolonizing education as a personal preference, to seeing it as an embodied aspect of who all teachers and school administrators are and are becoming. According to Friesen et. al (2022), “teachers need time to develop, absorb, discuss, and practice new knowledge over a sustained and intensive period” (p. 25) and I would suggest that this is the same for school administrators.

Engaging in Unlearning Colonialism and Re-Learning Settler Identity

There is a responsibility to include within curricula, stories that represent more than a Western worldview, which means that school administrators need to have this background knowledge themselves so that they can guide and mentor. It is important for school leaders and district leaders to address the challenges associated with the big work of cultural change and curriculum change. A conclusion that can be ascertained from M’s story is that the work towards decolonizing education is an ongoing process of unlearning colonialism. The first step towards

this unlearning may involve learning more about Settler identity. The three narratives weave together by highlighting the need for an unlearning colonialism approach – that it begins with re-learning a Settler identity, and unlearning colonialism so that there can be impact and change in schools. A recommendation would be to support all staff to start the process of unlearning colonialism and re-learning a Settler identity. But this move does not happen without significant leadership and professional learning. It is recommended that all school leaders take up the work of unlearning colonialism by considering the structures they have in place in their schools, the curricula that is being lived and taught, and the possible spaces and places where more than just a Western knowledge system can be made visible. In order to do this, school administrators will have to grapple with the discomfort in not knowing all of the answers.

Embracing Ambiguity

As Holmes (2013) makes clear, there are benefits of ambiguity in settings where we are more challenged than threatened and that “in an increasingly complex, unpredictable world, what matters most isn’t IQ, will power, or confidence in what we know. It’s how we deal with what we don’t understand” (p. 15). In this research, I have attempted to highlight school administrator’s efforts towards decolonizing education, their understanding of their own Settler identity, how unlearning colonialism can be a starting point, and how embracing ambiguity is required to lead this important work in a large organization with competing agendas, deadlines, and accountabilities. As Regan (2010) notes:

How people learn about historical injustices is as important as learning truths about what happened...that history education in the wake of systemic violence and deeply rooted identity-based conflict must focus not only on curricula reform but on

pedagogical reform as an effective means of transforming divisive histories and identities, and shifting negative perceptions of marginalized groups.” (p. 11)

Sophisticated thinking requires flexibility and when school administrators are challenged by not knowing the answers, there may be opportunities to hold and open spaces for discourse and action as it relates to decolonizing education. Perhaps it is the ambiguity that is the connection for all school administrators in this work. How could it be possible for anyone to have all of the answers? For a school administrator there may be a situation or event that disturbs a sense of order and consistency, which presents a mismatch between what is, and what ought to be. It might be soothing to push toward what you already know in those moments, but perhaps it is in the space between, in which unlearning can take place, not as an activity or a competency, but as a way of being and knowing that embraces the contradictions and creates new ways forward.

“Processes, such as conversations and storytelling, help us connect at a depth not available through charts and PowerPoint presentations” (Wheatley, 2007, p. 120). All three narratives highlighted the desire for time to connect through conversations and storytelling. Though the statements may not have been explicit, through the three-dimensional inquiry space, I can interpret how being in this space, at this time, with these people, despite their individual differences and styles of leadership, how they understand curriculum, and how they approach decolonizing education, all contained similar elements of a desire for connection and permission to slow down. Like M mentioned, being part of this narrative inquiry has been the best professional learning she has engaged in over a decade. When thinking about this statement it confirms Wheatley’s (2007) idea that people “need less formality and more conviviality” (p.120) and “they need time to decompress and to relax enough to be able to listen to one another” (p. 120).

Possibilities for Future Research

I propose several future studies building on the work that I have shared in this research. Further research is needed to uncover the Settler grammar that exists in schools, especially correlated to the hidden curriculum as well as the lived and experienced curricula. This future study might include developing a better understanding of a Settler grammar, its implications on curriculum design, and implications for pedagogy. The concept of Settler grammar describes “the ongoing project of settler colonial societies to construct a national identity which makes sense of its Indigenous history” (Calderon, 2014). As mentioned earlier in this research, Cutrara (2021) suggests that there is a Settler grammar, narratives of settler superiority, that continue construct stories of power and national identity in curriculum. The work of education, then, moving forward needs to address this Settler grammar, regardless of subject area. Understanding how teachers and school administrators understand colonial discourses and how these discourses shape policy and practice (Moodie & Patrick, 2017) may support teachers to work with all students in culturally responsive ways. Secondly, further research is needed to address the professional learning required to build competency related to understanding efforts towards decolonizing education, specifically with respect to Competency 5: Applying Foundational Knowledge about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (Alberta Education, 2020a, 2020b). This future research might consider the actions required on behalf of school administrators in providing the required leadership and space for teachers to engage in this work. Leadership qualifications must have both a desire to learn more about different worldviews as well as demonstrate competency in leading instruction in schools through the lens of social justice. School administrators must also be prepared to support families in their own understanding of colonialism and the role that it

plays in their child's education. Thirdly, more research is necessary in understanding how school administrators can embrace ambiguity to inspire creativity and develop confidence.

Final Thoughts

In nearing the conclusion of this study, I reflect on my own role as teacher, school administrator, and system principal. In the beginning, my intention was to listen to others' stories about how they understand the work of anti-racism, curriculum studies, and leadership as it relates to decolonizing education. I was curious about their stories, how they would make sense of the interview questions, and how their own lived experiences would reveal themselves. I wondered if they would find the questions compelling, and I was interested in what would make them sigh or become restless with discomfort. I speculated about how much they would share; how safe they would feel in the vulnerable space of telling their own story. As a researcher, I have become a better observer of the world. Participants invited me into their experiences to find meaning for the purposes of this study. I am curious about the similarities and differences in the narratives, and I respect the complexity of the spaces related to school administrator – teacher relationships. My commitment was first and foremost to the lives of the participants, and secondly to the narrative inquiry puzzle. It is in the lived practices of narrative inquiry that I can honour the relational ontological commitments. I have learned that writing takes effort, and that practice is something that you must continue to do regularly, despite the challenges and resistances. My intention as a researcher was to stay attentive and awake to the experiences that were shared by the participants without a clear outcome beyond a deeper understanding of experience. "It is in this relational, deep attending to experience that we see hope for personal, social, cultural, and institutional change" (Clandinin et al., 2018, p. 24). I learned that thinking narratively with stories of experience sometimes called me to enter uncertain, complex, and

tension-filled spaces. Finally, through this experience, I have learned about the importance of staying with the practice of thinking narratively, and staying curious about who each person is, and is becoming.

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