

7-1-2019

Insights from Indigenous Students on High School Completion

Melissa Steeves

Concordia University - Portland, steeves.me@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.csp.edu/cup_commons_grad_edd



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Steeves, M. (2019). *Insights from Indigenous Students on High School Completion* (Thesis, Concordia University, St. Paul). Retrieved from https://digitalcommons.csp.edu/cup_commons_grad_edd/365

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Concordia University Portland Graduate Research at DigitalCommons@CSP. It has been accepted for inclusion in CUP Ed.D. Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@CSP. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csp.edu.

Concordia University - Portland

CU Commons

Ed.D. Dissertations

Graduate Theses & Dissertations

7-2019

Insights from Indigenous Students on High School Completion

Melissa Steeves

Concordia University - Portland

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.cu-portland.edu/edudissertations>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

CU Commons Citation

Steeves, Melissa, "Insights from Indigenous Students on High School Completion" (2019). *Ed.D. Dissertations*. 367.

<https://commons.cu-portland.edu/edudissertations/367>

This Open Access Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Theses & Dissertations at CU Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Ed.D. Dissertations by an authorized administrator of CU Commons. For more information, please contact libraryadmin@cu-portland.edu.

Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

WE, THE UNDERSIGNED MEMBERS OF THE DISSERTATION COMMITTEE CERTIFY
THAT WE HAVE READ AND APPROVE THE DISSERTATION OF

Melissa Ann Steeves

CANDIDATE FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Julie McCann, Ed.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

Catherine Beck, Ed.D., Content Specialist

Dan Shepherd, Ed.D., Content Reader

Insights from Indigenous Students on High School Completion

Melissa Ann Steeves

Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in

Transformational Leadership

Julie McCann, Ed.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

Catherine Beck, Ed.D., Content Specialist

Dan Shepherd, Ed.D., Content Reader

Concordia University–Portland

2019

Abstract

In Canada, 25% fewer Indigenous students complete high school compared to non-Indigenous students. Given the rich culture and tradition of education within Indigenous communities and families, why is the discrepancy between graduation rates for Indigenous students compared to non-Indigenous students so significant? How do educators support Indigenous students complete high school? A review of previous literature suggested that, in order to improve Indigenous student success in completing high school, schools should consider addressing learning environments, improving culturally-infused pedagogical practices, and addressing the barriers in place for Indigenous people. This study's method was a case study design with data collected and findings triangulated through focus groups, observations, and document review. The intention of this qualitative study was to provide insights from the perspective, perceptions, feelings, and lived experiences of Grade 12 Indigenous students on how educators can better support high school completion for Indigenous students. The findings suggested that if educators improve relationships, build on awareness, and focus on supporting students to build resiliency, rates of high school completion could improve for Indigenous students. On this basis, it is recommended that school districts provide targeted professional development opportunities, engage with increased community involvement, target early childhood education programs, and focus on cultural awareness and privilege within schools and the larger community.

Keywords: Indigenous people, high school completion, relationships, awareness, resiliency

Dedication

I dedicate this to the two most important men in my life, my son Emmett and my husband Daniel. To Dan, I would never have been able to complete this without your constant love and support. To Emmett, I hope this will always be inspiration for you to follow your dreams.

Acknowledgements

Throughout the process of writing this dissertation I have received a great deal of support, guidance, feedback, and assistance. I would like to thank my supervising chair, Dr. Julie McCann, whose expertise and supportive feedback was always available. I am fortunate to have had you alongside me during this journey. I would also like to thank Dr. Dan Shepherd, Dr. Catherine Beck, and Dr. Laurie Wellner for their direction throughout this process.

I would like to thank and acknowledge my family, without whom I would have never been successful. First, my husband, Daniel. You always support my dreams and I would not be where I am without you by my side. My son, Emmett, for being my constant inspiration to follow my dreams. My parents and my in-laws, Debby, Mike, Tim, Theresa, Peter, and Dawn thank you for the support. Specifically, I want to thank Tim, Theresa, Mike and Debby for all the babysitting! I especially want to acknowledge Debby and Mike. They were sounding boards, reality checks, and cheerleaders throughout this whole process. Near the end of my dissertation, my father-in-law, Tim, lost his life. I will be forever grateful for his love and support throughout this process.

Thank you to all my friends and colleagues who were constant sources of support and places to vent! Specifically, my best friend Sandra and colleagues Pat, Sherry, and Jenn, who have had to work alongside me throughout the toughest years of this process. Also, to the countless other family, friends, and colleagues for their words of encouragement and prayers, thank you.

I would like to thank the school district, Indigenous liaison, principal, and staff for their support and willingness to allow me access to the school for this study. I am grateful for the Elders who presided over the focus groups, offering knowledge and wisdom. Finally, and most

importantly, I would like to acknowledge the Indigenous student participants in this study. You are the reason this study exists. Your candor and courage in telling your stories will forever be recognized. Thank you.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
List of Tables	viii
List of Figures	x
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Introduction to the Problem	1
Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem	1
Statement of the Problem	5
Purpose of the Study	5
Research Questions	5
Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study	6
Definition of Terms	7
Assumptions	10
Summary	10
Chapter 2: Literature Review	12
Introduction	12
Conceptual Framework	15
Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature	24
Review of Methodological Issues	34
Synthesis of Research Findings	37
Critique of Previous Research	38

Summary.....	41
Chapter 3: The Methodology	43
Introduction	43
Research Questions	43
Purpose and Design of the Study.....	44
Research Population and Sampling Methods	45
Instrumentation.....	47
Data Collection.....	49
Identification of Attributes	50
Data Analysis Procedures.....	50
Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Design.....	52
Validation	54
Expected Findings	55
Ethical Issues.....	55
Summary.....	59
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results.....	60
Introduction	60
Description of the Sample	62
Research Methodology and Analysis	65
Summary of the Findings	74
Presentation of the Data and Results	78
Theme 1: Relationships	79
Theme 2: Awareness	88

Theme 3: Resiliency	97
Chapter 4 Summary	100
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion	102
Introduction	102
Summary of Results	103
Discussion of Results	106
Discussion of Results in Relation to the Literature	119
Limitations.....	123
Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory	125
Recommendations for Further Research	128
Conclusion.....	129
References.....	131
Appendix A: Observation Checklist.....	142
Appendix B: Consent Form	143
Appendix C: Statement of Original Work	147

List of Tables

Table 1. <i>Focus Group In Vivo Coded Participant Response Frequency</i>	69
Table 2. <i>Observation Coding Frequency and Checklist Category Correlation</i>	72
Table 3. <i>Frequency of Evaluation of Achievement and Improvement Indicators for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Student Outcomes (2015–2019)</i>	74

List of Figures

Figure 1. <i>Social constructivist framework through the lens of the Indigenous worldview: Using the medicine wheel to guide research.</i>	23
Figure 2. <i>Relationships between themes and subthemes.</i>	77
Figure 3. <i>Relationship between themes and medicine wheel quadrants.</i>	78

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to the Problem

In Canada, 25% fewer Indigenous students complete high school than do non-Indigenous students (Beaudin, 2015; Mah, 2016). Given the rich culture and tradition of education within Indigenous communities and families (Hansen & Antsanen, 2016), how is it that the discrepancy between graduation rates for Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students is so significant? Key points raised throughout the literature (Madden, Higgins, & Korteweg, 2013; Mombourquette & Head, 2014; Preston, Cottrell, Pelletier, & Pearce, 2012) show that Indigenous students benefit from improved Indigenous-focused instruction through improved culturally respectful classroom environments, integration, the fostering of Indigenous education-focused success strategies, and the addressing of racial and systemic barriers that affect Indigenous people. By sharing the stories of Indigenous high school students, this study explored ways in which educators can foster culturally-infused learning environments, improve the integration of successful strategies, and address the barriers to Indigenous students completing high school within conventional schools—all with a view to improving rates of high school completions.

Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem

The Indian Act, written in 1867, contained legislation that applied specifically to First Nations people in Canada regarding status, land, resources, education, and legal proceedings (Horn-Miller, 2009; Walker, 2013). In addition to presenting these legislative policies, the goal of the Act, according to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (henceforth TRC)(2012), was to assimilate First Nations people into Canadian culture. Smith (2001) identifies that the Act had the intention of bringing Indian status to an end by civilizing and

Christianizing the Indigenous peoples of Canada. The policies were not implemented in a uniform or consistent manner among all Indigenous peoples, and thus the Inuit and the Métis were not governed according to the policies of the Indian Act; however, policies similar to the Indian Act affected the lives of the northern Indigenous peoples and the Métis (TRC, 2012). Many elements within the Indian Act contributed to limiting the Indigenous people of Canada (Horn-Miller, 2009; Smith, 2001). Of all the policies outlined in the Indian Act, it is the control of education through the residential school program that is of paramount significance to this study.

The educational policies in the Indian Act made possible the implementation of the residential school system following the Davin Report. The education and assimilation of Indigenous children through residential schools in Canada was outlined in the Davin Report, written in 1879. This report, which was based on research conducted by Nicholas Davin over the course of three months in the United States, recommended the implementation of what became residential schools in Canada (Smith, 2001). The report recommended that the federal government partner with churches to run industrial schools for Indigenous children (Horn-Miller, 2009; Smith, 2001). The report specified that Indigenous children needed to be separated from their parents and communities to “gradually prepare [students] to meet the necessities of the not distant future; to welcome and facilitate, it may be hoped, the settlement of the country” (Davin, 1897, as cited in TRC, 2015, p. 10). The report recommended partnerships with churches in order to ensure moral education, from the colonial perspective; according to Davin, it also would ensure the frugality of the educational program, as missionaries were likely to work for less money (TRC, 2012).

An estimated 150,000 children passed through the residential school system from the 1880s until 1996. It is also estimated that over 6,000 Indigenous children died while attending residential schools (Schwartz, 2015). The stories told by survivors of residential schools include accounts of sustaining mental, physical, and sexual abuse within the schools. The TRC report noted that the impact of residential schools had also been felt by subsequent generations of Indigenous people, leading to intergenerational trauma. According to Dion Stout and Kipling (2003), the elements of the intergenerational impact of residential schools on Indigenous people include poverty, substance abuse, family violence, sexual abuse, homelessness, and high rates of incarceration. Today, the intergenerational impact of residential schools and the role of the Indian Act in the education system in Canada are still present in the Canadian school systems, both on and off the reserves (TRC, 2015).

Justice Murray Sinclair, the chair of the TRC, stated, “education is what got us into this mess . . . but education is the key to reconciliation” (Watters, 2015, para. 16). The TRC (2012) found that the residential schools left a legacy of intergenerational trauma within Indigenous communities; however, it also recommended taking steps toward reconciliation in order to support Indigenous peoples. The TRC (2015) created a list of 94 Calls to Action to help facilitate a move towards reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada. Within the 94 Calls to Action, educators are called to support the success of all students through awareness, acknowledgement, atonement, and actions toward reconciliation (TRC, 2015).

In regards to the conceptual framework, a social constructivist framework incorporated elements of a traditional understanding of how knowledge is given and received, which aligns with Indigenous practices. The social constructivist theory denotes that conventional methods of

framing knowledge and understanding are only one way to look at research. Traditional and relevant teaching and learning methods are to be respected to help support reconciliation with Indigenous peoples (Kitchen, Cherubini, Trudeau, & Hodson, 2009; Pidgeon et al., 2014). Additionally, Hughes and Sears' (2004) research showed that inherent meanings of ideas and words are created within the specific context of a particular group of people; knowledge is a socially negotiated product. Hughes and Sears (2014) connected the conventional social constructivist theory with the traditional Indigenous frame by the use of and emphasis on the importance of traditional knowledge, languages, and cultures.

As I am a non-Indigenous researcher, the experiences of Indigenous people are not my stories to share. The stories of Indigenous participants that are shared within this study are presented as they were told to me, and with respect and care from the perspective of a non-Indigenous researcher. The methodology for this study was case study design, and the direct investigation of the perspectives, perceptions, feelings, and experiences of the participants was the focus of this case study (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). The use of case study design is parallel to traditional Indigenous methods of data-collection through oral storytelling (Lavallée, 2009). Within this study, the medicine wheel was used to guide the focus-group questions and the analysis of the data. The medicine wheel is a circle in which teachings within Indigenous cultures are understood; it encompasses all elements of understanding, including physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental wellbeing within Indigenous cultures (Bell, 2014). This case study aimed to tell the stories of Indigenous student participants based on their personal experiences, and as such, within this study traditional Indigenous ways of knowing and conventional academic methods of research overlapped.

Statement of the Problem

This study explored the insights that Indigenous students can provide to educators in order to support success and address concerns regarding the high school completion rates of Indigenous students. This study is critical, as it provides the shared experiences of Indigenous high school students who have successfully navigated conventional school to graduate from high school. The unique stories relayed by the participants may provide first-hand insights to educators on successful strategies and how to address the concerns in regards to high school completion rates for Indigenous students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to capture Indigenous students' experiences in learning environments, including both barriers and successes, with a view to improving Indigenous students' high school completion rates. The intention of this study was to listen to and share the stories of Indigenous students based on their personal experiences in conventional schools. Indigenous students shared their experiences, perceptions, and stories in order to improve educators' understanding of how to support Indigenous students so that they can complete high school. Specifically, the study focused on the perceptions and stories of Indigenous students on cultural inclusivity of classroom environments as well as on steps that can be taken to address the barriers Indigenous students face to completing high school and to acknowledge their successes.

Research Questions

The research question that drove this study was, "How do educators support Indigenous students' high school completion within conventional schools?"

The subsequent questions focused on:

1. How can focus group conversations with Indigenous students identify ways to improve culturally infused and respectful learning environments to encourage high school completion?
2. How can conversation with and observations of Indigenous students provide insight into addressing barriers to and acknowledging the successes of high school completion within conventional schools?

Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study

The results of the study may provide educators, administrators, and policy-makers with insight into the perspectives, perceptions, feelings, and lived experiences of Indigenous students in conventional schools. The results may also provide educators with knowledge, based on the lived experiences of the Indigenous high school participants, of how to maintain successful strategies and address barriers—as perceived by Indigenous students—to high school completion within conventional schools. This study may highlight successful strategies, based on the perspective provided by the participants, to help support Indigenous students to succeed in completing high school. The knowledge gained from this study may serve as a resource for educators seeking ways to impact high school completion rates for Indigenous youths from the insights gained from the stories and lived experiences of Indigenous students. Findings from this study may address limitations from previous studies, which include providing location-specific data from participants in rural Alberta. Additionally, this study collects data from Indigenous students currently on track to graduate from high school, rather than from multiple stakeholders such as parents and community members. The targeted location and specific participants may enhance the body of knowledge that is currently available to support Indigenous students to complete high school.

Definition of Terms

Indigenous peoples. As explained by the Government of Canada (2017), “Indigenous peoples” is a name collectively given to the original peoples of North America. The term “Aboriginal” has also been used and appears in older documents. The Canadian Constitution recognizes three Indigenous peoples: First Nations, which comprise over 50 Nations; Inuit, who are the Indigenous people of the Canadian North; and Métis, who are people of both European and First Nation heritage. The Métis National Council defines “Métis” as a person who self-identifies as Métis, is distinct from Aboriginal peoples, is of historic Métis ancestry, or is accepted by the Métis Nation (Métis National Council, 2011). Inuit are the traditional people of the Canadian Arctic, northern Quebec, and Labrador (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2006). “Indigenous” is used as a broad term throughout the research, though when specific Nations are mentioned or identified, those Nations are mentioned by name—at least in cases in which to do so would not compromise the privacy of the participants in question. Specifically, during data collection, if the participants identify their nation or heritage, respect will be given within this study to identify the Nation. During data collection, specific Nations were identified, and the inclusion of the Nations is discussed in Chapter 5 in reference to the privacy of the participants. As each Indigenous group is unique, the proper noun of an Indigenous people group will be used where applicable (Government of Canada, 2015; Younging, 2018). Younging (2018) also notes, in regards to capitalization that the conventional styles for proper nouns may not apply. For example, it is a deliberate decision to capitalize protocols when referring to cultural protocols as a measure of respect (Younging, 2018).

Medicine wheel. The medicine wheel is referenced within this study as a culturally-respectful method of data-sharing, reflective of Indigenous worldviews. Bell (2014) describes

the medicine wheel as a circle that reflects the interconnectedness and interrelatedness of all things. It is designed to be a guide for how to progress through a journey, and education is a journey. The wheel is made up of four quadrants, which can be reflective of the four directions as defined by the Creator and Mother Earth. As Lavallée (2009) explains it, all four quadrants of the medicine wheel must be present within a person for the person to be whole. A worldview of Indigenous ways of life can be framed in the holistic balance represented within the medicine wheel (Bell, 2014). For the purpose of this study, and reflective of research (Bell, 2014; Lavallée, 2009), the four quadrants are emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual wellbeing. This definition of the medicine wheel is shared under the assumption that there is no right or wrong way for the wheel to be drawn (Bell, 2014). Each culture and Nation experiences the medicine wheel in the manner in which it was taught and understood within that community (Bell, 2014). For the purposes of this study, the use and interpretation of the medicine wheel is referenced according to sources (Bell, 2014; Lavallée, 2009).

Conventional schools. *Conventional* is defined by Merriam-Webster (2018a) as being in accordance or sanctioned by the usage of society. For comparison, *tradition* is defined by the same source as an inherited customary action handed down by bodies or stories of belief from one generation to the next. *Conventional schools* refer to publicly funded schools in the province researched. I was mindful to use the word *conventional* rather than *traditional* when referring to colonized classrooms and schools to avoid giving a negative connotation to the word *traditional*. This word usage is also consistent with the word usage in the research, which points out that conventional schools are a product of the colonial legacy (Neeganagwedgin, 2013; Pidgeon, Archibald, & Hawkey, 2014). According to Pidgeon et al. (2014), conventional schools contain colonized classrooms, given the nature of how conventional classrooms are

run, and conventionally run schools are not consistent with Indigenous traditional ways of knowing.

Sharing circles. This study used focus groups as one method of data collection; in practice, the focus groups resembled sharing circles. Sharing circles, also known as talking circles, are a traditional method of sharing knowledge for Indigenous peoples (Lavallée, 2009). Sharing circles are typically formatted as small groups, designed to facilitate dialogue, knowledge-sharing, and discussion (Absolon, 2008). Sharing circles are unique because they focus on sharing information as the whole person: mind, body, heart, and spirit (Lavallée, 2009). Typically, sharing circles are begun and closed with prayer by an Elder, and often a smudge is performed prior to beginning (Tobias & Richmond, 2016). The sharing circles in this study were each preceded by a smudge. While the smudge is not a method of collecting data, it is a culturally-respectful method of beginning a conversation. A smudge is a traditional ceremonial method for Indigenous people to open a sharing circle, and it is understood to cleanse away negative energy (Laramee, 2013). It involves lighting dried medicines such as sage, sweetgrass, or tobacco, placing one's hands in the smoke, and pulling the smoke over one's head, ears, eyes, mouth, and heart (Stokes, 2001). The cleansing smoke is intended to rid oneself of negative thoughts, sight, listening, words, and feelings while within the sharing circle (Stokes, 2001). The essence of the smudge, along with the presence of the Elder, shows respect for the community. Within a sharing circle, a sacred item such as talking stick or feather can be passed around to signify whose turn it is to speak, and the other participants are required to listen respectfully to that person (Tobias & Richmond, 2016). I was sure to include the smudge within the sharing circles during the data collection for this study in order to acknowledge traditional methods of knowledge-sharing within a conventional study.

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

For the purpose of this study, I assumed the following:

1. It was assumed that I, the researcher, would share the stories of participants as they were shared with me.
2. It was assumed that participants would be honest in reporting their experiences as Indigenous students in the conventional school system.

Delimitations. The following delimitation exists in the study:

1. The study will be delimited to high school students within a rural Canadian high school.

Limitations. Consideration must be taken of the limitations of this study:

1. Student participants, while truthful, may not share all information which pertains to the study and their life stories.
2. There may be response bias, as participants can choose to participate or not.

Summary

Given the historical background of education in Canada for Indigenous people, as explained by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) among other sources, in order to move forward toward reconciliation within the current education system it is essential to acknowledge the past. The Indian Act and the subsequent implementation of residential schools among Indigenous peoples in Canada has had an intergenerational impact on Indigenous people within the education system (Dion Stout, 2003). This study focused on how educators can support Indigenous students in completing high school, and as such it explored how educators can address learning environments and barriers to high school completion, as well as acknowledge the successful strategies that have led to Indigenous students completing high

school. The data were collected from the shared stories, perspectives, and perceptions of Indigenous high school students in order to provide educators with insight on how to support Indigenous students in completing high school.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Education has had paramount significance in the traditional cultural practices of Indigenous people and their children (Hansen & Antsanen, 2016). Traditionally, Indigenous education was family and community based, with a focus on languages, cultures, and customs (Hansen & Antsanen, 2016). This traditional familial focus was damaged, however, when the Canadian government implemented the program of residential schools for Indigenous children (Elias, Mignone, Hall, Hong, Hart, & Sareen, 2012). The residential school policy required Indigenous students to attend federally funded institutions that were focused on a government mandate of assimilation, and this policy affected more than 150,000 students over 130 years (Elias et al., 2012). Barnes, Josefowitz, and Cole (2006) as well as Feir (2016) reported that the compromise of Indigenous identity that took place in colonized schools during the residential school program had a long-lasting and far-reaching impact that is still felt by Indigenous students in Canadian schools today.

Given that the research shows the impact that residential schools have had on traditional Indigenous families, Indigenous communities have significant concerns about Indigenous students being educated in conventional schools in Canada today (Blacksmith, 2011; Elias et al., 2012; MacDonald & Hudson, 2012). Indigenous leaders, school districts, and the Canadian government have renewed their focus on approaching Indigenous student success and high school completion through traditional foundational teachings (TRC, 2018). The research, as evinced in the field, supports the need to examine student learning environments and to make them more culturally inclusive, which involves improving the inclusion of Indigenous methods, addressing cultural barriers to the completion of high school, and acknowledging successful

strategies that lead to Indigenous students completing high school (Madden, et al., 2013; Mombourquette & Head, 2014; Pidgeon, 2016; Preston & Claypool, 2013; Preston et al., 2012).

Reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples is an ongoing Canada-wide initiative (Edelman, 2012). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2012) was formed to acknowledge the impacts of residential schools on Indigenous children, families, and communities. Part of its mandate was to promote public awareness and education among Canadians about the impact that residential schools had across the country. In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada created a list of 94 Calls to Action intended to promote the legacy of Indigenous peoples, to address the injustices faced by Indigenous people in Canada, and to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada. Eleven of these calls to action focused on addressing the current needs of educators and students in supporting Indigenous students' success in the Canadian school system, including high school completion rates. The contributors to the Calls to Action report looked at addressing education and employment gaps, addressing the discrepancy in funding for federally funded Indigenous schools, increasing transparency, developing culturally respectful programming, and improving academic attainment for Indigenous students (TRC, 2015).

According to census data recorded by Statistics Canada (2015), Alberta was home to 16% of Canada's Indigenous population. These same data showed the inequities between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people. For example, 49% of Indigenous people are under the age of 25, whereas 32% of non-Indigenous people are under that age. Only 44% of Indigenous youth live with both parents, compared to 80% of non-Indigenous youth. Significant for this study, 39% of First Nations people, 23% of Métis, and 24% of Inuit aged 25–64 did not have a certificate, diploma, or degree, compared to only 11% of non-Indigenous people. The lack of

formal education contributed to employment rates of 40.5%, 56.9%, and 68.2% respectively for First Nations people, Métis, and Inuit aged 25–64 without a certificate, diploma, or degree. Mah (2016) notes that as of 2016, 50.2% of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit grade twelve students succeeded in graduating from high school within the three year period. While this graduation rate was up 8% from the 2010 benchmark, there was still a gap in meeting equality standards, as the three-year high school completion rate of the overall population was 76.5% (Beaudin, 2015).

The inequity represented in the provincial statistics provided a foundation upon which to build a research inquiry regarding the need to improve Indigenous students' success in completing high school. This literature review used the provincial statistics to focus on how to improve Indigenous student success in completing high school. First, to address the inequalities in education, there needed to be an inquiry into improved, culturally-infused, and respectful learning environments for Indigenous students. Additionally, to improve Indigenous student success in completing high school, there needed to be a focus on how historically significant barriers could be acknowledged and addressed to support Indigenous student success. Finally, there was a need to acknowledge successful strategies as identified and experienced by Indigenous peoples, as well as how those strategies have been implemented.

The literature review was structured using an Indigenous lens, based on the medicine wheel, which focused on how research might address the whole person through physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional wellbeing (Lavallée, 2009). Addressing the physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional needs of the whole person is foundational for all work with Indigenous peoples (Pidgeon, 2016). This focus led to an emphasis on research that was conducted with Indigenous peoples in order to support and benefit Indigenous communities (Government of

Canada, 2018). As noted by the Government of Canada (2018), research that involves the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples of Canada must benefit Indigenous communities.

Conceptual Framework

Researchers have emphasized the importance of researching Indigenous peoples through an Indigenous worldview (Kitchen, Cherubini, Trudeau, & Hodson, 2010; Lavallée, 2009; Pidgeon et al., 2014; Preston, 2016). When working within and researching Indigenous communities, respect for Indigenous knowledge, perspectives, languages, cultures, and traditions is of paramount importance (Milne, 2017). Building relationships and a sense of community based on respect and trust contributes to the success of research conducted among Indigenous communities (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011; Madden et al., 2013; Oskineegish, 2015; Oskineegish & Berger, 2013). In order to conduct their research in a respectful and culturally appropriate manner, numerous researchers have observed traditional Protocols, and these Protocols were foundational to their building the relationships that enabled them to conduct research within Indigenous communities (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011; Johnson, 2013; Kitchen et al., 2010; Lavallée, 2009).

In Canada, the Panel on Research Ethics (Government of Canada, 2018) has stated that research studies conducted within Indigenous communities should adhere to the specific guidelines and requirements of the Panel on Research Ethics, unless guided otherwise by an Indigenous community or community member. The Panel emphasizes the need for preserving the human dignity of participants. To ensure the balance in relationship between the researcher and the participants, as well as respect for the customs of the Indigenous communities researched, the Panel on Research Ethics affirms the principles of respect, concern for welfare, and justice. Additionally, the Panel notes the importance of a mutual benefit for the researcher

and the community, not solely for the researcher. These principles are important guides for Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers working with Indigenous subjects.

Education Is Our Buffalo (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2016) is a resource for Alberta-based teachers on Indigenous education that outlined how to approach and use Protocols within Indigenous communities. This resource has been used across the province of Alberta as a primary source of information for teachers working with Indigenous students. It defined "Protocols" as traditions and respectful expectations of the specific group of Indigenous people the teacher visits; the visitor is expected to adhere to these Protocols when working with the Indigenous people of that specific community (Steele, 2013).

Using proper Protocols means that one follows the customs of the people or community (Alberta Education, 2005). Maintaining Protocols is essential when researching traditional knowledge and teachings (Steele, 2013). Protocols are specific to a community. For researchers, meeting the expectations for visitors to Indigenous communities involves knowing, understanding, and following the traditional customs and procedures of the specific peoples or community.

Protocols are complex; for example, in certain Indigenous communities, approaching Indigenous leaders with tobacco is one way to pay respect and signify good intentions to gather information about the Protocols and practices of the community (Steele, 2013). Protocols could be determined by asking informed community members, such as Band leaders or Elders. An Elder is an important member of an Indigenous community. Bell (2018) specifies that the use of the term "Elder" is not based on the person's age; rather, it denotes a member of an Indigenous community who has a high degree of understanding of the traditions, customs, and ceremonies within the community. Elders are often called upon to provide guidance and advice within and

outside of Indigenous communities, as they have earned the right to pass on their knowledge, and they are to be addressed with respect (Bell, 2018). Generally, when those from outside the community, such as researchers, spend time to ask about specific Protocols and attempt to follow those Protocols, this effort is respected by the community. Protocols exist for a multitude of reasons, including building trust, to show respect, to allow people to speak in the manner of their cultural group, to create a balance in processes of consultation and negotiation, to improve relationships within and outside Indigenous communities, and to open people's minds to different attitudes (Steele, 2013).

Case studies and phenomenological research have been used frequently in studies involving Indigenous peoples (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011; Johnson, 2010; Madden et al., 2013; Mombourquette & Head, 2014; Oskineegish, 2015). Intrinsic case studies have often been used to reflect the specific experiences of participants researched, as this is of great importance when working with Indigenous peoples (Johnson, 2010; Madden et al., 2013). The use of case study design allowed for the direct investigation of the perspectives, perceptions, feelings, and experiences of the participants (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011; Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). This method is parallel to traditional Indigenous methods of data collection of oral storytelling (Lavallée, 2009). Qualitative data can be collected through focus groups conducted in a conventional manner or in the traditional method of sharing or talking circles. Parallel to focus groups, sharing circles gather oral data and input through traditional Indigenous methods of open conversation and sharing of stories (Snowball, 2014; Strong 2014). As a method of data collection, traditional sharing circles move away from colonized methods of data collection as seen, for example, in Madden et al.'s (2013) study. A colonized method of data collection

could have negative connotations for Indigenous communities based on their experiences of residential schools (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011).

While Indigenous worldview frameworks are unlike traditional Eurocentric research models, more conventional conceptual frameworks, such as social constructivism, have also been used to research Indigenous cultures (Preston, Claypool, Rowluck, & Green, 2017). As Fox's (2001) summary explained, the social constructivist theory incorporates multiple ideas on how to frame research. First, knowledge is constructed rather than passively absorbed, invented not discovered, idiosyncratic and personal, and socially constructed. Fox further noted that learning is a process of making sense of the world, and effective learning requires problems to be solved that are meaningful, open-ended, and challenging.

The social constructivist framework incorporated elements of a traditional understanding of how knowledge is given and received, which aligns with Indigenous practices. The social constructivist theory denotes that conventional methods of framing knowledge and understanding are only one way to look at research. Traditional and relevant teaching and learning methods are to be respected to help support reconciliation with Indigenous peoples (Kitchen, et al., 2009; Pidgeon et al., 2014). Additionally, Hughes and Sears' (2004) research showed that inherent meanings of ideas and words are created within the specific context of a particular group of people; knowledge is a socially negotiated product. Hughes and Sears (2014) connected the conventional social constructivist theory with the traditional Indigenous frame by the use of and emphasis on the importance of traditional knowledge, languages, and cultures.

While I used an Indigenous frame to conduct the research, I also respectfully acknowledged the limitations of my usage, given I have non-Indigenous heritage. This study framed the research through the lens of social constructivist theory. Social constructivism was

used with the understanding that the research would be framed through the lens of Indigenous worldviews focused on the use of the four quadrants of the medicine wheel to collect data, with implicit boundaries due to my being a non-Indigenous researcher. The integration of the medicine wheel is done with respect and recognition of Indigenous traditions, as well as with the acknowledgement that the medicine wheel is a valid and reliable method of data presentation.

Figure 1 shows the interconnectivity of Fox's (2001) outline for the social constructivism framework as connected to the elements of the medicine wheel. Throughout history, cultures have used medicine wheels to represent how the universe works (Nelson, 1998). Indigenous peoples used medicine wheels with nature as the focus, in a cyclical manner, to frame their worldviews, as the natural world is often represented in cycles (Jones, 2014). The medicine wheel was used by prairie First Nations as a symbol of their worldview (Verwoord, Mitchell, & Machado, 2011). While medicine wheels took on a variety of meanings and significance among Nations depending on those Nations' different teachings and traditions, there are similarities between them (Kemppainen, Kopera-Frye, & Woodard, 2008). The cyclical nature of the medicine wheel connects to the natural world and has cultural and spiritual meaning.

For the purposes of this study, the quadrants of the medicine wheel will focus on human wellbeing: mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual. According to Indigenous traditions, as described by Lavallée (2009) the four quadrants must be in balance for the person to be whole. Furthermore, personal balance within the quadrants must also coincide with balance with others, the environment, and Mother Earth (Lavallée, 2009). Using the medicine wheel quadrants as a foundation, the elements of social constructivism provide a conventional guide for the basis of the theory guiding this research study. Lavallée (2009) concluded that the four quadrants must be addressed during data collection, regardless of which theory frames the research. Research on

social constructivist theory has indicated that learning is an active process; knowledge is constructed rather than passively absorbed (Fox, 2001). Additionally, the theory conceives that knowledge is invented, not discovered; idiosyncratic and personal; and socially constructed. Research on social constructivism also describes learning as the process of making sense of the world, and it suggests that effective learning requires problems that are meaningful, open-ended, and challenging (Fox, 2001). Social constructivism theory lends itself to the traditional medicine wheel as a method through which to frame this study.

While each element of the framework of social constructivism is unique, the cyclical nature of the medicine wheel shows that every element is interconnected in the development of the full worldview; one aspect of the framework cannot work without the other aspects. social constructivism framework is similar to the wheel: if one element of the medicine wheel is removed, the wheel cannot turn (Lavallée, 2009). Each quadrant of the medicine wheel connects to and cannot work without the others. Similarly, a piece of a story cannot be understood without the whole story (Lavallée, 2009). As the medicine wheel is a circle, the circle cannot turn without all sides working in harmony. This is essential to comprehending the importance of the medicine wheel as it guides studies with Indigenous peoples (Lavallée, 2009). The conventional research frame of social constructivism works harmoniously and respectfully within the traditional, holistic medicine wheel view of Indigenous peoples. As mentioned earlier, Fox (2001) noted that within the frame of social constructivism, learning is the process of making sense of the world. The learning process, and the encouragement to make learning personal and open-ended, is respectful to Indigenous traditions. Using social constructivism in harmony with the medicine wheel, which focuses on taking care of the whole person, creates a

framework that is respectful of traditional methods, while still working within the confines of conventional research methods (Lavallée, 2009).

Toulouse (2016) framed the medicine wheel as the foundation for an effective learning cycle. Toulouse broke down the four essential elements of the medicine wheel in terms of their relationship to educational pedagogy and elements. The intellectual quadrant focuses on expansion of the curriculum, evaluation, assessment, and adaptations. The spiritual quadrant focuses on teaching, historical facts, traditional use, and Indigenous concepts. The emotional quadrant focuses on step-by-step plans, inquiry questions, strategies for engagement, and key terms. The physical quadrant focuses on materials, resources, time, space, considerations, and cautions (Toulouse, 2016). Addressing the four elements of the medicine wheel connected to the purpose of the study, which was focused on improving high school completion rates for Indigenous students through addressing the needs of students, encompassing all elements that make them whole. Specifically, this approach addresses the needs of students not just from their academic standings but also, for example, their mental health and environmental factors, which, as Lavallée (2009) points out, may contribute to student success.

The final components of the conceptual map are the overarching elements to be considered when researching and working within Indigenous communities. The historical hegemony, colonialization, and Eurocentric control of school systems influenced all aspects of Indigenous education systems (Aquash, 2013; Kearns & Anuik, 2015). It was essential that this study be culturally sensitive, given the historical imbalance of power that occurred during the implementation of residential schools (Richards, Vining, & Weimer, 2010). Indigenization was the essential element needed to lay the foundation for framing the study and working with and within Indigenous communities (McGregor, 2013).

Figure 1 reflects the interconnectivity between the traditional use of the medicine wheel as a guiding principle for Indigenous traditions and the conventional methods of social constructivism. The medicine wheel functions as the foundation for the research, while the conventional lens of social constructivism is still respected.

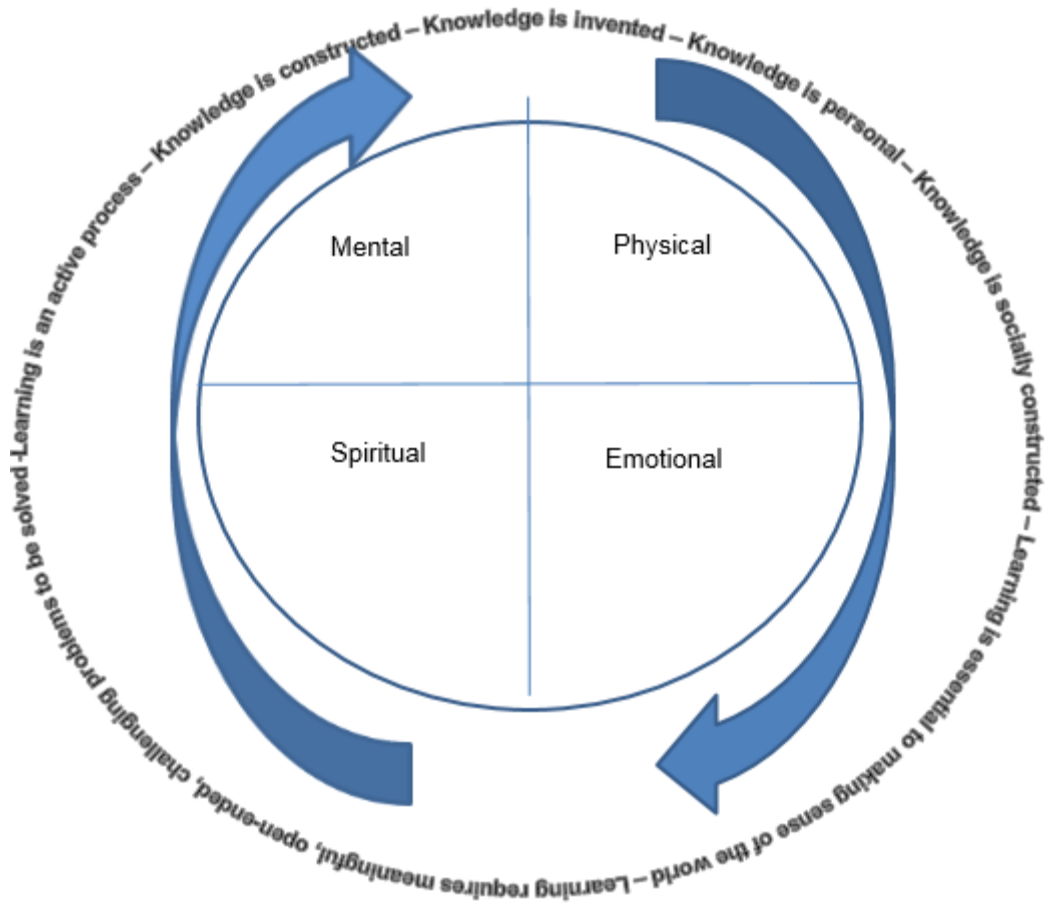


Figure 1. Social constructivist framework through the lens of the Indigenous worldview: Using the medicine wheel to guide research.

Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature

While I did find studies regarding how educators can support Indigenous students' success, there were gaps in the corpus of that research, such as from where the data were collected and from whom. The review of previous studies provided insight into data collection, research methods, and analysis for research conducted within Indigenous communities by Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers. Previous research studies focusing on Indigenous education were often qualitative. Traditional Protocols aligned to coincide with specific communities and were used in qualitative research studies of Indigenous peoples.

The review of literature presents three main areas of focus to examine Indigenous student success in completing high school improving student learning environments, improving pedagogical practices of educators, and addressing historical barriers to Indigenous success (Mombourquette & Head, 2014; Pidgeon, 2016; Preston & Claypool, 2013). While learning environments, culturally sensitive practices, and barriers were distinct issues presented in the literature, these three concepts overlapped in findings. This recalls the medicine wheel: themes and concerns that affected Indigenous students were connected and could not be addressed in isolation. Therefore, while I categorized the literature by presenting themes and findings, the findings are interconnected and overlap.

Addressing learning environments. Preston and Claypool (2013) used individual interviews to collect data on school experiences from urban Indigenous students in Grade 12. The semistructured interviews were conducted and framed through an Aboriginal worldview, with questions derived from the medicine wheel's learning quadrants (physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual). The key findings of Preston and Claypool's research were that Indigenous student success requires creating a hospitable school culture, relevant learning

opportunities, and positive influences from personal connections outside the school. The study initially focused on what motivated all students to learn. The data collected by Preston and Claypool reflected the need for schools to create policies and programs to promote peer mentoring and life-long learning for all students. Using data from the individual interviews, the researchers, through grounded theory, analyzed the results from an Indigenous perspective. Preston and Claypool noted the importance of Indigenous people being in control of the knowledge that belongs to Indigenous peoples. Additionally, Preston and Claypool emphasized that any research that is conducted about or among Indigenous people should be empowering and benefit Indigenous people. Stress was placed on the idea that gathering Indigenous knowledge must benefit Indigenous people and not just the researchers. Opening lines of communication and building community prior to beginning any research are integral elements of conducting research from an Indigenous worldview.

Hare and Pidgeon (2011) provided another example of qualitative research conducted through the Indigenous worldview. Hare and Pidgeon drew upon cultural Protocols that were aligned with two reserves in northern Ontario. Protocols included approaching the leaders of the community with offerings and smudge. The researchers examined the school experiences of 39 Indigenous youth. Incorporating the expected Protocols for the two Nations, Hare and Pidgeon (2011) conducted focus group interviews of the youth. The interview questions used in the open-ended focus group provided data for the researchers to analyze. The researchers' findings led the researchers to conclude that this specific group of Indigenous students accessed Indigenous sources of strength, such as family and community structures, to address the inequalities that occurred within their school experience. The researchers emphasized the importance of having specific responses from Indigenous participants. By listening to what the participants said, the

researchers connected the responses to the foundational elements of an Indigenous worldview. Hare and Pidgeon found that Indigenous students accessed family and community more frequently in order to compensate for the inequalities in their schooling.

In a qualitative study, Whitley (2014) focused on understanding how middle-school-aged children's development was influenced by the relationships they form within a school setting. Whitley used two sets of four focus groups, one set specifically for teachers and one for students. Similarly to Hare and Pidgeon (2011), Whitley used focus groups as a culturally respectful manner of gathering data. The participants emphasized the importance of the focus groups taking place in circles, which was consistent with traditional practices. Whitley synthesized the data based on information gathered from separate teacher and student focus groups. Whitley determined that concurrent factors influenced educational success for students. Based on Whitley's research, those factors were relationships, self-concept, academic expectations, relevance of school curriculum, and academic aspirations. Whitley raised the point that the results of the focus groups with the students may have varied if the researcher had been of Indigenous heritage.

Oskineegish and Berger (2013) noted the importance of building relationships as a fundamental element to student success. They used a qualitative study structured as formal and informal conversations with participants. The open-ended nature of these formal and informal conversations allowed for participants to share their stories in accordance with methods that coincide with Indigenous traditions. This was in keeping with the Panel on Research Ethics' statement that data gathered must benefit the participants as well as the researcher (Government of Canada, 2018). By providing an opportunity for the Indigenous participants to share their full stories, the research conducted by Oskineegish and Berger respected the cultural traditions and

oral storytelling. Of the seven participants who shared their stories, four identified as First Nations and three were non-Indigenous. The researchers emphasized the importance of minimizing Eurocentric perspectives in conducting and synthesizing the information gathered from the conversations. The responses showed that non-Indigenous teachers needed to build reciprocal relationships. The data also showed that the non-Indigenous teachers needed to understand their roles as visitors within the community.

The open-ended nature of the research conducted by Preston and Claypool (2013), Hare and Pidgeon (2011), Whitley (2014), and Oslineegish and Berger (2013) was consistent with Indigenous teachings. Allowing participants to share their stories for the length of time needed was respectful, and it was also in harmony with Indigenous practices (Madden et al., 2013). By offering Indigenously inclusive methods of data collection, researchers aligned with the guidelines of the Panel on Research Ethics, but also respected the culture of the participants and their responses.

Improving culturally infused classroom practices. Mombourquette and Head (2014), in an intrinsic case study, used interviews with high school teachers in a professional learning community (PLC) to conduct a qualitative study. The PLC groups focused on improving teacher practice. The researchers found that Indigenous students were more successful in completing courses and graduating when Indigenously inclusive and appropriate teaching methods were used within the school. Teachers reported that the improved instructional practices emanated from a heightened sense of collective teacher efficacy. The researchers found research-based training, which teachers accepted as a better way to teach, needed to be culturally competent; the training needed to be aligned with traditional and culturally appropriate methods of teaching and learning. Cultural competency included a need for a deeper understanding of appropriate

teaching and assessment methods that are congruent with Indigenous traditions. Mombourquette and Head noted the importance of the presence of Elders in the school, of smudging, of language, and of traditional artwork. Additionally, Mombourquette and Head found that the school environment needed to be culturally inclusive and focused on partnering with the culturally appropriate ideas of extended family and support systems.

Preston et al. (2012), focused on the importance of quality Indigenous education that is culturally appropriate. Within this qualitative study, Preston et al. analyzed and synthesized the methods and intended outcomes six Indigenous early childhood education programs. Cultural compatibility theory was central to this study. The use of cultural compatibility theory was intended to mirror Indigenous teaching in that the values and expectations in the classroom should be in line with those within the larger community. The overall goal of the cultural compatibility theory was that learning would improve when the learning was consistent and reinforced between school and home. The findings of Preston et al. were consistent with those of Mombourquette and Head (2014), who suggested that programs should incorporate Indigenous pedagogy infused with language and culture. Additionally, the study suggested programs be staffed with qualified Indigenous educators and structured to help improve conditions within Indigenous communities.

Oskineegish (2015) used semistructured interviews within a qualitative research study. The interviews were conducted with Indigenous educators to gather information about where non-Indigenous teachers were finding success and what limitations occurred when non-Indigenous teachers came to the northern communities to teach. Oskineegish focused on using Protocols to conduct these interviews and included guiding questions. In keeping with traditional methods, the questions were intended to guide the conversation, but the interview was

not limited to using these guiding questions if the conversation presented opportunity to expand beyond them. By allowing and encouraging discussion and expansion of responses using oral methods, Oskineegish incorporated respectful Protocols for the participants. Respondent results showed that to cultivate student success, non-Indigenous teachers should focus on enriching their teaching practices through engagement with the community, self-reflection, communication, and a positive attitude toward learning. Within these specific communities, the findings showed that culturally relevant teaching and incorporation of culturally relevant resources and pedagogy would lead to increased student success. Additional findings of the study emphasized the need for educators from outside the community to have a deeper understanding of the historical barriers presented to Indigenous students in order to improve high school completion rates.

Mombourquette and Head (2014) and Oskineegish (2015) emphasized cultural Protocols. The use of Protocols within the data collection was consistent with the findings of Preston et al. (2012), who argued for using Indigenous teachings and methods in educational pedagogy. The findings of researchers who focused on improving learning environments through an Indigenous lens (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011; Oskineegish & Berger, 2013; Preston & Claypool, 2013; Whitley, 2014) are consistent with the findings of researchers who focused on improving pedagogical practices (Mombourquette & Head, 2014; Oskineegish, 2015, Preston et al., 2012) through an Indigenous lens. This reinforces the interconnectivity between research findings when studying Indigenous groups.

Addressing barriers. Pidgeon (2016) synthesized and analyzed previous research studies on Indigenous education to highlight instances of the successful integration of Indigenous knowledge into the fabric of higher education institutions. Like Preston and Claypool (2013), Pidgeon focused a qualitative research study through the lens of an Indigenous holistic

framework, and the medicine wheel was the center of this holistic framework. Pidgeon also focused on the notions of reciprocity, respect, relevance, and responsibility. The study focused on the need for systemic changes within the school system and the transformations required within institutions to bring about social inclusion for Indigenous people. Additionally, the researcher noted the importance of the interconnectedness and the anchoring that Elders bring to the building of a community.

Milne's (2016) research focused on the perspectives of adults on the lives of off-reserve Indigenous students in southern Ontario. Milne collected qualitative data from interviews with parents and teachers. The majority of the parent participants were of Indigenous background, and there were both Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers. Respondents noted that Indigenous students encountered racial discrimination, a lack of a sense of belonging, a desire to blend in with the majority of the student population, and inequalities in Indigenous-based programs. While Milne did not interview students directly, the data synthesized from the teacher and parent community indicated that embedding Indigenous cultures, perspectives, and histories into conventional educational content could counteract negative experiences for Indigenous people in the school system. Additionally, embedding Indigenous education could serve as a way to combat prejudices in schools by facilitating respect for cultural diversity among non-Indigenous people. Milne noted that significant time was spent working within the community, and steps were taken to build relationships by attending parent meetings and being visible at the schools to promote the trustworthiness of the researcher's intentions.

Madden, Higgins, and Korteweg (2013) used poetic transcription of interviews within their qualitative study. Poetic transcription is a meaning-making practice that focuses on holistic approaches to teaching and learning, rooted in the medicine-wheel: heart, mind, body, and spirit.

Madden et al. noted that the use of poetic transcription is a way to disseminate the oral data collected and not to be satisfied with a “good enough” interpretation of the oral data collected. Poetic transcription involves research done with the participant rather than on the participant. The poetic transcription was as a respectful method of data collection that was aligned with cultural practices in order to respect the voices of the participants. This traditional method of data collection was used as an attempt to overcome the barriers in place and thus to help urban Indigenous people find more success in the traditionally colonized education system. In addition to poetic transcription, traditional sharing circles were used to collect data, and each one began with a smudge. Madden et al. focused on the barriers that needed to be overcome in order to better support Indigenous students within the Canadian education system. The barriers identified in this study were unwelcoming schools, the professionalization of classroom teaching, colonized classrooms, and unilateral colonization. Madden et al.’s study indicated the historical and prevalent barriers that Indigenous students and non-Indigenous teachers would need to overcome to successfully work toward the common goal of improving Indigenous student achievement in school.

Milne (2017) used grounded theory with a qualitative study focused on barriers to supporting Indigenous students as perceived from educators’ perspectives. Within the study, Milne conducted interviews with Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents and teachers to determine their perceptions of the implementation of Indigenous-focused policy directives from the provincial government. The focus of the study was to determine what was seen as encouraging and what was seen as limiting the implementation of the policies. Participant interviews indicated that Indigenous-focused content and resources and traditional Indigenous teaching methods contributed to student self-esteem, self-confidence, and an improved sense of

cultural identity. Learning environments that focused on traditional languages, cultures, perspectives, and traditions were noted to have a positive influence on academic performance. Interestingly, the majority (74%) of participants were non-Indigenous. The barrier that presented itself to the non-Indigenous participants was that educators were unaware of and intimidated by the Indigenous content. Teacher participants indicated that they were concerned they would say or do the wrong things in class, which could be misinterpreted by Indigenous students, or that they might appear uneducated to their students.

The emphasis on Indigenous methods of data collection, such as Indigenous holistic frames, protocols, sharing circles, smudges, and including Elders when working with students were found throughout Pidgeon (2016), Milne (2016; 2017), and Madden et al.'s (2013) research. These Indigenous methods also coincide with conventional research methods when framed from a culturally sensitive perspective. The use of traditional methods indicates a commitment to treating participants with respect while adhering to the conventional methods of data collection. This is reflected in the use of social constructivist theory and the use of the medicine wheel as a frame; the researchers modeled the use of an Indigenous lens as a guide and focus for conventional research (Preston et al., 2017).

Although Stavrou and Miller's (2017) research was specifically focused on mathematics education, the conclusions drawn from their qualitative research connected with previous research studies (Madden et al., 2013; Milne, 2016; Pidgeon, 2016). Stavrou and Miller's study aligned with the emphasis on understanding historical barriers faced by Indigenous peoples in order to help support students to move toward improved academic success (Madden et al., 2013; Milne, 2016; Pidgeon, 2016). Stavrou and Miller's research focused on the synthesis and analysis of previous research studies and literature that focused on Indigenous education and

mathematics education. The findings of the research indicated that avoiding or not focusing on the ongoing racism, traditional colonization, and oppression experienced by Indigenous students even in Indigenized mathematics courses, practitioners are “perpetuating a false sense of the origins of inequality” (p. 92). Because the curriculum was implemented at the surface level only, Indigenous students had inauthentic, disrespectful, or damaging experiences in the classroom. Though no new data were collected and the researchers’ personal biases may have been a factor, the findings supported the notion that there were barriers in place for students and these barriers needed to be addressed by the educators.

Another barrier to Indigenous student success in completing high school that has been identified is the intergenerational effect of residential schools. Using a mixed method study, Bougie and Senécal (2010) studied the effects that intergenerational trauma caused by residential schools had on the success of Indigenous students. Bougie and Senécal analyzed and synthesized previous research and combined that with quantitative results from the 2006 Aboriginal Peoples Survey, focusing on the children and youth component. The responses were based on the perceptions and reporting of parents. The researchers concluded that factors such as poverty, lack of safe housing, and food insecurity were prevalent within the participants’ responses. The analysis of the quantitative responses from the survey led Bougie and Senécal to see a connection between residential school survivors to current states of inequality. This inequality, Bougie and Senécal concluded, affected the academic success of children of residential school survivors.

Stavrou and Miller (2017) and Bougie and Senécal (2010) approached the subject of Indigenous student success using different research questions; however, both studies found through previously synthesized data that there were barriers to improved success. The recurring

findings within the literature showed that culturally inclusive and respectful learning environments, improved pedagogical practices that reflect Indigenous cultures, and a focus on addressing the deeply rooted barriers to Indigenous student academic success are needed. Reflective of the medicine wheel, the findings of the research within the literature review are connected, though each finding is significant in its own right (Lavallée, 2009). The findings showed that there was not simply one aspect that could address the concerns for Indigenous students; rather, the whole person, as connected to the medicine wheel foundation, needed to be addressed (Lavallée, 2009). The data indicated that the foundation for improving Indigenous student success in completing high school should consist of addressing historical barriers, and that improved learning environments and pedagogical practices would be an outcome of addressing these barriers.

Review of Methodological Issues

These studies encountered various methodological issues, including the feasibility of the studies, the need to meet ethical standards, and the need to minimize risks to the participants, especially participants drawn from vulnerable sectors. Researching within specific cultural communities presented opportunities and hurdles to overcome in the methods, as there are specific guidelines in place when working with vulnerable participants and working within Indigenous communities (Government of Canada, 2018).

The qualitative data collection methods used in these studies, such as Preston and Claypool (2013) and Madden et al. (2013), were better aligned with understanding the cultural traditions of Indigenous peoples. These methods focused on gathering data from the whole person: data regarding the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual needs of the participants (Verwoord et al., 2011). The use of qualitative data also provided researchers with the

opportunity to follow traditional Indigenous Protocols (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011). By using focus groups, sharing circles, and interviews to collect data, the researchers provided opportunities for participants to provide detailed background, and they also showed respect for the Indigenous traditions of oral storytelling (Madden et al., 2013). Madden et al.'s (2013) study provided opportunity for follow-up and for the participants to give clear and complete responses. This opportunity was not made available in the mixed-method study conducted by Bougie and Senécal (2010), where the selected response survey limited participants' ability to clarify or provide further information.

The ages, roles, and locations of participants also varied within the literature. When looking at what influenced and affected Indigenous students' success in completing high school, few researchers actually collected data from students. Whitley's (2014) study showed that parents raised concerns about signing permission forms for younger participants, as well as about any coaching or prompting that could occur during interviews. Besides Whitley's research (2014), which gathered data from students from upper elementary and middle school, the other studies included data from students in Grade 12 (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011; Preston & Claypool, 2012). Preston and Claypool (2012) and Hare and Pidgeon's (2011) studies did not require parental permission, as the participants were at least 18 years old.

In multiple studies, non-Indigenous people—teachers, parents, and community members—were interviewed to provide their perspectives on Indigenous issues (Milne, 2016; Preston et al., 2012). There were significantly fewer Indigenous teachers than Indigenous students. As Milne's (2016) study identified, it was more feasible to work with teachers who had experience working with Indigenous students, even if those teachers did not identify as Indigenous. The lack of Indigenous participants potentially limits the responses (Milne, 2016).

Involving non-Indigenous parents and community members in data collection created a more inclusive environment, but may not have resulted in culturally sensitive data collection (Milne, 2016).

The locations where the studies were conducted affected the methods that were used. Differences between provinces, Nations, urban-versus-rural, and northern-versus-southern all factored into the responses and the transferability of the data collected. Results collected in northern Ontario differed significantly from data collected in urban Saskatchewan. Indigenous peoples have been frequently referred to as a heterogeneous group, and location plays a large role in the diversity of Indigenous cultures, traditions, and languages.

In some cases, the researchers had pre-existing relationships with the groups of participants they researched (Oskineegish, 2015). Oskineegish (2015) noted that it might be challenging to insert oneself into a community solely to conduct research. Preexisting relationships were beneficial when it came to respecting cultural traditions. These relationships could limit locations where the studies took place and the Nations being studied. The analysis and coding of results could also have been colored by the biases of the researchers. These biases could be based on previous experiences within the community, previous encounters with participants, or prior knowledge of events within the community (Oskineegish & Berger, 2013). Even with established relationships, Oskineegish and Berger (2013) found that participants reported being nervous during the interview, and this may have led to untruthful or guarded responses. There was a fine balance between familiarity and objectivity, especially when working with people for whom culture and tradition play an essential role.

Conventional qualitative methods of collecting data further reflected the colonized and Eurocentric methods used to interact with Indigenous peoples. Additionally, conventional time

constraints on and expectations of interviews did not coincide with Indigenous traditions of oral storytelling. Madden et al. (2013) used poetic transcription of interviews, giving a decolonialized perspective on the conventional interview format, and some other research was mindful of this (Oskineegish, 2015), but the use of conventional research methods was a limitation in other research. It was also important to note that some studies were not conducted with Indigenous researchers, and this affected the results of the data collected (Whitley, 2014). In some cases, non-Indigenous researchers may have had previous long-standing relationships with the community (McGregor, 2013) or may have invited Indigenous scholars from the area to participate in the research.

Synthesis of Research Findings

With the recent focus on improving relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada, Indigenous student success has been a topic of study (TRC, 2018). My synthesis of the research on Indigenous student success revealed multiple commonalities between data sets. These researchers chose to conduct their studies using qualitative methods, which used and embedded traditional Indigenous frames, and worked to ensure the utmost respect for the whole person. The research methods included focusing on the physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental wellbeing of participants (Madden et al., 2013; Preston & Claypool, 2013). Researchers consistently placed emphasis on using culturally appropriate methods for collecting data (Madden et al., 2013; Preston & Claypool, 2013). Interviews, focus groups, and sharing circles were used to gather data (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011; Kitchen et al., 2010; Mombourquette & Head, 2014). Using sharing circles and focus groups to collect data showed respect for Indigenous Protocols and respected the cultural norms of the First Nations people, Métis, and Inuit being

studied. Open-ended opportunities for participants to share information beyond conventional structured interviews were also provided. With the emphasis on culturally appropriate methods, researchers were made more aware of their biases and limitations when working with Indigenous peoples, and these were taken into account as they conducted their research (Oskineegish & Berger, 2013; Whitley, 2014).

The literature reflected specific recurring findings. First, Indigenous students needed improved culturally-infused, culturally-respectful, and culturally-appropriate learning environments (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011; Oskineegish & Berger, 2013; Preston & Claypool, 2013; Whitley, 2014). Elements of the medicine wheel—physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual—needed to be the foundation of Indigenous programs and education (Lavallée, 2009). Second, educators needed support to incorporate Indigenous foundations into their teaching practice (Mombourquette & Head, 2014; Oskineegish, 2015; Preston et al., 2012). Teachers noted the need for improved cultural competency and the understanding of traditionally appropriate instructional practices (Mombourquette & Head, 2014). A large part of Indigenous pedagogy included building relationships and community as the cornerstones to success. Finally, historical barriers needed to be addressed and understood to move forward with supporting educators and students in rural provincial classrooms to ensure that Indigenous students could complete high school (Bougie & Sénécal, 2010; Stavrou & Miller, 2017). Without help to bridge the gaps and overcome the barriers among and between students, educators, parents, and community, reconciliation would be a challenge (Bougie & Sénécal, 2010; Stavrou & Miller, 2017).

Critique of Previous Research

While there have been significant contributions in recent years to the study of Indigenous student success, there are still gaps and limitations in the existing research. Methodological

issues were present when researching within specific cultural communities. There were strengths and weaknesses within the methodologies of previous research. While there were rich opportunities to collect qualitative data through respectful methods, researchers also needed to remain focused on feasibility, bias, and risks.

The first limitation has to do with the locations where the research studies have been conducted. As Indigenous groups are heterogeneous, results from studies conducted only in one part of the country with a specific Nation may not have yielded the same results when conducted with a different Nation. For example, the results from Oskineegish's studies (2014, 2015) focused on northern Ontario communities, which tended to be more isolated than the urban Saskatchewan communities studied by Preston and Claypool (2013). There are differences of culture, language, and tradition between each Nation of Indigenous people. Given these differences, the factors and strategies that lead to Indigenous student success in completing high school might vary from one location or community to another, so this is an area that requires further research.

Next, only few studies sought out perspectives from multiple stakeholders. Perspectives from parents and teachers might differ from those of students. The lack of participation from multiple groups such as Indigenous parents, students, and community members also caused concerns, especially in cases in which non-Indigenous participants responded to questions about the realities of being Indigenous. For example, Milne's (2017) study focused on the challenges and successes of the implementation of Indigenous education policy directives from Ontario Public Schools. The interviews were conducted with 100 parents and teacher participants, but only 26 of the 100 participants were Indigenous. While data collected from non-Indigenous participants could still be rich in information, it does not provide a full view of the realities for

Indigenous peoples from an Indigenous perspective. Given these stakeholder limitations, there needs to be further investigation into Indigenous student perspectives on the factors that lead to Indigenous students succeeding in completing high school.

There were also differences between the responses from participants who worked at or attended schools on reserves and those who worked at or attended schools off reserves. The different realities faced by participants in conventional public schools and those in federally-funded schools were reflected in their responses. Whether information was gathered from conventional schools or federal schools also affected the sampling of students from whom data were gathered. Sanderson et al. (2013) noted that there was almost no correlation between attendance rates and the students' sense of cultural identity. These results seemed contradictory to typical results, but the sampling of participants only included students who were in school; the results did not include those who had dropped out or who struggled with attendance. Sanderson et al.'s findings could be connected back to the idea that students who are successful are those who are able to navigate the colonialized school structure. It is difficult to draw conclusions based on the data collected in this study, as not all types of students were represented in the sample. Given the design of the study and the accessibility of participants at the school, those who dropped out, for example, could not be interviewed. The feasibility and practicality of gathering data from students who were not in schools may have proven difficult, but this was a critique of the nature of the sampling for this type of study.

Another area of focus for researchers was the element of personal bias and privilege. Non-Indigenous researchers who work with Indigenous participants should acknowledge their biases and privilege, and they should attempt to mitigate this internal bias. While this bias was acknowledged in the existing literature, it was difficult to understand to what extent the bias was

intrinsically ingrained within researchers. From the opposite perspective, bias was also presented when the researcher was closely tied to the community and had a vested interest in the results (Pidgeon, 2016). The bias within studies could threaten the internal validity during the collection and analysis of data.

Additionally, the conventional qualitative research model used by researchers was not always congruent with the respectful practices and Protocols of Indigenous peoples (Madden et al., 2013). Madden et al. (2013) attempted to mitigate this process by including poetic transcription into the interview process to gather data respectfully from participants. In some cases, researchers used and adhered to traditional Protocols when collecting data from Indigenous participants. This critique was raised about some methods of data collection that did not adhere to these traditions, as they showed a potential bias against cultural practices, which may have violated the personal ethical standards of the participants (Sacher, Sacher, & Vaughan, 2014).

Often, the feasibility and accessibility of participants could be a concern when researching Indigenous students (Sanderson et al., 2013). Accessing students in school presents limitations related to timing, the availability of students, attendance, and parental permissions (Sanderson et al., 2013). While researchers attempted to bridge the gaps, there were still limitations to previous studies conducted.

Summary

The body of evidence on the subject of educators supporting Indigenous student success contained three major claims. First, Indigenous students need improved culturally infused and respectful learning environments. Second, educators need support to embed Indigenous foundations into their teaching practice. Third, barriers need to be addressed and understood in

order to move forward with supporting educators and students in high schools in rural provincial classrooms. These claims were supported by scholarly research and data (Madden et al., 2013; Mombourquette & Head 2014; Preston & Claypool, 2013).

Research showed that one element that contributes to Indigenous student success is a school environment that focuses on culturally appropriate learning opportunities (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011; Preston & Claypool, 2013; Whitley, 2014). Research also showed that there was a need to focus on what *educators* need to improve upon in order to help Indigenous students succeed (Mombourquette & Head, 2014; Oskineegish, 2015; Preston et al., 2012). Finally, research showed that there were many historical barriers and personal barriers that needed to be considered and addressed, specifically by non-Indigenous teachers and the conventional school systems (Madden et al., 2013; Milne, 2016; Pidgeon, 2016).

Multiple factors influence Indigenous student success in completing high school. The barriers that are in place also limit the ability of educators to support Indigenous student success in school. Given what is known from the review of the literature, there is sufficient reason to think that an investigation examining how educators can better support Indigenous students' high school completion within conventional schools would yield socially significant findings.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Given the impact of residential schools on Indigenous communities, educators play a pivotal role in reconciliation (Barnes, Josefowitz, & Cole, 2006; Feir, 2016). Multiple factors influence Indigenous student success in completing high school. While there are successful strategies for encouraging Indigenous students' success, there are also barriers that limit educators' ability to support Indigenous students in successfully completing high school.

The purpose of this study was to explore the successes, barriers, and strategies related to the high school completion rates of Indigenous students based on the insights provided by Indigenous grade twelve students. The study was an examination of ways to improve culturally infused, respectful learning environments, to acknowledge the successful strategies, and to address barriers to completing high school that are experienced by Indigenous students. The study focused on traditional Indigenous methods and it also used conventional methods, such as data coding, data collection, and analysis of the data throughout the research (Hughes & Sears, 2004; Lavallée, 2009). A frame of social constructivist theory was embedded in an Indigenous lens throughout the methods of this study.

Research Questions

The following research question will drive this study:

How do educators support Indigenous students' high school completion within conventional schools?

The subsequent questions were:

1. How can focus group conversations with Indigenous students identify ways to improve culturally infused and respectful learning environments to encourage high school completion?
2. How can conversation with and observations of Indigenous students provide insight into addressing barriers to and acknowledging the successes of high school completion within conventional schools?

Purpose and Design of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the successes, barriers, and strategies related to the high school completion rates of Indigenous students. This study was an examination of the strategies needed to improve learning environments, and it addressed barriers to completing high school that Indigenous students in one rural Canadian school district faced. These barriers were identified based on student input. Improving the high school completion rate of Indigenous students will be defined as what can be done, from the students' perspectives, to improve culturally appropriate learning environments through improved inclusivity and how to overcome the barriers to Indigenous success in completing high school. The intention of this research study was to provide insight into what can be done to improve high school completion rates for Indigenous students, based on the accounts of Indigenous high school students.

A case study design was used for the collection, analysis, and synthesis of the data, providing insight into the uniqueness and interest of the specific case (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study design for this study involved direct investigation of the perspectives, perceptions, feelings, and experiences of the participants (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). The case study was selected as it is bounded by the parameters of the questions, the participants, and the location of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The intent of this case study was to help

understand the driving question of this study, supported through the collection and integration of multiple forms of qualitative data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research design is parallel to traditional Indigenous data collection methods of oral storytelling (Lavallée, 2009). The intent was to provide information for educators to implement so they can better support Indigenous students within a specific area in Alberta based on insights provided by Indigenous students. My intent in gathering the perspectives, experiences, feelings, and perceptions of participants through the case study design was to provide data that will be useful to educators in their work supporting Indigenous students.

The choice to use a case study design approach is supported by previous research undertaken within Indigenous communities (Mombourquette & Head, 2014)). Grounded theory, with the systematic use of theory development, was an option for this study; however, the limitations of time and access to the student participants made this challenging (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ethnographic research was also suggested by Gallop and Bastien (2016), Johnson (2010), and Snowball (2014) as a valid approach. However, it may not have been feasible or permissible by the school district (or the school calendar) for me to be embedded into a school or schools for this fieldwork for an extensive amount of time.

Research Population and Sampling Methods

Research population. The bounds of the case study consisted of one rural Canadian school district community and included Indigenous students. The population of students was drawn from one composite high school within the rural provincial school district. Students were of First Nation, Métis, or Inuit heritage. The rural school is located on Treaty 6 territory, traditional lands of over 17 nations including the Cree, Saulteaux, Nakota Sioux, and Dene Peoples (Walking Together Education for Reconciliation, 2017). While the schools within the

district are on Treaty 6 territory, the research population may have been from a wide variety of Treaty areas, Métis settlements, or Inuit communities.

Sampling method. For the purpose of this study, snowball sampling was used to sample participants. Creswell and Poth (2018) noted that snowball sampling “identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich” (p. 159). As noted above, student participants were of First Nation, Métis, or Inuit heritage. Informational posters were displayed and word-of-mouth was used to inform potential participants about the opportunity to participate. Self-selection for this study was consistent with Indigenous practices of inviting participants to share their stories in the manner that the participants choose (Aquash, 2013; Johnson, 2013).

Aquash (2013) noted that use of nonprobability sampling and volunteer opt-in sampling is conducive to respecting the knowledge and autonomy of Indigenous peoples. Johnson (2013) noted that snowball sampling as a way for formal and informal networks to branch out to recruit participants. The formal network of the researcher, school principal, and Indigenous liaison used informal connections among Indigenous students, parents, and community members to contact student participants who fit the criteria for the study. Consent forms and information letters (see Appendix B) were distributed to potential participants. The target was 16 student participants. If the optimal sample size had not been achieved, the study would still have had merit as the stories and experiences of Indigenous students provided the data, and each participant’s story has significant meaning, as is consistent with a case study design (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). If there had been more than the targeted number of volunteers, names would have been drawn at random until eight female students and eight male students were selected, and alternates would

have been drawn in case any of those selected chose not to participate once their name had been drawn.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation used in this study was classified as qualitative, as the data collection included transcripts from focus groups, observations, and a review of documents. The study was not quantitative, as it did not involve numerical data. Focus groups, observations, and document review formed the triangulation of data collection for this qualitative study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Triangulation of data is the use of multiple sources of data to provide corroborating evidence to validate the accuracy of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Triangulation assists in enriching and corroborating data, as it does not rely on a single source for data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The methods coincided with Indigenous practices, because they incorporated experiential learning; the participant was fully engaged within the focus groups, which were conducted in a manner that is reflective of a traditional sharing circle (Restoule, 2004).

Focus groups. Lived experiences can be shared through collecting and telling stories, and this can be defined as narrative research (Casey, 1996). Narrative research can include analyzing biographies, narrative interviewing, and ethnobiography (Casey, 1996). Narrative stories, in the form of focus group data, were used as one method of data collection within this case study. Gathering stories through the use of focus groups is consistent with conventional research methods, while it also acknowledges a traditional method of sharing stories (Lavallée, 2009). It is in keeping with the Indigenous practice to allow participants to tell their stories (Madden, Higgins, & Korteweg, 2013). The focus groups were conducted in a manner that was reflective of a sharing circle.

Sharing circles, also known as talking circles, are typically formatted as small groups, designed to facilitate dialogue, knowledge-sharing, and discussion (Absolon, 2008). The focus groups were conducted in a circle, and each participant received a written copy of the questions. The questions were posed one at a time, and participants were given the opportunity to respond. Because the questions were posed in a circular format, each participant had the opportunity to share their response. Participants were invited to contribute in two focus groups. The first focus group consisted of the participants, the researcher, and an Elder who led the traditional Indigenous elements of prayer and blessing. This focus group gave participants the opportunity to share their stories and lived experiences, and these stories helped to explore ways to improve rates of high school completion for Indigenous students. The focus group questions provided a foundation and guide for the conversations within the first focus group, but the questions were phrased in an open ended way in order to enable participants to share how they saw fit (Hare, & Pidgeon, 2011).

The follow-up focus group gave me the opportunity to delve deeper into the initial responses and collect additional data from participants. Both focus groups were recorded through digital audio. No video recording was taken. I transcribed the audio recordings for further analysis, coding, and synthesis. An invited Elder began the circles with a smudge and prayer, and closed each circle with prayer. This practice is consistent with Indigenous Protocols, as was highlighted in the Madden et al. (2013) study.

Observation. Observation was done in the school and classrooms to collect data to corroborate the data collected through the focus groups. I conducted a week of observation within the high school to corroborate data collected from focus groups. I observed the school in a general manner; I did not follow participants or identify them in any manner during

observation. The purpose of the observation was not made public to staff or students. Findings were noted using an observation checklist, which included the categories of evidence of Indigenous pedagogy, physical space reflecting Indigenous culture, use of language of the staff, and relationships between teachers and students (see Appendix A). These observation sessions were conducted with the intent of being a participant as observer (Creswell & Poth, 2018). During the observations, the focus remained on categories, key events, and conditions that may have influenced subsequent analysis; the observation period was not intended for the analysis or explanation of events (Stake, 1995).

Document review. Documents such as the district's three-year plans, policies, and reports regarding Indigenous education were also reviewed and coded to further corroborate the participant responses from the focus groups with the policies and practices set forth by the school district. The document review included documents that provided insight into the supports in place for Indigenous students within the school district. The review was concentrated on the Indigenous-focused practices of the school district, and the documents were analyzed to find commonalities and themes. Like the findings from the observation sessions, the reports, plans, and policies were reviewed for common themes and key ideas to provide insight into how educators can best support Indigenous students in this particular district to complete high school (Stake, 1995).

Data Collection

In this study, data were collected from three sources: focus groups, school and classroom observation sessions, and a document review. One focus group was conducted with Indigenous students, and a follow up focus group was conducted to discuss recurring and synthesized themes. Additionally, observations were made of teachers to collect data to confirm and

corroborate data collected through the focus groups. Documents that reflected the Indigenous-focused practices of the school district were reviewed to find commonalities and themes. The follow-up focus group was an opportunity for me to delve more deeply into initial responses and collect additional data from participants. Once the data was collected from focus groups, observation sessions, and document review, the data from these sources were then triangulated. Triangulation of data is performed to ensure that there is corroborating evidence between multiple sources of information within a study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This triangulation helped to ensure that the findings from conversations with students aligned with what was observed in classrooms and the school. The transcripts were then reviewed further to reduce overlaps and redundancy, additional notes were taken, and themes and key concepts within the data were identified.

Identification of Attributes

The concepts and characteristics of this study were how students can provide insight into ways to improve culturally-infused learning environments through better support in embedding Indigenous education and how barriers can be addressed to improve the rate of high school completion for Indigenous students. The raw data gathered from focus groups, observations, and document review were placed into themes, categories, and descriptions to address each research question. As with all areas of this study, a holistic approach was embedded in the respectful collection and analysis of attributes within the study.

Data Analysis Procedures

Once the initial focus group was conducted and transcribed, the data were prepared for analysis by moving through the data analysis spiral described by Creswell and Poth (2018). In this case, the spiral process involved an in-depth reading of the initial verbatim focus group

transcript, reading and creating memos of emergent ideas, describing and classifying codes into themes, developing and assessing interpretations, and representing and visualizing data. Creswell and Poth's data analysis and representation spiral guided my analysis of the data collected.

The analysis of the initial focus group revealed themes and categories to take further note of during the observation sessions in the classrooms. To ensure that the analysis accurately reflected the participants' words, *in vivo* codes and exact word coding were used—two techniques identified by Creswell and Poth (2018). The data were organized into various tables to facilitate ease of access and understanding for both the researcher and participants. Documents such as school district policies regarding Indigenous education and three-year plans were also reviewed and coded to further corroborate the responses from participants.

Once the focus groups and observations were complete and their data collected, the data were amalgamated and analyzed, which included the process of data triangulation to ensure that there was corroboration between the data from the focus groups, observations, and document review. The transcripts were then reviewed further to reduce overlaps and redundancy, additional notes were taken, and themes and key concepts were identified. The goal was to identify and analyze five to six themes, as this was encouraged by Creswell and Poth (2018).

Given the nature of the data collection methods, epistemological assumptions were present during the collection of data; this is something Creswell and Poth (2018) highlighted. The epistemological assumptions in this study included philosophical assumptions put into practice regarding what counts as knowledge and how the claims of participants are justified. As Creswell and Poth (2018) explained it, in practice, epistemology requires the researcher to rely on quotes from participants as evidence to support findings, which means that the researcher

treats the participants as a reliable foundation for information. This is consistent with Indigenous tradition and practice, in which the stories that are shared are considered knowledge. The researcher is an active participant in the focus group in order to receive the knowledge and lessen the distance between the researcher and participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Johnson, 2010). By accepting stories and knowledge from the participants as evidence, and by becoming an active participant to receive this knowledge, the researcher remains consistent with both Indigenous traditions and the stated epistemological assumptions.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Design

Common limitations to case study research design are the researcher as the instrument for data collection and analysis; and issues of reliability, validity, and generalizability within the qualitative study (Manning, 2016). Additionally, given the limitations of access to students in schools during school hours, time constraints were also a limitation of this study. Although I made every attempt to maintain appropriate traditional Protocol while working with participants and in the Indigenous communities, I also respectfully acknowledge that, since I am of non-Indigenous heritage, my own bias and privilege likely played a role throughout the collection of data; my bias and privilege should therefore be considered limitations of the study.

Further, as I am a non-Indigenous person, I behaved and was treated like a visitor to the community; Oskineegish and Berger (2013) mention the significance of this in their study. Oskineegish and Berger's findings were intended to spark conversation and encourage other non-Indigenous educators to engage more deeply with Indigenous communities. Oskineegish and Berger also acknowledged that even if the researchers have pre-established relationships with the community and are of Indigenous heritage, Indigenous participants could still be nervous, untruthful, or guarded. McGregor (2013) noted the importance of including Indigenous scholars

when researching Indigenous participants when the primary researcher is non-Indigenous. In this study, I enlisted the assistance of the Indigenous liaison, school principal, and Elders, and incorporated traditional practices such as the smudge to help limit the potential for guarded or nervous responses as much as possible.

Delimitations. To address these limitations, I also focused on using Indigenously recognized and appropriate methods to select participants, such as snowball sampling and the invitation of Elders to be present during the data collection (Aquash, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The use of nonprobability sampling and volunteer opt-in sampling aligned with respectful methods of acquisition of knowledge from Indigenous peoples outlined in the literature (Aquash, 2013; Aseron, Wilde, Miller, & Kelly, 2013). Formal and informal networks are traditionally used to gather information in Indigenous communities (Johnson, 2013). The presence of Elders within the focus groups also played a critical role in establishing the validity of the data collected, as Elders are the foundations of Indigenous communities (Tobias & Richmond, 2016).

As the study was conducted during school hours with students, time constraints were set by the nature of the school year. My intent was to collect data during one school year with the same students in both focus groups. The use of multiple focus groups throughout the data collection period helped alleviate the time constraints. Analyzing the data from the first focus group prior to collecting data from the second focus group helped ensure that the allotted time was used efficiently when I was with the student participants. Given the limited availability and access to students, I also needed to use time efficiently to develop themes and codes based on the participants' responses to validate the further data collected.

Validation

Credibility. Credibility is the degree to which data, data analysis, and conclusions are trustworthy and accurate (McMillian, 2012). This case study used two focus groups conducted in a manner reflective of sharing circles in an effort to increase the credibility of the study within the Indigenous community. To substantiate the findings, data from focus groups, classroom observations to confirm participants' responses, and document review were triangulated. Additionally, verbatim transcription and member checking were used to ensure the accuracy of findings and observation notes. Member checking involved providing verbatim transcripts of the focus groups to each participant to review. Participants were given the opportunity to add to responses, change responses, or redact responses from the focus groups. Member checking was completed one-on-one with each participant. Descriptive note taking and reflection, two methods mentioned by Creswell and Poth (2013), were also used during the observations, document review, and creation of notes and memos from the focus group transcripts.

Dependability. In conjunction with traditional Indigenous methods of data collection, member checking was used to strengthen the dependability of the study (McMillian, 2012). During the second focus group, I was able to delve more deeply into initial responses and collect additional data from participants. Additionally, as a way to ensure the internal validity and dependability of the data collection process, I engaged in reflexivity as a method of self-reflection on potential biases during the study (McGuire, 2014). Reflexivity is systematically attending to the context of the knowledge constructed as it affects the research process (Malterud, 2001). I kept a reflective journal throughout the data collection, analysis, and synthesis stages as a means of reflection during the research process.

Expected Findings

The expected findings were written with the understanding that they may reflect the biases of a non-Indigenous researcher studying Indigenous students. The intention of the research was to support Indigenous students' success in conventional schools. As noted by Preston and Claypool (2013), any research conducted within Indigenous communities should benefit Indigenous peoples, and not solely the researcher. Through this study, I expected to find ways to improve learning environments, to acknowledge successes, and to provide insight into addressing barriers that Indigenous students face to completing high school in one rural school district. This study was expected to add to the body of knowledge of the geographic area and specific demographics of students by providing community-specific responses from Indigenous student participants about how they felt they could be more successful in conventional schools.

Ethical Issues

Building relationships with Elders and the Indigenous liaison within the school district was essential to ensure the validity and reliability of my findings from researching Indigenous students. When working with Indigenous communities, the data collected in a specific geographic area might be of limited generalizability for future studies, as each community across Canada is unique and has unique features due to its unique community members (Steele, 2013). As noted by the Panel on Research Ethics (Government of Canada, 2018), the ethical framework to be used in Indigenous contexts identifies core ethical values to ensure that human dignity is upheld when research is conducted. Respect for persons in the Indigenous research context goes beyond the conventional securing of free and informed consent; it extends to ensuring the interconnection between the natural world and humans and the obligation to pass on knowledge to future generations (Government of Canada, 2018). Informed consent addressed the first

aspect of respect for persons. Another aspect of respect for persons in the Indigenous context was supported through the use of focus groups reflective of traditional sharing circles as a method of data collection, through inviting Elders to participate, and through the intention to pass on Indigenous knowledge to help support future Indigenous students to successfully complete high school.

According to the Panel on Research Ethics (Government of Canada, 2018), concern for the welfare of participants includes ensuring the collective rights of Indigenous communities and a consideration of their physical, social, economic, and cultural environments. In this study, the concern for welfare was connected to and addressed by questions and discussions that led around the elements of the medicine wheel—an approach that has precedent in the literature (Lavallée, 2009; Toulouse, 2016). Concern for welfare extends to the assurance that research will contribute to maintaining and improving the culture, language, and identities of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples in Canadian society (Government of Canada, 2018). Multiple sources of data, along with open-ended opportunities to share knowledge, were used in an attempt to respectfully acknowledge the culture of participants. Sharing the findings based on the data collected will help to support students within the school community, to share knowledge with educators to help support future Indigenous students, and to support further studies in this area.

The Panel on Research Ethics (Government of Canada, 2018) noted multiple areas where justice may be compromised when researching Indigenous peoples, such as misappropriation, devaluing Indigenous knowledge, failure to share data, and dissemination of information that stigmatizes or misrepresents communities. In this study, by engaging with the community prior to conducting the research, which included engaging with the Indigenous liaison within the school district and the Elders, I hoped to help minimize misunderstandings. Given that the

research was focused on Indigenous people and the results of the research were specific to Indigenous people, the Indigenous liaison within the school district was consulted. This was done in accordance with the Panel on Research Ethics Article 9.2: Nature and Extent of Community Engagement (Government of Canada, 2018). While I am non-Indigenous, I attempted to recognize diverse interests within the communities I was studying, to respect the community customs and codes of practice, to seek mutual benefits in research, and to recognize the role of Elder, as heeded by the Panel on Research Ethics (Government of Canada, 2018).

Conflict of interest assessment. I had a professional relationship with the school district from which the participants were recruited. I had no professional role within the particular school in which I conducted the research. I was a professional colleague of teachers in the school district and at the school in which the research was conducted, but I was not in a supervisory or leadership role within this school or context. I had no professional power or influence over the student participants nor over the teachers I observed. There were no financial remunerations that would benefit the researcher or participants within this study. The results of the study played no role in the academic or scholastic results for student participants.

Researcher's position. As a person of non-Indigenous heritage, I acknowledge my limitations, biases, and privilege when working within the Indigenous community. Traditional Indigenous teachings (as outlined by Momper, Delva, & Reed, 2011) would encourage the researcher to take on the role of active participant, while still firmly understanding that he or she is a visitor to the community (Oskineegish & Berger, 2013). While I was the principal investigator, my intention was to listen and participate in the focus groups with students without judgement or bias. Additionally, I conducted classroom observation sessions to assist in the corroboration of data from the focus groups. I conducted these observation sessions with the

intention of being a participant as observer; however, in the dynamic setting of the classroom, there was an opportunity to move from being an outsider to an insider—an experience described by Creswell and Poth (2018)—during the course of the observations.

Ethical issues in the study. Prior to commencing this study, I secured a commitment by the school district to conduct the study, pending Concordia University–Portland Institutional Review Board approval. Approval was also obtained from the Indigenous liaison within the school district. Written consent was obtained from participating students or parents if the participants were under the legal age of consent. The purpose of the study was disclosed to participants and parents prior to conducting the focus groups and observations. All steps were taken to maintain the privacy of participants and protect participants from undue harm. No faculty members connected to the participants were involved in the focus groups. Only on the consent forms was identifying participant information collected, and these consent forms were collected and securely stored in a locked desk at my home. The consent forms were locked separately from focus-group transcripts and digital audio recordings. The digital audio recordings were stored on an encrypted, password-protected laptop in my home. All the recordings and transcripts were locked at my home when not in use and will be securely destroyed after a three-year period. The consent forms will also be retained, locked, and secured for a period of three years. The audio recordings were destroyed once the transcripts were completed. No identifying traits or features of participants were included in the analysis or synthesis of the data. Participants were invited to member check all transcripts. Participants had the opportunity to withdraw or redact comments at any time during the research process. The use of codes for the data, separation of data and identifying features, and access to the data solely by the researcher helped to ensure the confidentiality of the participants.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to further understand how educators can better support Indigenous students in completing high school within conventional schools. This study used data collected from Indigenous students to provide insight into how to improve learning environments, continue with successful strategies, and address barriers to Indigenous students' completing high school. Both traditional and conventional methods of data collection were employed throughout the study. The use of social constructivism theory was embedded into an Indigenous worldview lens by focusing on the four elements of the medicine wheel throughout the research, data collection, and analysis of the data (Hughes & Sears, 2004; Lavallée, 2009).

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Introduction

Within Chapter 4, the focus is on the analysis and results of the data collected. This chapter includes the description of the sample research population, the research methodology, the analysis, the presentation of results, and the summary of the findings.

Given the discrepancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students' high school completion rates in Canada, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore successes in encouraging high school completion, barriers to high school completion, and strategies needed to improve the rate of high school completion for Indigenous students. The intention of this study was to gather insights from and share the feelings, perspectives, perceptions, and lived experiences of Indigenous high school students in relation to completing high school. The research question that drove this study was: "How do educators support Indigenous students' high school completion within conventional schools?"

The subsequent questions were as follows:

1. How can focus group conversations with Indigenous students identify ways to improve culturally infused and respectful learning environments to encourage high school completion?
2. How can conversation with and observations of Indigenous students provide insight into addressing barriers to and acknowledging the successes of high school completion within conventional schools?

For this study, case study methodology was selected to allow for the direct investigation of the perspectives, perceptions, feelings, and experiences of the participants (Mombourquette & Head, 2014)). Case study is parallel to the traditional Indigenous methods of data collection

through oral storytelling (Lavallée, 2009). In this study, data were collected through focus groups, observations, and document review. Each instrument of data collection was used to triangulate data collected from the personal lived experiences of the focus group participants.

This study was motivated in part by the lack of research collected directly from high school students in off-reserve conventional schools in Treaty 6 territory. While I had a personal and professional dedication to supporting at-risk student populations, as a non-Indigenous person, my privilege was ever-present during the processes of data collection, research, and analysis. The data collected were intended to support the driving question of this study and to assist me to better support Indigenous students in conventional classrooms in my own professional practice. Additionally, the findings from this study may serve other educators by providing insights into how to better support Indigenous students in completing high school. This study will contribute to research in the area of supporting Indigenous students' success by expanding the current body of research and including the voices, perceptions, and stories of Indigenous students from the target area.

The research methodology and analysis for Chapter 4 followed Creswell and Poth's (2018) data analysis spiral. Themes and topics emerged as the memoing and coding of focus groups, observations, and document review progressed. Within the data analysis, the words and voices of participants from the focus group were coded and recorded according to their frequency within the responses to each research question. Additionally, observations were coded by frequency and reflected the identified categories on the observation checklist. Within the presentation of the data, each participant's responses were summarized per question. The participant data were cross-referenced with themes that emerged from coding the observations and the documents reviewed.

Description of the Sample

The boundary of this case study was one school district community. The population of student participants was drawn from one composite high school within that rural Canadian school district. Student participants were of First Nation and Métis heritage. The rural school was located on Treaty 6 territory. Across Canada, there are 11 numbered treaty areas, and these treaties constitute the “law of the land in the relationship between First Nations and the rest of Canada” (Walking Together Education for Reconciliation, 2017, p. 2.). Treaty 6 encompasses the traditional lands of 17 First Nations, including the Cree, Saulteaux, Nakota Sioux, and Dene Peoples (Walking Together Education for Reconciliation, 2017). Although the school in which the research took place was on Treaty 6 territory, the research population did not reflect all 17 Treaty 6 Nations or Métis settlements. Participants may have also identified as being members of other Treaty Nations in Alberta outside of Treaty 6 territory.

For the purpose of this study, snowball sampling was used for sampling participants. Snowball sampling identifies potential participants from people who know people who may be prospective cases that are rich in information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Following meetings and conversations with the principal of the school and the Indigenous liaison for the district, informational posters were displayed to inform potential student participants of the opportunity to contribute to the study. The school principal was informed of the nature of the study and the need to protect the privacy of the participants. Word-of-mouth was used to inform targeted potential participants about the opportunity to contribute. Recruitment posters were posted in the Aboriginal Studies classroom. Self-selection for this study was consistent with Indigenous practices of inviting participants to share their stories in the manner of the participant’s choosing (Aquash, 2013; Johnson, 2013). The formal network of the researcher, principal, and Indigenous

liaison used the informal connections among Indigenous students, parents, and community members to contact potential student participants who fit the criteria for the study. The recruitment period lasted one month.

In a concerted effort to protect the privacy of the potential participants, no formal presentations or informational meetings were held to inform potential participants of the study. The effort to protect the privacy of the potential participants was also shown in the use of snowball sampling in. The privacy of the potential student participants was paramount. If staff members had known the specifics of the study, that could have made students reluctant to come forward or participants reluctant to be authentic in their responses. Also, as the study location was within a small rural community, there was likelihood that school staff could have uncovered the nature of the study, which could have compromised the authenticity of the lessons and interactions during the classroom observation sessions.

In Canada, when students register for school, they are given the option to self-identify as First Nation, Métis, or Inuit on the school registration form. Of the 800 students in the school, 20% (160 students) were estimated to identify as First Nation, Métis, or Inuit. Based on these numbers, the target population sample of 10% was initially thought to equal 16 participants. However, this number did not take into account that the participants would be drawn from Grade 12 only, in order to ensure that they would have had graduated prior to the publication of this study, to help protect their privacy. Of the 160 students of Indigenous heritage, it was estimated that 53 were in Grade 12. Students who were on the list of identified First Nation, Métis, or Inuit students were offered the consent forms. A number of students who did not self-identify as such also requested a consent form but were denied, as the researcher's instruction was to invite only Indigenous students to participate. It is unknown how many consent forms were distributed.

However, four participants returned the consent form in time for the first focus group. Self-identification of Indigenous students will be further analyzed in the discussion of results in Chapter 5 of this study.

Of the four participants, one was male and three were female. Participants ranged in age from 17 to 18 years old. All participants were in Grade 12 and were on track to graduate in June of 2019. All four participants contributed to the initial focus group and the follow-up focus group. The questions were provided to participants beforehand as part of the parent information letter and consent form. As such, one participant also provided written responses to the focus group questions after the first focus group. To help protect the confidentiality of the participants, biographies were not included in this study. Background information and details about life experiences were revealed through the focus group process, the oral storytelling, which was consistent with Indigenous practices, as explained by Lavallée (2009).

While the intent was to have participants of First Nation, Métis, or Inuit heritage, there were no participants of Inuit heritage in the study. Additionally, while some participants identified their membership in First Nation groups, to protect the privacy of the participants, these specific groups were not identified in the study. Participants were asked whether or not they wanted the researcher to include this specific identification during member checking of transcripts, and the participants chose not to identify their Nation membership. While the intention of this case study was to share the personal lived experiences of the participants, the need for privacy outweighed the desire of the participants who self-identified during the research to identify personal Nation membership. As such, throughout the data analysis and summary the participants will be identified by the order in which they spoke during the focus groups.

Research Methodology and Analysis

Case study design. Two focus groups, five days of school and classroom observation, and document reviews were completed for this case study. This study was led through the use of qualitative case study design methodology, as it related to traditional methods of Indigenous knowledge-sharing (Lavallée, 2009). Creswell (2015) noted that case study design is best suited when the study necessitates the perspectives of the participants in a shared group. The case study design allowed me to further understand the essence of the lived experiences of Indigenous high school students from their perspectives. The study was designed to obtain authentic and valuable impressions of the participants' perspectives, perceptions, feelings, and lived experiences within phenomenon.

Data collection. The data collection procedure included an initial focus group with participants, followed by five days of observation within the high school, a follow-up focus group, and document review of three documents. The documents that were reviewed and examined included the school district's three-year plans ranging from 2015 to 2019, and the district's response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action (TRC, 2015). The three-year plans were written to include input from district staff, students, parents, community members, and school trustees. The focus groups were led in a manner reflective of a sharing circle. Sharing circles, also known as talking circles, were formatted as small groups, designed to facilitate dialogue, knowledge-sharing, and discussion (Absolon, 2008). Additionally, a single one-on-one follow-up meeting was held to clarify the written responses provided by one participant. As Creswell and Miller (2000) explain, it is expected that, in a qualitative study, researchers implement member checking and triangulation, and seek to obtain

detailed descriptions during the collection of the data. Transcripts from both focus groups and the written responses were individually member checked by participants.

As explained the methodology chapter, Creswell and Poth's (2018) data spiral was used to specifically analyze the data collected. The spiral included managing and organizing the data, reading, memoing emergent ideas, describing and classifying codes into themes, developing and assessing interpretations, and representing and visualizing the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each of the triangulated data sets was collected and analyzed through the spiral.

Data analysis. Perhaps the most critical component to this case study was the coding, reducing, and data analysis that was used to arrive at the essence of the lived experiences of the student participants. I was ever mindful of the need to respect the stories and perceptions of participants, taking into consideration the requirements of a conventional research study, all while being present to and respectful of the Protocols of Indigenous practices and traditions. The data analysis spiral, as presented in Creswell and Poth (2018), was used to analyze the focus groups, observations, and documents.

Two focus groups were led at the participants' rural high school. The follow-up focus group was held five weeks after the initial focus group. After each focus group was completed, I transcribed the session. Verbatim typed transcriptions were reviewed by participants and returned to me after member checking. Participants were given copies of the typed transcripts to read and review. Participants were given the opportunity to add to responses, change responses, or redact responses from the focus group. Transcription review by participants was completed in a private location, one-on-one with the researcher. Additionally, upon completion of the initial focus group, one student participant provided a written response to the focus group questions. A meeting to follow up on and clarify the written responses to the research questions was set up

with this participant, and this one-on-one meeting was recorded and transcribed. The transcription was then member checked by the participant. These written and oral responses were included as part of the focus group data.

The procedure was in keeping with the Indigenous practice of allowing participants to tell their own stories (Madden, Higgins, & Korteweg, 2013). While the intention of this study was to gather data through the focus group, one specific participant, as has been mentioned, chose to share part of their response in writing. A deviation between the methodology plan and the actuality of research for the focus group in this study was related to this written response. Additionally, the intention was to have an Elder present for both focus groups. The Elder in the first focus group had a familial relationship with one of the participants. This relationship may have impacted that participant's willingness to share openly and candidly. It was this participant who wrote out the responses and shared them with the researcher at the end of the first focus group. The follow-up focus group invited a different Elder with no direct familial relationship with the participants. This was a deviation from the initial proposed methodology but was necessary to promote the comfort and candor of all the participants.

Following member checking, I read and re-read the transcripts of the focus groups. Initial memoing, reflective thinking, and cross-referencing of emergent ideas began as note-taking progressed. For the focus groups, in vivo codes were used after the initial memoing was completed. Careful, line-by-line in vivo coding was used to code the actual words and voices of the participants as coding student responses (Saldaña, 2009). I used codes to label and categorize data, which provided the opportunity to better summarize and synthesize the lived experiences of the participants. All compiling and coding of the data was done by hand using Excel spreadsheets.

The frequency of in vivo phrases and words used by participants is reflected in Table 1. Table 1 was created to highlight the frequency and common language presented during the focus groups. The common language and words that presented frequently contributed to the classification and connection to the themes and subthemes uncovered through the data analysis. Each question asked during the focus groups was coded individually. The frequency of in vivo codes as they pertained to each research question, as well as their overall frequency, is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Focus Group In Vivo Coded Participant Response Frequency

In Vivo Code	Question 1: In your experience, how do you engage in Indigenous education in your classroom or school?	Question 2: In your experience, what has contributed to your success so far in completing high school?	Question 3: From your perspective, what are the barriers to completing high school, and what could be done to address these barriers?	Overall Frequency
Aboriginal Studies	8	0	0	8
Social/Social studies	7	0	5	12
Culture	5	1	4	10
Teachers	0	3	12	15
Friends	1	5	0	6
Family	0	9	1	10
Parents/ Mom	3	9	4	16
More classes	0	0	3	3
Racist/Racism	0	1	5	6
Ignorant/Ignorance	0	2	3	5
Scrape/Scratch the Surface	2	0	0	2
That's it/ That's Pretty Much It	3	0	0	3
Just Sit There	0	0	3	3
Just Don't (Really)Understand/ Try to Understand	0	1	5	6
Have Opinions/Those Opinions	0	3	6	9
Parents' Views/ Parents Have Opinions	0	1	2	3
Scared/Scary	0	3	0	3
Angry/Anger	0	3	2	5
Sad	0	0	2	2
Frustrated	1	1	1	3
Junior High/Grade 8/Grade 9	7	2	4	13
Residential Schools	3	0	1	4

Next, the observation sessions in the school and classrooms were carried out over the course of five nonconsecutive days at the high school. The classrooms to be observed were randomly assigned on the morning of each observation day. Teachers were informed that observations would occur throughout the month, but not why or what the researcher was looking for. The nature of the study was not disclosed to the teachers in order to protect the integrity of the observation and the privacy of the participants. While teachers were given the option not to be observed, all assigned teachers allowed the researcher in their classrooms. There were four class periods per observation day. Observations were performed using an observation protocol checklist. This checklist comprised four areas of focus: evidence of Indigenous pedagogy, physical space reflecting Indigenous culture, use of language by staff, and relationships between teachers and students. Observations were typed into charts for ease of memoing and reflective note-taking.

The reading and rereading of the observations occurred after the notes were typed and put into the researcher-created charts. Reflective thinking and cross-referencing of the memoing and notetaking led to coding. The observations were initially coded, as per the first cycle reflected in Saldaña's (2009) coding process. Line-by-line coding of the observations in all four categories revealed common themes. Descriptive notes on events observed were included in the presentation of data and results as they compared to the experiences shared by focus group participants. All the compiling and coding was done by hand using Excel spreadsheets.

The line-by-line coding is summarized in Table 2, which was created to highlight the frequency of common occurrences. This table is divided into the four categories from the classroom observation checklist, and it reflects what labels the codes were categorized under based on the observation checklist. The line-by-line observation codes that presented frequently

contributed to the classification and connection to the themes and subthemes that were uncovered through the data analysis.

Table 2

Observation Coding Frequency and Checklist Category Correlation

Code	Overall	Evidence of Pedagogy	Physical Space	Use of Language	Relationship
No evidence	21	x	x		
Cultural Insensitivity	8	x		x	x
Builds relationships beyond the classroom	16			x	x
Flexible	34	x		x	x
Tangible/Visual First Nation, Métis, Inuit Representations	9		x		x
Plants/Flower	10		x		
Approachable	7	x		x	x
Responsive	15			x	x
Reflective	2			x	x
Visionary (Looking Ahead/Next Steps)	3			x	x
Clear expectations	4			x	x
Modelling making mistakes	4			x	x
Variety of Feedback	16	x		x	x
Subject Knowledgeable	7			x	x
Positive Reinforcement	7	x		x	x
Builds Relationships	6			x	x
Friendly/Complimentary	17			x	x
Curiosity	2				x
Serious	2			x	x
Not punitive	3			x	x
Lack of depth	4			x	x
Encouraging	4			x	x
Awareness	2	x		x	x
Permeated examples	3	x		x	x
Trust	2				x
Career Skills	2				x
Explicit Use of Indigenous Terminology	10	x		x	x
Mindful	3			x	x
Gracious	3			x	x
In-depth	2			x	x
Transition warnings	2			x	x

Finally, document review was used as the third method of data collection to triangulate the data. I obtained three documents from the school district that pertained to Indigenous education within the district. The documents included the two three-year plans from 2015 to 2019, which encompassed the years the participants were in high school within the district. I also reviewed the district's response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action (2015). Initial reading and rereading of the documents led to highlighting and compiling the specific Indigenous areas of focus within the plans and responses. Then, the initial memoing, note-taking, reflective thinking, and cross-referencing took place as I progressed through the documents. Descriptive codes, phrases, and themes from the document review were included in the presentation of data and results, as they cross-referenced and related to the lived experiences of the student participants. The annual education report accountability survey provided information in regard to Indigenous student achievement compared to provincial averages. The following areas were reflected in the accountability survey: drop-out rate, three-year high school completion rate, acceptable level on diploma examination, excellence level on diploma examination, diploma examination participation rate, and six-year transition rate for Indigenous graduates. Table 3 reflects the results of frequency of evaluation of achievement and improvement indicators for the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit student outcomes, as reported in the annual education report accountability survey within the two different three-year plans of the school division.

Table 3

Frequency of Evaluation of Achievement and Improvement Indicators for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Student Outcomes (2015–2019)

Achievement and Improvement Evaluation Descriptor	Frequency
Very Low	7
Low	2
Intermediate	1
High	2
Very High	1
Declined	1
Maintained	10
Improved	1

Once the data were collected from the three methods, the codes from the focus groups, observation sessions, and document review were cross-referenced and reduced to common themes among the three data sources. From the commonalities of participant responses, observations, and document review, themes and subthemes emerged (see Figure 2). In order to share the lived experiences and stories of each participant, included in the presentation of data will be the participants' words conveying their perceptions and perspectives. These quoted examples connected the lived experiences of the participants to the themes that emerged from the data analysis. Additionally, specific examples from the observation sessions and document review will be included. Through the triangulation of data sources, I was able to examine consistencies and inconsistencies in the results.

Summary of the Findings

The purpose of this case study was to discover themes and commonalities among and between the lived experiences described by participants regarding high school completion. As a non-Indigenous person, the weight of summarizing and sharing the experiences of the

Indigenous participants in a respectful manner that remained true to the lived experiences of those participants was not lost on me. Saldaña's (2009) words were imperative when looking at the inherent challenges, contradictions, and paradoxes of qualitative research:

We are told to capture the essence of our study's data, yet also to render our accounts with thick description. We are advised to 'reduce' our data to an elegant set of well-codified themes, yet also advised to write about the intricate complexity of what we observed in the field. . . We are charged to contribute productively to the knowledge bases of our disciplines, yet also advised to leave our reader with more questions than answers. . . We don't need to reconcile these contradictions; we only need to acknowledge the multiplicity of them. (p. 191)

Saldaña's words were a constant reminder to me as I was summarizing and working with Indigenous participants to tell their stories. My goal was to be respectful and forthcoming with the results of the data, while always acknowledging that I come from a place of privilege and inherent biases.

The questions that were asked during the focus groups were designed to be in student-friendly language and were derived directly from the driving question and subsequent questions for the study. These questions were written to reflect the aims of a case study. The same three questions were posed in the initial focus group and the follow-up focus group, which was led after the classroom observation sessions. The questions were as follows:

1. In your experience, how do you engage in Indigenous education in your classroom or school?
2. In your experience, what has contributed to your success so far in completing high school?

3. From your perspective, what are the barriers to completing high school, and what could be done to address these barriers?

When the commonalities of the participants' responses to the three focus-group questions were cross-referenced with the findings of the observation sessions and document review, three themes and eight subthemes emerged: The three main themes were relationships, awareness, and resiliency. The theme of relationships revealed three subthemes: family, teachers, and peers. Each of these three subthemes reflected the limitations and benefits of relationships between participants and their families, teachers, and peers, and the impact these relationships had on the participants' completion of high school. The theme of awareness also revealed three subthemes: cultural awareness, intergenerational racism, and action. The theme of awareness reflected the participants' perspectives on the lack of cultural awareness, struggles with intergenerational racism, taking action or lack of action, and the impact all of these factors had on the participants' completion of high school. The theme of resiliency revealed two subthemes of self-motivation and self-preservation. Participants noted their own resiliency as being a contributing factor to their completing high school and that the lack of resiliency might have an effect on other Indigenous students.

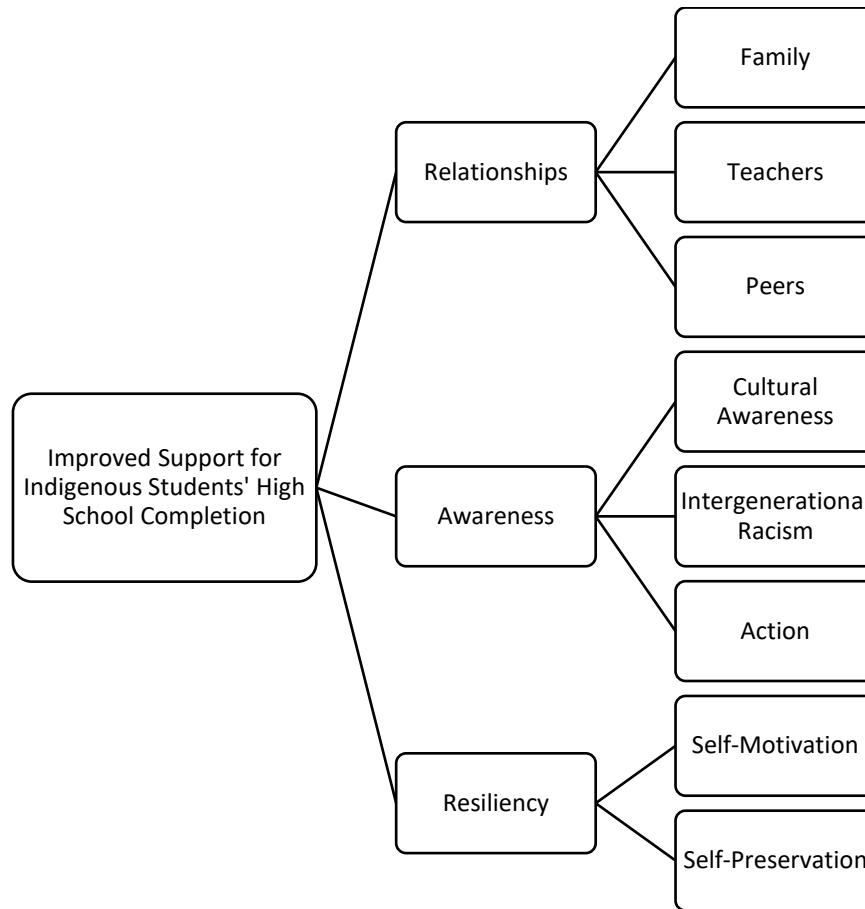


Figure 2. Relationships between themes and subthemes.

In an effort to respect Indigenous ways of knowledge-sharing, the themes are reflected in Figure 3 as part of a medicine wheel. Toulouse (2016) framed the medicine wheel as the foundation for an effective learning cycle to meet the needs of the *whole person*. Emergent themes are represented in Figure 3 as they related to mental, physical, spiritual, and emotion wellbeing in relation to the medicine wheel as referenced by Toulouse (2016).

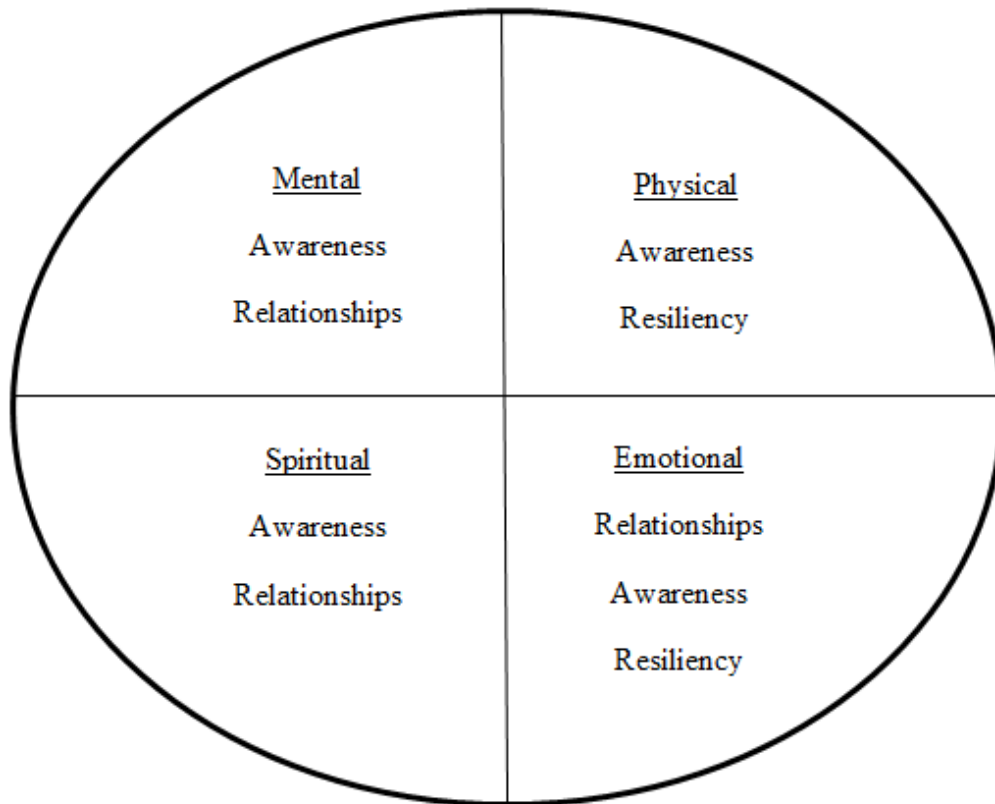


Figure 3. Relationship between themes and medicine wheel quadrants.

Presentation of the Data and Results

In a qualitative study, it is expected that researchers implement triangulation and seek to obtain detailed descriptions within data collection (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The data collected for this study were represented by three themes and eight subthemes. Within each theme, the data were further presented through each focus group question. The focus group questions were derived directly from the central research questions and two subsequent questions. Each theme and subtheme was presented and discussed as it pertained to each focus group question. Specific examples and quotations from participants were included under each theme to honour their lived

experiences, perceptions, perspectives, and feelings. Extensive quotations from the participants were included in an attempt to honor the voices of the participants. Many of the quotes from students pertain to more than one theme within the study. While I focused on honoring the voices of participants, repetitive quotations were summarized during the presentation of the data. The themes were further supported through examples and evidence, which were corroborated through the findings from the observation sessions in the high school and the evidence from the document review. The observations and document review confirmed the participants' responses and supported the common themes and subthemes that were revealed through the data. The triangulation of the data to corroborate the participants' responses included observations and document review.

Within each theme and subtheme, the data were presented in a similar format. The participants' responses reflected their perspectives, perceptions, experiences, and lived experiences regarding completing high school. Discussed under the themes and subthemes are observations included to corroborate and support participants' responses as the responses pertained to completing high school. Additionally, corroborating data from the document review were presented as part of the themes and subthemes.

Theme 1: Relationships

One theme that emerged through coding and analysis—based on review of the transcripts from the focus groups, observational data collected from the classrooms and school, and review of the district's documents—was relationships. Throughout the data collected from the focus groups, the participants shared about the positive and negative effects that relationships had on their completion of high school, and this was corroborated through the triangulation of the data. The stories shared by participants provided insight into their perspectives on the impacts of

relationships, both positive and negative, regarding the successes and barriers related to completing high school. Within the theme of relationships, three subthemes emerged, each a type of relationship that participants reported as affecting high school completion. The three relationships noted were with family, teachers, and peers.

Subtheme 1: Family. The theme of relationships and subtheme of family were derived from the evidence obtained from students in the focus groups, classroom and school observation sessions, and the document review. In the responses related to family, there were examples of both the benefits and the limitations that family represent and the impact of family on improving high school completion rates for Indigenous students. Participants' personal stories provide insight on the impact of family on high school completion.

Question 1. In your experience, how do you engage in Indigenous education in your classroom or school?

Participant 3. Participant 3 shared that she attended the Indigenous festival in a nearby city with her foster family. She also shared that her foster family was required to ensure she engaged in cultural activities for a specified amount of time. Additionally, Participant 3 shared that her foster parents were required to engage in their own personal learning for their own sake, but also to help teach and support the participant in engaging in her own culture. Learning about Indigenous culture was required for non-Indigenous foster care families.

Participant 4. Frequently, Participant 4 articulated an emotional connection with her grandmother. For example, she noted that after moving from a reserve school to a conventional public school, she learned many things about Indigenous history that she previously did not know. This learning led to a personal and emotional conversation with her grandmother, who

was a survivor of residential schools. “I asked my grandma, and she was like, a bit hesitant to speak about it. But she told me. And I just remember sitting there, crying with her.”

Question 2. In your experience, what has contributed to your success so far in completing high school?

Participant 1. Participant 1 said that because his mother dropped out of high school in Grade 8, she encouraged her children to finish high school so they could get better jobs and have a better life.

Participant 2. Participant 2 articulated that her family helped her, and “they always told me, if you get good marks, you’ll go far in life.” She noted in the follow-up focus group that she both agreed and disagreed with this statement, as she believed there was “so much more to learn than just what’s in school.”

Participant 3. Participant 3 shared about the influence both her biological family and her foster family had on her success. The participant chose to stay in foster care rather than return to her biological family. She said of her life experiences, “looking back at like my real parents. . . . I want to actually do something.” The participant’s decision to stay in foster care was supported by her biological mother. The participant shared that her biological mother was glad that she made that decision: “she probably knows that I wouldn’t finish. I probably would be staying home watching my siblings or something.”

Participant 4. Participant 4 said that her family had the second largest number of graduates on her reserve. She noted her mother’s influence and push to encourage her to graduate, saying her mother said, “you have to graduate.” She also shared that when racist comments were made in regard to her ability to graduate because she was “native,” her mother was adamant that she could not quit.

Question 3. From your perspective, what are the barriers to completing high school, and what could be done to address these barriers?

Participant 3. Participant 3 thought that some people's families could be a barrier to them completing high school. Her perception was that, in some cases, people may have chosen to follow their parents, and if their parents did not complete high school, then "why should I?" She said that school might simply not be a priority for them.

Subtheme 2: Teachers. The theme of relationships and subtheme of teachers were derived from the evidence obtained from students in the focus groups, classroom and school observation sessions, and the document review. When referring to teachers, participants provided examples of both the benefits and the limitations of teachers and their impact on improving high school completion rates for Indigenous students. Students' personal stories provide insight on the impact of teachers on high school completion.

Question 1. In your experience, how do you engage in Indigenous education in your classroom or school?

Participant 1. Participant 1 spoke about engaging in Indigenous education in Social Studies class. He also shared that there was an Aboriginal Studies course offered, but he did not join because he "had other classes to do."

Participant 2. Participant 2 initially said that students and teachers do not really do much related to Indigenous education except for in Social Studies and Aboriginal Studies. During the follow-up focus group, she also mentioned that in junior high school, "they'd bring in smudging ceremonies, they'd bring in presentations. . . we went and did a career fair at [First Nation X]."

Participant 3. Participant 3 said that she found Aboriginal Studies interesting and wanted to go into a social work career and needed the course.

Participant 4. Participant 4, in reference to Indigenous education, said that “they only teach it a lot in Social Studies,” and as students got older, in junior high, teachers “started to bring more information on Indigenous people, that I previously didn’t know.”

Question 2. In your experience, what has contributed to your success so far in completing high school?

Participant 1. Participant 1 shared that a specific teacher played a significant role in his completion of high school. The participant noted the push and encouragement that this teacher gave him in his first year at the high school. The teacher tried to get the participant out of the knowledge and employability program (K&E). The participant was able to move into regular programming in all subject areas after the encouragement he received in Grade 10 from the specified teacher and will graduate with a regular high school diploma. The participant also felt that his own hard work contributed to his success.

Question 3. From your perspective, what are the barriers to completing high school, and what could be done to address these barriers?

Participant 2. Participant 2 felt that there were “a lot of teachers who shouldn’t be teachers . . . they just don’t care, like, they are there for the paycheck. They don’t care if you pass, if you fail, it doesn’t matter to them. And it should.” For example, when it comes to cheating in class, she noted that “the teacher just doesn’t care. . . . just sits there and doesn’t do anything.” In contrast, she shared that in junior high, “we had a lot of really good teachers, which is awesome.” She suggested administration “go around into the classrooms unannounced, and just like, watch. Because [they] can get a feel for what’s going on.” She also suggested adding more classes to “mix it up.”

Participant 4. Participant 4 felt that there were a lot of racists in the school. In Social Studies, she explained,

A lot of people make ignorant or racist comments and the teachers are clueless . . . they hear this and, I don't know, forgive them I guess, the students. . . . lot of them ignore those comments. . . . and not really do anything while teaching. . . . I think lots of them hear.

Additionally, Participant 4 noted that people in the school were

uneducated about what goes on in our reserves . . . people think that they are allowed to speak freely, and wrong, about our culture, our politics, and our way of life when they do not know anything about us. They state these opinions in class with one or two Indigenous students in the room and the teacher says nothing. The most racist and ignorant statements could come out of their mouths and the teachers sit there.

She noted that after discussion with her mother, she realized that teachers were not supposed to put their biases on students. Participant 4 went on to share a story of when a Social Studies class discussed the topic of reserves, and one student was very vocal about Indigenous people.

Participant 4 recalled that the student “kept talking about how reservations always get all the money, no taxes, and how everyone is just a bunch of drunk Indians, and how we could never amount to anything in life.” She followed up by noting that the teachers should address students and remind students that they

don't need to state everything about what you believe because it's hurtful. . . . [and teachers] just sit there . . . nod their heads or they shake their heads. . . . they just shush the student . . . they don't tell them “hey, we have Indigenous students in this class, can you be a bit more like sympathetic maybe?”

Observation and document review. Observations in the school and classrooms corroborated the positive and negative experiences that the focus group participants shared about their relationships and interactions with teachers; both positive and negative examples of relationships with teachers were observed during the classroom and school observation sessions. The following are two data sets which provide examples of positive and negative interactions between students and staff.

Every classroom that I observed reflected a degree of teachers attempting to build relationships and provide flexibility in their instruction to help students find success in the subject area. Multiple classrooms showed teachers offering classroom support outside of the regular schedule, with lunch-hour or after-school support opportunities. Feedback and one-on-one opportunities were presented in nearly every class.

There were multiple examples where teachers highlighted and emphasized the need for students to use correct terminology when referring to Indigenous peoples and experiences, specifically when there was emphasis on residential schools. One teacher refused to begin the lesson until the class was in an appropriately emotionally regulated space to watch a film about residential school survivors. The teacher also explained the need to “value understanding what happened, and not shying away from it. [Students] need to surround [themselves] with more knowledge.” There were also two examples of teachers integrating Indigenous culture into conventional classroom activities that were not specific lessons focused on Indigenous education. For example, teachers intentionally mentioned Northern Indigenous communities in a math problem-solving activity and infused traditional Indigenous cultural elements into an English writing activity about students’ home lives.

Examples of the negative experiences and perceptions of participant students were corroborated by the data from the 5 days of observation sessions at the school. One example was a side conversation that occurred between students in the back of a classroom. In response to the whole class conversation, one student brought up how Indigenous people were mistreated. A side conversation carried on when a second student noted that, in Canada, Indigenous people were treated better than in the United States, saying that “Americans kill the Natives.” A third student spoke and said, “that’s okay; we give them [Indigenous people] money every month anyway.” In a second instance, a student requested that another student leave their classroom and return to his original class. The student said, “quit being a powwow guy and go to class.” The teacher said, “ya, what he said, even though it was derogatory.” The third instance, when a historical poster of an Indigenous family in a teepee was presented in front of the class, a teacher spoke about the racism presented in historical documents and reminded students that “it was a different time.” An Indigenous student, quietly in the back of the room, said, “hey, that’s me!”

Additionally, there was one interaction between a support staff member (not a teacher) and an Indigenous student. The staff member said to the Indigenous student, “what’s your problem?” and then the staff member left the room. The teacher intervened, and the student said, “why do I even bother [working] when she talks to me like that?” There were, however, positive interactions between support staff and students as well. One support staff member was observed every observation day moving around the halls and classrooms encouraging students to go to class and acknowledging by name every child whom they encountered.

As has been explained, document review was used as an instrument of triangulation to corroborate the perceptions, perspectives, feelings, and lived experiences of participants regarding their relationships with teachers. Document review revealed the school district’s

creation of a First Nation, Métis, and Inuit staff cohort to facilitate the sharing of best practices among staff. The documents revealed that principals and teachers self-identified professional development needs in areas of Indigenous education. Strategies recorded in the annual education results report to support Indigenous students included counsellors to monitor student success, attendance, and identification of at-risk students. Additionally, the strategies identified the need to provide professional development opportunities to develop and enhance the understanding of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students' needs. The strategies also noted the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit cohort in each school. The cohort was intended to focus on developing relationships and building cultural and historical sensitivity. These strategies included improved flexible planning at the learning centers, the opportunity for staff to engage in the blanket exercise, and the implementation of outdoor activities, which were intended to connect students to the land and nature. The documents revealed that the district is aware of the need to support teachers in building relationships with Indigenous students.

Subtheme 3: Peers. The theme of relationships and subtheme of peers were derived from the evidence obtained from students in the focus groups, classroom and school observation sessions, and the document review. When referring to peers, participants provided examples of both the benefits and the limitations of peers and their impact on improving high school completion rates for Indigenous students. Students' personal stories provide insight on the impact of peers on high school completion.

Question 1. In your experience, how do you engage in Indigenous education in your classroom or school?

Participant 1. Participant 1 shared that he engaged in Indigenous education in school by talking to and making friends with Indigenous people around the school.

Question 2. In your experience, what has contributed to your success so far in completing high school?

Participant 1. Participant 1 shared that friends played an important role in his success. He said that school would be “pretty boring” and he “probably wouldn’t want to be there. . . . or not show up at all,” if he did not have friends at school.

Participant 2. Participant 2 shared that she had a good group of friends with whom she grew up, and this contributed to her success in completing high school.

Question 3. From your perspective, what are the barriers to completing high school, and what could be done to address these barriers?

Participant 1. Participant 1 said that peers and other students at the school tell people that they cannot graduate or do anything good with their lives. His perception was that peers say these things because, “they’ve been taught that they are higher than us . . . all of us.”

Observation and document review. The school and classroom observation sessions provided examples of students being involved in negative experiences, which corroborated the focus group participants’ perceptions regarding their relationships with peers. Both of these examples have already been noted. First, there was the side conversation previously noted, which ended in a student saying, “that’s okay; we give them [Indigenous people] money every month anyway.” Second, there was also the instance when a student requested that another student leave his classroom and referred to the visiting student as a “powwow guy.”

Theme 2: Awareness

Another theme that emerged through coding and analysis—based on thorough review of the transcripts from the focus groups, observational data collected from the classrooms and school, and review of the district’s documents—was awareness. Throughout the focus groups,

participants shared about the impacts of awareness and lack of awareness regarding Indigenous people and culture. The stories shared by participants provided insight into their perspectives on the impacts of awareness or lack thereof, both positive and negative, as they pertain to the successes and barriers related to completing high school. The theme of awareness appeared throughout the data collected from the focus groups, and this was corroborated through the triangulation of the data. Within the theme of awareness, three subthemes emerged that participants reported as having an impact on high school completion: cultural awareness, intergenerational racism, and action.

Subtheme 1: Cultural awareness. The theme of awareness and subtheme of cultural awareness were derived from the evidence obtained from students in the focus groups, classroom and school observation sessions, and the document review. The data collected provided examples of cultural awareness as well as the lack of cultural awareness, as well as of the impact that cultural awareness has on high school completion rates for Indigenous students. Students' personal stories provide insight on the impacts that cultural awareness has on Indigenous students completing high school.

Question 1. In your experience, how do you engage in Indigenous education in your classroom or school?

Participant 2. Participant 2 initially said that the students do not engage much in Indigenous education beyond Social Studies. During the follow-up focus group, she also mentioned that in junior high school the students and staff engaged in traditional ceremonies and presentations. Referring to the experience at her high school, she said that they merely “scrape the surface” and “there’s not a lot.”

Participant 4. Participant 4 shared that while on reserve school; she was taught to speak Cree fluently and had “all around learning about our culture.” When she moved to conventional public school, she said that “there wasn’t anything related to Indigenous people.” Additionally, she said “I wasn’t like, not forced, but it was the only option to take French.” Participant 4 also articulated that she was taught historical information about Indigenous people that she was not previously taught. After the junior high taught a lesson about residential schools, she had an emotional conversation with her grandmother, a residential school survivor. In reference to her high school experience, Participant 4 said that the school “barely scratched the surface of . . . history” and “it’s kind of frustrating because I just feel like I want to know more but I can’t. Because they just don’t take the time to address anything.”

Participant 1, Participant 2, and Participant 4 also each noted at the end of the first focus group, when referring to how they engaged in Indigenous education, “that’s about it,” “that’s pretty much it,” and “that’s it,” respectively.

Question 2. In your experience, what has contributed to your success so far in completing high school?

Participant 4. Participant 4 said that the school was filled with “people who have ignorant opinions on Native people, and that Indigenous people, mostly women, are targeted.” She shared that she was scared to leave the house sometimes, even on her reserve where she knows everyone. She noted that her guard was always up when she went to this city; she needed always to check behind and around herself.

Additionally, she articulated her perspective on the statistics for Indigenous women. She said, “Indigenous women have a higher chance of being murdered than we do of graduating high school or university, buying a house, or living past 50.” She shared her perception of the

opinions that people have on “Native people,” that they “don’t have the drive to do what they want because they expect everything to be handed to them.” In junior high school, she said that adults told her that she “wouldn’t graduate because [she] was Native and that all Native people should be in jail.” She said that adults “teach their children all of their views and their children grow up with those kinds of opinions and views.”

Question 3. From your perspective, what are the barriers to completing high school, and what could be done to address these barriers?

Participant 2. Participant 2 said, “we need to be taught more about like the Indigenous when we are young-young. Like, as soon as you hit kindergarten . . . that should be a part of the curriculum all the way up. And just keep progressing and progressing and progressing.” She recalled learning about Indigenous culture starting in eighth grade but thought that by eighth grade, “you already have your opinions formed.”

Participant 4. As noted, Participant 4 shared that people off the reserve are uneducated about what occurs on the reserve, and are vocal about their lack of understanding and “ignorance,” and the “teachers sit there.” She also shared her perception of many people saying that Indigenous people should be thankful they are taught English. Participant 4 articulated that there was a difference in the quality of education at reserve schools compared to conventional public schools.

Observation and document review. The subtheme of cultural awareness and the lack thereof that was evident in the participants’ responses was also noticed during the classroom and school observation sessions. There were multiple examples in which teachers highlighted and emphasized the need for students to use correct terminology when referring to Indigenous people and experiences, specifically when the emphasis was on residential schools. For example, a

teacher refused to begin showing a film on residential schools until the class was regulated. There were also two examples of teachers integrating mention of Indigenous culture into conventional courses (math and English).

Corroborating the negative experiences of the students were multiple instances in which teachers demonstrated a lack of cultural awareness and knowledge, were unaware of language choices, and avoided Indigenous topics and ideas. For example, one teacher presented about treaties, but could not answer a specific question put forth by an Indigenous student. In another instance, a teacher identified a beige color on a map as “skin color.” In another class, there was a discussion about marginalization. A student said that First Nations people were most likely to be marginalized. The teacher responded that the answer was minority groups.

The document review process, which was used as an instrument of triangulation to corroborate participants’ responses regarding cultural awareness or the lack thereof, revealed the school district’s consideration of future Early Childhood Education programming. This directly correlates to the suggestion put forth by Participant 2.

Subtheme 2: Intergenerational racism. The theme of awareness and subtheme of intergenerational racism were derived from the evidence obtained from students in the focus groups, classroom and school observation sessions, and the document review. The data collected provided examples of intergenerational racism and how the impact of intergenerational racism felt by Indigenous students influenced high school completion. Students’ personal stories provide insight on the impact that intergenerational racism has on Indigenous students completing high school.

Question 1. In your experience, how do you engage in Indigenous education in your classroom or school?

Participant 4. Participant 4 shared that while on reserve school, she was taught to speak Cree fluently. When she moved to conventional public school, she said “I wasn’t like, not forced, but it was the only option to take French.”

Question 2. In your experience, what has contributed to your success so far in completing high school?

Participant 4. Participant 4 shared that she managed to become successful in completing high school by “staying under the radar.” She said that the school was “filled with people who have ignorant opinions on Native people. . . . and how [they] live.” She said that “there’s just all these racist comments and racial slurs.” While she felt there were some times when she agreed with that sentiment because some Indigenous people do not have drive to complete high school, “other Native people . . . don’t agree with those opinions.” She shared that when she was in junior high school adults told her that she “wouldn’t graduate because [she] was Native and that all Native people should be in jail.” She felt that adults “teach their children all of their views and their children grow up with those kinds of opinions and views.” She felt that it was mainly Caucasian people “who think that they can have an opinion on something they just don’t understand.” She said that racism was “a continuous thing in different generations.”

Question 3. From your perspective, what are the barriers to completing high school, and what could be done to address these barriers?

Participant 1. Participant 1 shared that peers and other students at the school “tell you that you can’t graduate or do anything good with your life.” His perception was that peers say these things because “they’ve been taught that they are higher than us. . . . all of us.”

Participant 4. Participant 4 said that “parents have opinions and those opinions are taught to their children and, most time, those opinions are racist.” She noted being frustrated that

students just understand what their parents have taught them about topics such as reserves and treaties and about “Native kids.”

Observation and document review. The document review process, which was used as an instrument of triangulation to corroborate participants’ responses regarding intergenerational racism, revealed the district’s intentions to investigate the creation of a Cree course at the high school or the formation of Cree clubs as determined by the level of student interest. This related to the loss of language experienced by Participant 4.

Subtheme 3: Action. The theme of awareness and subtheme of action were derived from the evidence obtained from participants in the focus groups, classroom and school observation sessions, and the document review. The data collected revealed examples of action and lack of action and the impact of this action or inaction on Indigenous students. Students’ personal stories provide insight on the impacts of action or lack thereof on Indigenous students completing high school.

Question 1. In your experience, how do you engage in Indigenous education in your classroom or school?

Participant 2. On the follow-up focus group, Participant 2 recalled that in junior high school, the students participated in Indigenous ceremonies and presentations. She also felt that the engagement in Indigenous education “scrape[d] the surface.”

Participant 4. Participant 4 noted her frustration with the depth of Indigenous knowledge and education, and the lack of time spent addressing Indigenous history.

Question 2. In your experience, what has contributed to your success so far in completing high school?

Participant 1. Participant 1 shared that he worked hard to complete high school to prove that he could do it.

Participant 3. Participant 3 said that she wanted to “actually do something,” that she would be “the first one to graduate in [her] whole family,” and wanted to “be like a role model,” and this contributed to her completing high school.

Participant 4. Participant 4 said that she was angry and spiteful after having “always been told” that she was Indigenous and was “never going to graduate.” This pushed her to work hard to get where she is.

Question 3. From your perspective, what are the barriers to completing high school, and what could be done to address these barriers?

Participant 1. Participant 1 felt that schools need to start teaching more about the Indigenous and to go deeper in Social Studies. He encouraged action to learn more than “just the bare minimum.”

Participant 4. Participant 4 articulated the difference in the quality of education on reserve school compared to conventional public school. She discussed how, given the lack of funding and lack of teachers from when she was in kindergarten to Grade 3, she still has trouble with learning and understanding things because of how she was taught at the reserve school. Participant 4 also noted that while she did not expect teachers to address the racism every time it was presented in class, she wanted teachers to specifically address the racism when it centered on conversations about residential schools.

Observation and document review. The subtheme of taking action and the lack of action shared by participants was corroborated during the classroom and school observation sessions. There were multiple examples of teachers highlighting and emphasizing the need for

students to use correct terminology when referring to Indigenous people and experiences, specifically when there was emphasis on residential schools. These examples included the teacher who was aware of and communicated the seriousness of the film on residential school survivors, and the math and English teachers who focused on Indigenous education permeation. Additionally, the side conversation and racist remark, which were not acted upon by staff during the observation sessions, corroborate the negative lived experiences shared by participants.

The document review process was used as an instrument of triangulation to corroborate the experiences shared by participants regarding taking action or inaction. The review of the documents from the school district showed that, regarding the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action (2015), the district acknowledged the 11 Calls to Action which focused on education and the 15 subsequent points embedded within the Calls to Action. Within the document, the school district noted nine times in which "no action is considered." The document revealed that provincial government was referred and referenced to five of the subpoints. Within the five subpoints, the provincial government was referred to as the party that required to take action. The document revealed the district's development and implementation of the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit cohort was called upon to act on three points within the document. The blanket ceremony, also known as the blanket exercise, was referred to twice. Additionally, the document review revealed future consideration for Cree language clubs, Cree language classes, and an Early Childhood Education program. These types of programs were mentioned by participants in the focus groups. The documents also noted that the district made efforts to improve the results for Indigenous students compared to the provincial levels, the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students met or exceeded results achieved compared the provincial levels.

Theme 3: Resiliency

The third theme that emerged through coding and analysis—based on thorough review of the transcripts from the focus groups, observational data collected from the classrooms and school, and review of the district’s documents—was resiliency. Throughout the focus groups, students shared about their own resiliency and the resiliency, or lack thereof, of others. The stories shared by participants provide insight into their perspectives on the impacts—both positive and negative—of resiliency as it pertains to the successes and barriers related to completion of high school. The theme of resiliency appeared throughout the data collected from the focus groups, and this was corroborated through the triangulation of the data. Within the theme of resiliency, two subthemes emerged regarding participants’ perceptions of factors that have an impact on high school completion. These two subthemes were self-motivation and self-preservation.

Subtheme 1: Self-motivation. The theme of resiliency and subtheme of self-motivation were derived from the evidence obtained from students in the focus groups, classroom and school observation sessions, and the document review. When referring to self-motivation, there were examples of self-motivation, the lack of self-motivation, and the impact of self-motivation on rates of high school completion for Indigenous students. Students’ personal stories provided insight on the impact of self-motivation on high school completion.

Question 1. In your experience, how do you engage in Indigenous education in your classroom or school?

Participant 3. Participant 3 indicated that she found Aboriginal Studies interesting

Participant 4. Participant 4 shared that she was “shocked” after learning about the history of residential schools at conventional public school. This led to her pursuing the more in-

depth, emotional conversation about the history of residential school with her grandmother, a residential school survivor.

Question 2. In your experience, what has contributed to your success so far in completing high school?

Participant 1. Participant 1 felt that his own drive to study and prove that he could complete high school contributed to his success.

Participant 2. Participant 2 said that she studied a lot to be successful. She also felt that there was more to learn than just what was taught in school.

Participant 3. Participant 3 shared that her life experience of “looking back at [her] real parents” motivated her to “actually do something.” She noted being motivated as she would be the first in her whole family to graduate and she wanted to be a role model. While she could leave foster care and go back to her biological family, she said, “I wanted to finish school. And I know I wouldn’t have finished school if I lived with my family.”

Participant 4. Participant 4 said that she was “graduating out of spite, really.” She noted that due to “racist comments” that “sometimes, it was like, ya. . . . I should just quit.” However, she said that “it just kind of started all the anger and the spite to just prove everyone wrong.”

Question 3. From your perspective, what are the barriers to completing high school, and what could be done to address these barriers?

Participant 3. Participant 3 said the following about what is required in order to overcome barriers: “you have to be your own self-motivated and like, you have to actually really want it. . . . it’s up to you if you want to do something.”

Subtheme 2: Self-preservation. The theme of resiliency and subtheme of self-preservation were derived from the evidence obtained from participants in the focus groups,

classroom and school observation sessions, and the document review. There were examples of self-preservation and its impact on improving the rate of high school completion for Indigenous students. Students' personal stories provide insight on the impact of self-preservation on high school completion.

Question 1. In your experience, how do you engage in Indigenous education in your classroom or school?

Participant 4. Participant 4 shared the frustration she felt and the “mess with everything” school was after moving from reserve school to public school. She recalled being “shocked” after learning about the history of residential schools at conventional public school.

Question 2. In your experience, what has contributed to your success so far in completing high school?

Participant 3. Participant 3 noted that her life experiences motivated her to “actually do something,” after “looking back at [her] real parents.” She noted being motivated as she would be the first to graduate in her whole family and wanted to be a role model. Participant 3 chose to stay in foster care to ensure she completed high school.

Participant 4. Participant 4 said that she has been successful in completing high school by “staying under the radar.” She noted that she stays under the radar to avoid being targeted, as “white people are crazy when angered and Indigenous people, mostly women, are targeted when they are.”

Question 3. From your perspective, what are the barriers to completing high school, and what could be done to address these barriers?

Participant 4. Participant 4 perceived being Indigenous as a barrier unto itself. She noted that it was hard to overcome this barrier put in place by society. As for how she managed

to work around this barrier and preserve herself, she said, “I don’t really look Native. . . . so people aren’t like ‘oh why are you here, you’re just like a dirty Indian.’” She also noted that she would not tell people about her culture, and that helped her to avoid facing the barrier. Finally, she shared that she hated the denial of her identity and it made her sad.

Observation and document review. The subtheme of self-preservation shared by the participants was also noted during the classroom and school observation sessions. Although I did not follow the participants during these observation sessions, there were multiple times when participants were in the classes being observed. I intentionally did not engage with the focus group participants during observation sessions. In classroom observations, Participant 4 was observed “staying under the radar,” and not actively engaging in all the classroom activities. She worked on her assignments and moved around with peers as the class progressed, but she did not ask questions and was not called on during the lesson.

The document review process was used as an instrument of triangulation to corroborate the experiences that the participants shared regarding self-preservation. The document review revealed that the number of self-identified First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students in the school is relatively low. There are, however, students at the school who chose not to self-identify as Indigenous. Some of these students requested the consent form to participate in this study, but they were not given one as they were not identified within the school as Indigenous. This was taken as an indication that more students at the school might have been using tactics of self-preservation such as those mentioned by Participant 4.

Chapter 4 Summary

The driving research question for this case study was as follows: How do educators support Indigenous students’ high school completion within conventional schools?

The subsequent questions were as follows:

1. How can focus group conversations with Indigenous students identify ways to improve culturally infused and respectful learning environments to encourage high school completion?
2. How can conversation with and observations of Indigenous students provide insight into addressing barriers to and acknowledging the successes of high school completion within conventional schools?

The intention of this study was to gather insights and share the lived experiences and perceptions of Indigenous high school students. The use of case study design in data collection was intentional, as it was expected to allow for the direct investigation of the perspectives, perceptions, feelings, and experiences of the participants (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). The triangulation of data from focus groups, observations, and document review was used to validate and corroborate findings in the data analysis and results of this study. The three themes that emerged through the data analysis process were relationships, awareness, and resiliency. The eight subthemes that emerged through the data analysis process were family, teachers, peers, cultural awareness, intergenerational racism, action, self-motivation, and self-preservation.

The data collected and presented in Chapter 4 will be discussed in Chapter 5. These data and results will be compared to findings from the literature and analyzed for implications for future practice, policy, and theory. The recommendations for further research, given the results from the triangulation of data in this study, will also be explored in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

The research within this study was designed to gather insight on the perspectives, feelings, perceptions, and lived experiences of Indigenous students who will succeed in graduating from high school. Chapter 1 discussed the historical background and context of Indigenous people and the effects that this history has had and continues to have on conventional education for Indigenous people in Canada. Chapter 2 outlined the conceptual framework for the study, presenting justifications for the use of that framework from the existing literature. The review of the literature in Chapter 2 also highlighted the need for improved learning environments, improved pedagogical practices, and successful strategies for overcoming barriers to Indigenous student success. Chapter 3 outlined the concrete procedures performed in this study to share the stories of four Indigenous high school students, using a case study design method of data collection, triangulated through observations and document review. Chapter 4 presented the qualitative findings from the focus groups, classroom observation sessions, and document review. Chapter 4 also explored the three major themes and the eight subthemes that emerged from these qualitative findings.

Now, in Chapter 5, the summary of the results of the study are presented. The results of the three focus group questions are presented, and discussed in terms of how they relate to the themes and subthemes that emerged. The results are then discussed as they compare to the findings in previous literature. This chapter also acknowledges the limitations of this study, and examines the implications of the results for practice, policy, and theoretical development, along with the opportunities for future case study design research to support Indigenous students.

Based on the findings of this study, I drew certain conclusions and determined what the implications should be for educators and school communities. As such, Chapter 5 includes the findings documented in this study, offers recommendations for practice, and identifies opportunities for future study on improving support for Indigenous students as they attempt to complete high school. It was paramount to consider and recognize, throughout Chapter 5, that the results were based on the stories and lived experiences of four Indigenous high school students and do not represent the experiences of all Indigenous people.

Summary of Results

In Canada, 25% fewer Indigenous students complete high school compared to non-Indigenous students (Beaudin, 2015; Mah, 2016). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the strategies needed to improve the rate of high school completion of Indigenous students, as informed by qualitative data related to both the successes and the barriers experienced by Indigenous students. By sharing the stories and perceptions of Indigenous high school students, this study was designed to suggest ways in which learning environments could be improved, how strategies for high school success could be maintained and further integrated, and how the barriers to high school completion for Indigenous students could be addressed. The findings in this study were based on the following research questions:

How do educators support Indigenous students' high school completion within conventional schools?

The subsequent questions were as follows:

1. How can focus group conversations with Indigenous students identify ways to improve culturally infused and respectful learning environments to encourage high school completion?

2. How can conversation with and observations of Indigenous students provide insight into addressing barriers to and acknowledging the successes of high school completion within conventional schools?

Each research question uncovered themes directly connected to the purpose of this study. The participants in this study were asked to share their perceptions, perspectives, feelings, and lived experiences through focus groups. The themes uncovered through the focus groups were corroborated through the triangulation of data from additional observations and document review. The decision to use these data collection methods to respond to the driving question and address the purpose of this study was informed by the literature reviewed in this study.

Chapter 1 introduced the problem of the disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in Canada (Madden, Higgins, & Korteweg, 2013; Mombourquette, & Head, 2014; Preston et al., 2012). Background, history, and context were given, framed in such a way as to explain the origins of the disparity. This chapter also discussed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) report that called on the people of Canada to recognize 94 Calls to Action toward reconciliation. All Canadians were called to act to fulfill the TRC's recommendations. Within the 94 Calls to Action, educators specifically were called on to support the success of all students through awareness, acknowledgement, atonement, and actions towards reconciliation. As one such act of reconciliation, I focused on how the results of this study could provide insight to educators on how to improve high school completion rates for Indigenous students, informed directly from the perspectives of such students.

Chapter 2 provided background from the existing literature on the topic of Indigenous students' success in the conventional education system, and other topics pertaining to and surrounding the study. Extensive research has documented the disparity and discrepancies

between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in Canada (Beaudin, 2015; Mah, 2016). The review of existing literature revealed three areas that could be addressed to improve the rate at which Indigenous students successfully complete high school. First, the review of the literature revealed the need for improved learning environments (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011; Oskineegish & Berger, 2013; Preston & Claypool, 2013; Whitley, 2014). Next, the review showed the importance of and need for improved culturally-infused pedagogical practices in classrooms and schools (Mombourquette & Head, 2014; Preston et al., 2012). Finally, the review of the literature identified the need to address the disproportionate number of barriers faced by Indigenous students in the education system (Bougie & Senécal, 2010; Stavrou & Miller, 2017). In reviewing the body of existing research, I discovered that there was a dearth of research specific to the environment, location, and lived experiences of the targeted participants.

In Chapter 3, I proposed the method for a qualitative study using a case study approach and design that was consistent with traditional methods of sharing information used by Indigenous peoples (Hughes & Sears, 2004; Lavallée, 2009). The case study research design method for this study involved investigating directly the perspectives, perceptions, feelings, and experiences of the participants (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). This method is parallel to traditional Indigenous methods of data collection such as oral storytelling (Lavallée, 2009). Data were collected through three sources: focus groups, observation sessions, and document review. The data from these three sources were then triangulated to corroborate and validate the qualitative research. The study was framed by social constructivist theory, and this frame was reflected through an Indigenous worldview lens throughout the methods of this study (Fox, 2001; Preston et al., 2017).2017).

Chapter 4 presented the analysis and interpretation of the participants' responses that were collected in the focus groups, school and classroom observation sessions, and document review. The triangulation of the data, performed to corroborate and validate the responses from participants, revealed three themes and eight subthemes within those themes. The three themes were relationships, awareness, and resiliency. The theme of relationships was further divided into three subthemes: family, teachers, and peers. The analysis of each of these three subthemes revealed both the limitations and the benefits of the relationships between participants and their families, teachers, and peers, and the impact that these relationships had on the participants as they completed high school. The theme of awareness also contained three subthemes: cultural awareness, intergenerational racism, and action. Analysis of the theme of awareness showed the participants' perspectives on the lack of cultural awareness, the struggles with intergenerational racism, taking action or the lack of action, and the significance that these factors had for students as they completed high school. The theme of resiliency was found to have two subthemes: self-motivation and self-preservation. Participants noted that their own resiliency was a contributing factor to their completing high school, and how the lack of resiliency could have a negative effect on other Indigenous students who were attempting to complete high school.

Discussion of Results

Within this study, I considered the ways in which educators could better support Indigenous students to complete high school. The discussion of the results is categorized according to the driving question and the two subsequent questions that directed this study. The rich data collected through the lived experiences and stories of the participants, corroborated by the findings from observation sessions and document review, revealed three ways in which educators can better support Indigenous students to complete high school. The findings

suggested that if educators were to improve relationships, based on improved awareness, and focus on supporting students to build resiliency, the rate of high school completion for Indigenous students might improve.

The results that were suggested from the data were presented as they related to the three themes derived from the triangulation of data collected throughout this study: relationships, awareness, and resiliency. Within each theme section, data related to the relevant subthemes were presented and discussed. There was frequent overlap between themes and the responses from the participants during data collection. The interconnections between the themes were also noted. Where possible, verbatim quotes from participants were used in response to each research question to ensure the authentic stories of participants were shared. However, due to the overlap and interconnectedness between themes, summaries of participants' responses were presented in some instances. The data and themes were then presented as they related to the subsequent questions within this study. Finally, the driving question for this study was addressed as it pertained to the themes and subsequent questions.

Relationships. The theme of relationships focused on the three subthemes of family, teachers, and peers. Participants noted the influences of their families, and how families could have positive and negative impacts on students' completion of high school. Students' personal stories and lived experiences provided first-hand insight into the impacts both positive and negative that relationships had on students' completion of high school. These stories also provided background information on the lives of students, including evidence of how their relationships are still affected by the intergenerational trauma experienced by Indigenous people, which has been discussed in various sources (Bougie & Senécal, 2010; Dion Stout & Kipling, 2003). Participants provided numerous examples of the positive influence their family

relationships had on their completion of high school. Participant 1 noted the significant role his mother played in his completing high school, as his mother had not completed high school and emphasized the importance of his doing so. Participant 4 shared the emotional connection she had with her grandmother and the support she felt from her mother. Participant 3 discussed her foster family and biological family and how she chose to stay living with her foster family rather than returning to her biological family in order to ensure that she could complete high school. Participants also noted that family could be a barrier to students completing high school if the family did not deem school to be a priority. The examples provided by the students suggested that they saw family relationships as separate from school relationships.

The second relationship that featured prominently throughout the data was the relationship students had with teachers. During observation sessions, I noted examples of positive interactions between school staff and students. In every classroom I observed, the teachers worked on building relationships and connections with students. Teachers knew students' names, offered flexible teaching strategies, and provided a variety of methods of feedback. Multiple teachers also offered support outside of the classroom such as extra homework help. There were examples of teachers intentionally focusing on Indigenous education and respect, such as the teacher who emphasized the importance and seriousness of the film on residential schools, the intentional use of Northern communities as a situational example in a math problem, and an English assignment that focused on celebrating Indigenous culture. There was also an example observed of a support staff member actively engaging with students across the school throughout the day, encouraging students in the hallways to go to class, and addressing every student by name. Participant 1 noted the large role one specific teacher played in his graduating high school with a regular diploma. Students shared about their experiences of

engaging in Indigenous culture through the elements of Indigenous education offered in their junior high school, such as smudges, a visit to a reserve, and cultural presentations.

During observation sessions in the classrooms, I also noted examples of negative interactions between staff and students. For example, there were two things I observed during my classroom observation sessions—a conversation between two students who spoke about the “Americans kill[ing] the Natives,” and a remark from a student referring to a peer as “a powwow guy”—that went unaddressed by the classroom teacher. (However, during this conversation, I was observing from the back on the classroom near where the students were having the conversation and the teacher might not have overheard the conversation.) There was also the instance in which a support staff member asked an Indigenous student, “What’s your problem?” and then left the classroom. The student then noted to the teacher, “Why do I even bother [working] when she talks to me like that?” After this interaction with the staff member, the teacher sat with the student one-on-one to help him complete his assignment. As the support staff member had left the classroom, the teacher was not able to follow up with that staff member during my observation period.

Students also shared their negative experiences of teachers. Participant 2 observed that some teachers lacked the passion for teaching and were only at the school “for the paycheck.” The participants observed repeatedly that teachers did not act on racism or ignorant comments made by other students. On this point, Participant 4 noted that she did not expect teachers to address comments every time they occurred, but she wanted teachers to address the comments when it came to conversations surrounding residential schools. This example from Participant 4 also overlapped with the subthemes of cultural awareness and action.

Furthermore, I observed that teachers were at times unaware of answers to questions specific to Indigenous content and did not offer to find out those answers, and they were perhaps not cognizant of the interpreted meaning of their words when using certain phrases (for example, referring to beige as “skin colour”). Both the positive examples and the negative examples of teacher-student relationships mentioned in the focus groups and noted in the observation sessions highlighted the need for teachers to be mindful and purposeful when using examples for class assignments and when choosing their words when teaching.

The document review revealed the district’s implementation of a First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cohort throughout the district. The cohort consists of staff at each school from across the district. The cohort was tasked with sharing best practices among schools in the district. The cohort could facilitate professional development sessions focused on best practices for Indigenous students. The cohort was intended to act as a bridge between the specifically identified needs of the schools and the district-wide goals regarding Indigenous education. However, there were few details in the publicly accessible documents about the methods of the cohort. The document review revealed that school staff had self-identified that they had professional development needs regarding Indigenous education. The pursuit of Indigenous-based professional development was left to the discretion of the staff and schools. Within the focus groups, students shared that they had more frequent exposure to Indigenous cultural experiences in junior high school than in high school. The best practices that could be shared by the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cohort could provide some of the support necessary to positively bridge the gap between the students’ reported experiences in junior high school compared to high school.

The final relationship category that participants highlighted was that of relationships with their peers. Participants noted that without their peer groups, school would be “pretty boring.” Participant 1 said that without his peers he “probably wouldn’t want to be there. . . . or not show up.” Participant 2 specifically noted that she had developed long-term friendships beginning in elementary and junior high school. Participants also mentioned that they had negative experiences with peers because some of their peers had “been taught that they are higher than [Indigenous students].” Participant 4 noted her desire for teachers to address comments made by her student peers that she felt were “racist or ignorant.”

During my observation sessions in the classrooms and the school, I saw evidence of positive and negative relationships between peers. I purposely did not engage with the participants during the observation period in order to help protect the privacy of the participants in the study. However, throughout the observation periods in classes and common spaces at the school I did observe each participant engaging positively with friend groups, including having lunch and collaborating during classroom lessons. Within the classrooms, I also witnessed examples of students being involved with negative experiences that corroborated the participants’ perceptions regarding their negative relationships with peers. For example, there was the racist “powwow guy” comment that was not addressed by the teacher and the side conversations about Indigenous people receiving money every month. While Participant 4 had clarified that she did not expect teachers to react every time a racist or ignorant comment was made by her fellow students, from observing the classrooms and interpreting the data collected through the focus groups I noted the need to address these overt comments.

Awareness. The theme of relationships interconnected with and set the stage for the theme of awareness. Participants repeatedly noted ignorance, racism, and inaction as

contributing factors to negative relationships or as hindrances to the development of positive relationships at school. The students' perceptions of this type of hindrance led to the development of the theme of awareness, which was subdivided into three subthemes: cultural awareness, intergenerational racism, and action. The personal stories and lived experiences of the participants provided first-hand insights into the impacts of awareness, or lack thereof, on high school completion for Indigenous students. The stories that participants shared were quoted and summarized in this study in order to provide background information on the lives of students and to provide insight on how the education system still needs to improve awareness and action. There is a need for societal change and through mindful actions in classrooms; the reach to greater society change may improve.

I did still observe examples of cultural awareness in the school. These examples included the purposeful planning for math and English classes that incorporated Indigenous culture and content. Also, one teacher was intentional and mindful about the correct use of terminology and the correct attitude of respect prior to showing a film on residential school survivors in the Social Studies class. In regard to the negative examples, and cross-related to the theme of relationships, I observed that teachers avoided making specific claims about Indigenous people in their responses to questions. For example, when a question was posed in the classroom and a student offered the answer "Indigenous people," the teacher corrected the student by saying, "minority groups." There was also an instance in which a teacher did not have answers to questions specific to Indigenous content and did not offer to find out the correct responses, and an example of a teacher not being cognizant of their word choice when speaking to the class.

Participants observed that schools just "scraped" or "scratched the surface" of Indigenous education. Participant 4 voiced her frustration on this point: "I just feel like I want to know more,

but I can't. Because they just don't take the time to address anything." Participant 4 also spoke about her experience moving from a reserve school to a conventional school. On the reserve, she felt as though her culture was infused into every aspect of education. She said that was not her experience once she moved to conventional school. She also voiced her frustration that she learned Cree and spoke it fluently in the reserve school, but Cree language was not an option in the conventional school—instead, French was the only option. The loss of language was one concern brought up by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2012); it noted that loss of language among Indigenous peoples in Canada was a consequence of the Indian Act. The document review revealed that the school district had considered creating Cree language clubs and offering Cree language courses at the high-school level.

The subtheme of cultural awareness converged with the subtheme of intergenerational racism. Participant 3 highlighted her feelings that students needed to be taught more about Indigenous culture when they were young. She suggested teaching both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students about Indigenous culture starting in kindergarten because by the time students reach junior high school, their opinions have already been formed. The document review of the most recent three-year plan revealed that the school district intended to create an Indigenous-focused Early Childhood Education program.

The idea of teaching students about Indigenous culture earlier was echoed and expanded upon by Participant 4 when she said parents, "teach their children their own views and their children grow up with those kinds of opinions and views." Participant 4 also shared her perception that many people say that Indigenous people should be thankful they are being taught English and that "people think that they are allowed to speak freely and wrong about our culture, our politics, and our way of life when they do not know anything about us." She said that racism

was a “continuous thing in different generations,” meaning that racism and racist views are passed down from generation to generation.

Finally, the subtheme of action was uncovered through the data analysis. Action, taking action, or the lack of action were common concepts brought up in participants’ responses in the focus groups, and their comments were corroborated by my observations in the classrooms. Participants shared their frustration with the lack of depth in content and lack of time spent in class on Indigenous education, history, and issues. Participant 1 shared that he wanted to see schools doing “more than just the bare minimum.” Participant 4 noted her desire for teachers to address comments, specifically when it came to comments or inaccuracies about residential schools. As previously noted, it was suggested that when racist or ignorant comments were heard by teachers, they be addressed and taken seriously in classrooms.

The document review of the district’s response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action (2015) was revealing in regard to the theme of taking action. While many of the of the 11 Calls to Action and 15 subsequent bullet points in that document had to do with matters outside the scope of a provincial school district, the district noted nine points within the district’s response where there was “no action considered.” The document review revealed that the district had considered taking action by creating Cree language courses and clubs as well as an Indigenous-focused Early Childhood Education program.

The documents included the statement that while the district continues efforts to improve results for Indigenous students, the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students already meet or exceed average provincial results. This comparison meant that the district is meeting or exceeding provincial averages when it came to First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students’ results. However, this does not mean that all First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students across the province are meeting

achievement goals. Exceeding an average is not the same as completing high school or meeting achievement goals. Comparisons via averages do not ensure that all Indigenous students are succeeding. While the district in this study was meeting or exceeding averages, it was likely as a result of a decline results within other districts in the province, which lowered that average.

Many of the challenges faced by Indigenous students and mentioned by the focus group participants were related to the theme of awareness. These challenges extended beyond the walls of the school. The data uncovered the need to address intergenerational racism through improved cultural awareness, and the need to take action when there were perceived inequalities. Addressing these concerns and taking action could not solely be the responsibility of the school. The greater community, Canadian society, and the Canadian government would all need to actively address the systemic barriers to Indigenous students' success.

Resiliency. Within the final theme of resiliency, two subthemes were identified through the data collection and analysis: self-motivation and self-preservation. Students' personal stories and lived experiences illuminated the effect that resiliency can have on students in their attempt to complete high school. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2012) reports that the impact of residential schools has been felt not just by the students who attended those schools but by subsequent generations as well, leading to intergenerational trauma. According to Dion Stout and Kipling (2003), residential schools have contributed to poverty, substance abuse, family violence, sexual abuse, homelessness, and high rates of incarceration in generations of Indigenous people. Given the impact of this intergenerational trauma, the resiliency demonstrated by the participants in this study is all the more significant to note.

Participant 3 shared the story of her choosing to stay in foster care rather than returning to her biological family. She stated that she knew she would not have finished high school if she

had returned to her biological mother. She shared the personal steps she was taking to be successful in the future, including purposefully planning her courses in order to get into a social work program. She also commented, “you have to be your own self-motivation and like, you have to actually really want it. . . . it’s up to you if you want to do something.” Participant 4 shared her feelings of shock at what she was learning in conventional schools in regard to Indigenous history. She wanted to learn more and pursued further education outside of school by accessing her family’s knowledge. She also shared that anger and spite were partial motivators for her finishing high school; she accessed her own anger and spite to prove everyone wrong about their preconceived notions of Indigenous people.

Participant 3’s story of staying in foster care was one example of self-preservation in the face of adversity. She chose to stay in foster care to ensure that she graduated from high school. Participant 4 noted her frustration and the “mess with everything” when she moved from reserve school to conventional school. She discussed “staying under the radar” and denying her culture and identity as tactics of self-preservation in conventional schools, and the sadness she felt at denying her identity in this way. Participant 4 noted that she “doesn’t really look Native,” and this has helped her to successfully complete high school. This self-preservation strategy of ‘staying under the radar’ was also observed during the classroom observation sessions.

The documents reviewed showed that there were statistically few self-identified Indigenous students within the district. Early on in this study, it became clear that the small number of self-identified Indigenous students might have something to do with tactics of self-preservation; when consent forms to participate in this study were distributed, more students requested a consent form than were on the list of identified Indigenous Grade 12 students. Those students who wanted to participate but had not identified themselves to the school district as

Indigenous might have chosen not to mention their Indigenous identity to the school district as a means of self-preservation. This showed similarities to Participant 4 denying her identity as a way to overcome the perceived barrier of being seen as Indigenous.

The theme of resiliency was present throughout the data collected. This theme was not noted in previous research, so it may have been specific to the students who were able to participate in this study. All participants were on track to graduate high school, and all noted a measure of familial support in their success in completing high school. The theme of resiliency may or may not appear in future research if the population sample or demographics in those future studies differ from those of this study. Although mention of this theme was unique to this study, it may have been a result of influencing factors such as relationships with family and community, which were mentioned in previous research (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011; Preston & Claypool, 2013).

Overall, the first subquestion for this study focused on identifying ways to improve learning environments in order to improve high school completion. On this topic, participant responses in focus groups corroborated the things I observed in the classrooms and the school, and document review suggested the need to improve relationships within the school in order to improve the cultural awareness of staff and students and to increase and improve the action taken when injustices and racism were perceived within the school.

The second subquestion focused on addressing the barriers to high school completion and acknowledging successful strategies for high school completion for Indigenous students. Participant responses in focus groups corroborated findings from the classroom and school observation sessions and the document review. The data analysis suggested the need to improve relationships within the school, to address the need for improved cultural awareness for staff and

students, to address intergenerational racism, to take action on perceived inequities, and to build resiliency in Indigenous students.

Finally, the driving question of how educators could better support Indigenous students in their effort to complete high school was addressed through the perspectives, perceptions, feelings, and lived experiences of the student participants, which were collected as data in this study. The findings of this study suggested that if educators were to improve relationships—building them on improved awareness—and focus on supporting students to build resiliency, rates of high school completion for Indigenous students may improve.

Although I am non-Indigenous, I purposely designed the study to respect and acknowledge Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing. As such, I included a conventional method of data presentation, but I also acknowledged a traditional method of data presentation through the inclusion of the themes as they related to the medicine wheel. Acknowledging and addressing the themes in relation to the medicine wheel could support educators in understanding what areas of the whole person need to be supported in order to better support Indigenous students to succeed. In order to support the mental and spiritual wellbeing of students, educators could focus on building awareness and relationships. To support the physical wellbeing of students, educators could focus on building awareness and supporting resiliency in students. Finally, to support the emotional wellbeing of students, educators could focus on all three identified areas for improvement: improving relationships, building awareness, and supporting students to build resiliency.

While the findings from the research suggested that making improvements in relationships, awareness, and resiliency could help educators to better support Indigenous students in completing high school, it bears repeating that the results of this study were based on

the specific responses of four targeted participants. The participants were targeted to contribute to the study because there was a gap in the literature in regard to the location studied and the specific identified group of rural Indigenous students. Although the stories shared by the participants were candid and thoughtful, they do not represent the lived experiences of all Indigenous students.

Discussion of Results in Relation to the Literature

The literature review of this study uncovered three common themes in the research related to improving high school completion rates for Indigenous students. The existing literature revealed the need to improve learning environments, improve culturally infused pedagogical practices, and address the barriers to high school completion for Indigenous students (Bougie & Senécal, 2010; Hare & Pidgeon, 2011; Mombourquette & Head, 2014; Oskineegish & Berger, 2013; Preston & Claypool, 2013). Results from this study suggest that improving relationships, building awareness, and supporting Indigenous students to build resiliency could improve high school completion rates. The findings of this study, then, are consistent with the themes revealed in previous research.

In regard to improving learning environments, previous research suggested the need for hospitable school cultures, family and community relationships, academic aspirations, and high academic expectations. It also suggested the need for non-Indigenous teachers to understand their roles in Indigenous education (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011; Oskineegish & Berger, 2013; Preston & Claypool, 2013; Whitley, 2014). These suggestions are consistent with many findings from this study. For example, relationships and family were consistently revealed through the data as having both positive and negative effects on participants in regard to their completing high school. Additionally, Participant 3 noted her academic aspirations, while Participant 1 noted

how the academic expectations from a specified teacher helped him to graduate high school. Hare and Pidgeon (2011) found family and community to be influential inside the schools themselves, but this was not mentioned as part of the participants' experiences. The participants referenced going outside the school to access family as a source of knowledge. Strong familial relationships could be related to personal resiliency, self-motivation, and self-preservation, which were themes raised in participants' responses in this study. The theme of resiliency was not emphasized in previous literature, and it is significant to this study.

Additionally, Oskineegish and Berger (2013) suggested the need for non-Indigenous teachers to understand their role as visitors to Indigenous communities. This need for cultural understanding and awareness could be further explored through professional development training for staff on the topics of cultural sensitivity and privilege. Previous literature suggested that to improve culturally infused pedagogical practices, there would need to be culturally appropriate, inclusive teaching methods for Indigenous content and deeper cultural understanding (Mombourquette & Head, 2014; Oskineegish, 2015; Preston et al., 2012). The need for deeper cultural awareness was highlighted by many findings from this study. For example, this study and previous literature revealed the need to have authentically infused, quality Indigenous content and learning experiences on Indigenous content that are facilitated in a culturally competent manner. Oskineegish's (2015) study suggested a need for deeper cultural understanding in schools. The need for deeper understanding was specifically noted by participants as they voiced their frustration with school "scraping the surface," and "not taking the time" when it came to Indigenous history, culture, and issues. Oskineegish's (2015) study also suggested the need to engage with the community. Participants in this study noted that they had experienced engagement between the school and the community in junior high school, but

not at the high school level. The document review found a suggestion about providing outdoor learning opportunities. Outdoor learning environments provide connection to communities outside the conventional school or classroom setting.

In regard to addressing barriers, previous literature stated the need to bring in community members, address racial discrimination, address unwelcoming schools, and address intergenerational trauma (Bougie & Senécal, 2010; Madden et al., 2013; Milne 2016, 2017; Pidgeon, 2016; Stavrou & Miller, 2017). Many findings of this study were consistent with these observed needs. For example, Pidgeon (2016) suggested the need to bring Elders into schools. The participants in this study did not note any community engagement at the high school level. Inviting Elders in for the focus groups may be one step in promoting cultural awareness.

Milne (2016) noted that racial discrimination and the desire to blend in are potential barriers to Indigenous students' success. This was confirmed by Participant 4, who said that despite the pain it caused her to deny her culture, she felt she needed to hide her identity. Milne (2017) further suggested that the inclusion of quality Indigenous content in schools led to improved self-esteem and self-concept for Indigenous students. Madden et al. (2013) found that unwelcoming schools were a barrier to success for Indigenous students in conventional schools. This theory was corroborated by the participants in this study; instances of "racism and ignorance" at the school were noted by participants and by my classroom observation sessions. Participants also noted that without their peer groups that may have given up on school, which also illustrates the welcoming aspects of the school. However, participants also observed some features of their school experience that were not entirely unwelcoming, such as their school friends, whom participants noted as a reason they attended school, as well as specific teachers who built positive relationships. This was also confirmed by school and classroom observations.

Additionally, Stavrou and Miller (2017) suggested that avoiding or not focusing on ongoing racism was “perpetuating a false sense of the origins of inequality” (p. 92). Heeding this, it could be said that implementing curriculum that is inauthentic or surface-level could lead to damaging effects for Indigenous students in classrooms. Participants in this study noted the “bare minimum” approach to the teaching of Indigenous history within their schools, that it was merely “scratching the surface.” Finally, Bougie and Senécal (2010) noted the effects of intergenerational trauma on residential school survivors and how this could affect the school experiences of the children of survivors. Participant 4 alluded to this, as the grandchild of residential school survivors.

All of this goes to show that many of the findings from the existing literature were confirmed by the findings of this study. However, many findings from previous research were not discussed as part of the lived experiences of the participants within this study, and some of the elements of the lived experiences of the participants in this study were not addressed by previous research. Specifically, participants in this study emphasized resiliency, self-motivation, and self-preservation as contributing factors to their personal success in completing high school. While resiliency may be a product of the themes uncovered by previous literature, it was a key and more explicit finding in this study. This study was designed to be specific to the identified population, location, and environment. Therefore, this study added to the body of literature in response to the driving question of how educators can better support Indigenous students to complete high school, and by so doing improve high school completion rates for Indigenous students.

Limitations

As with all research studies, there were certain limitations inherent to this study. I attempted to mitigate the number of limitations within this study. I was mindful that undertaking this study as a non-Indigenous person was a limitation unto itself. Other limitations to this study included sampling, combined with participants' potential fear of speaking openly and the limited number of participants. Initial limitations were the time constraints and sampling constraints of the study. As an Elder was invited to participate in the focus groups, the date and timing for the focus groups could not be adjusted. Requiring consent forms to be submitted well in advance may help prevent this limitation in the future. Such fixed timelines and deadlines are not congruent with or typical of Indigenous culture (Madden et al., 2013). It should be noted that conventional requirements of research studies do not always coincide with Indigenous ways of sharing knowledge (Madden et al., 2013; Mombourquette & Head, 2014).

As for the limitation of the number of participants, of the potential student participants who identified as Indigenous, an estimated 56 students were in the target sample population. Of those 56 students, only four submitted consent forms. Of those four, three required parental permission, and one was of age to not require parental consent. More potential participants took copies of the consent form but did not return the form in time for the initial focus group. Targeting students who were over the age of consent might have improved sampling numbers, as the younger participants' need to have parental permission to participate in this study might have limited their participation. The study secured approximately 7% of the potential population of participants. The stories shared by participants needed to be shared, which was consistent with oral storytelling and knowledge-sharing in the Indigenous community. As such, the data collected from the participants were saturated, as I no longer found new information that added

to the study. During the five days I spent observing the school and classrooms, the events, activities, and incidents I observed provided evidence in each category. After the five days of observation, I found there to be no new information that added to the understanding of each category, meaning that there was data saturation.

In a concerted effort to protect the privacy of the participants, no formal presentations or information sessions were held to inform potential participants about the study and thereby enhance the reach of the sampling. Reaching out to the community might have helped to build trust and relationships, which might have improved sampling numbers (Oskineegish & Berger, 2013). However, there was also a need to protect the privacy of participants and the authenticity of the classroom observations. As the research location was a school within a small rural community, the likelihood of school staff uncovering the nature of the study was high, and that could have compromised the authenticity of the lessons being taught during the classroom observation sessions. Had staff members known the specifics of the study, the participants might have been fearful or reluctant to be forthcoming in the focus groups.

I was employed with the school district in which the research took place. Although I had never worked at the research location, I did have general acquaintances with some staff members and students. While it might have been a limitation not to have had a more developed relationship with the student participants and families, a more developed relationship also could have been a hindrance to obtaining authentic responses from the student participants. Specifically, a more developed relationship could have been a hindrance if the participants had thought that I was well acquainted with staff or teachers at the school.

As a non-Indigenous person working with Indigenous students, I entered the study aware of the intrinsic biases I possess and the place of privilege that I occupy. My being non-

Indigenous was a limitation of the study, which might have contributed to participants feeling fearful or reluctant to speak freely and openly. I conducted extensive research on how to frame the study in a manner that was respectful of Indigenous traditions. I endeavored to mitigate the limitation of my being non-Indigenous by using respectful and traditional methods of data collection—specifically, a style of focus group inspired by a sharing circle. I also invited Elders to be present and to provide a blessing within the focus groups. Additionally, I put significant effort into ensuring the privacy of students in an attempt to help create a safe environment in which participants could speak freely. I also focused on retelling verbatim the stories and lived experiences of the participants as a further attempt to mitigate the effects of my biases and privilege.

The limitations of this study included my researching Indigenous people as a non-Indigenous researcher, sampling combined with participants' potential fear to speak openly, and the limited number of participants. While there were limitations within this study, I attempted to delimit and address potential concerns. In future research, this study could be replicated with a focus on further addressing these limitations.

Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory

As with any study based in an educational context, the implications of this study should ultimately lead to improved outcomes for students. The intention of this study was to provide insight on how educators could better support Indigenous students to complete high school and thereby increase the high school completion rate of Indigenous students. While the data in this qualitative study were triangulated using focus groups, observations, and document review, the responses to the focus groups were based on the lived experiences of the four participants. Further studies could replicate and explore the same concepts and topics in different areas of the

province, different types of schools, or with larger numbers of student participants to provide a broader data set. The challenges of building relationships, improving cultural awareness, and fostering resiliency in students are not the sole responsibility of schools and educators. As such, the implications for policy, practice, and theory are expanded to include recommendations for communities and Canadian society as a whole. Many of the recommendations would be under the purview of the school district, administration, and governments and not individual educators.

The recommendations in this study were linked directly to the data collected through focus groups, observations, and document review. The recommendations are not listed in order of priority; each recommendation is provided to give insight to educators. Based on the results of the study, several recommendations are offered to educators to improve high school completion rates for Indigenous students:

1. Set expectations for educators (teachers and support staff) to attend professional development opportunities focused on Indigenous education. Professional development could specifically focus on building cultural awareness, addressing intergenerational racism, and implementing the TRC's (2015) Calls to Action.
2. Provide educators (teachers and support staff) with access to professional development opportunities focused on acknowledging privilege.
3. Provide parents, community members, and businesses with access to training on cultural awareness and privilege.
4. Include self-identified needs and district-wide initiatives in regard to Indigenous education in professional development opportunities.
5. Improve collaboration between teachers, parents, and peers to build positive relationships.

6. Target efforts to build community relationships between and among Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members.
7. Extend invitations to Indigenous community members to participate in school and community events.
8. Work with community organizations to build cultural awareness and target racism beyond the walls of the schools.
9. Promote Indigenous and non-Indigenous community collaborations.
10. Improve cultural sensitivity training among Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.
11. Improve collaboration between junior high schools and high schools in regard to strategies to support Indigenous students.
12. Develop leadership programs and opportunities targeted at Indigenous students to help improve resiliency.
13. Develop early childhood education programs focused on Indigenous education, both in schools and in community centers.
14. Develop Cree, and other Indigenous language clubs or courses.
15. Create targeted support for Indigenous students transitioning from reserve schools to conventional schools.
16. Advocate publicly for Indigenous students at the local, provincial, and federal government levels.

Ideally, if the findings from this study were applied to future planning, they could lead to improved high school completion rates for Indigenous students. Future planning should include collaboration both inside school communities and within the greater communities at large. In order to transfer theory into practice, it is recommended that further research continue in the area

of how educators can better support Indigenous students and thereby improve the high school completion rate for Indigenous students.

The findings of this study connect to the intended research framework and social constructivism. The social constructivist framework incorporated elements of a traditional understanding of how knowledge is given and received, which aligns with Indigenous practices. The social constructivist theory denotes that conventional methods of framing knowledge and understanding are only one way to look at research. Traditional and relevant teaching and learning methods are to be respected to help support reconciliation with Indigenous peoples (Kitchen, et al., 2009; Pidgeon et al., 2014). One key idea in constructivism is that learners are intended to build upon knowledge as a foundation from previous learning (Fox, 2001). By building on the knowledge gathered from the participants, school observations, and document review, the goal of the research is to help support educators to build upon their own foundational understandings to help improve on the successes for Indigenous students completing high school.

Recommendations for Further Research

The following are recommendations for future study, which could broaden and deepen the body of literature in regard to better supporting Indigenous students in completion high school, and could address the limitations of this study:

- This study could be replicated with a larger group of participants, followed over a long period of time or across several districts, to increase the sample size.
- This study could be replicated with a group of students who are not on track to graduate in order to confirm if the themes identified in this study are replicable.
- This study could be extended to include the insights and perspectives from students on and off reserves.

- A study could be conducted that gathered the perspectives of teachers on what they feel is needed to better support Indigenous students in their classrooms.
- A long-term study could be conducted to explore the successes and barriers experienced by students who switch from reserve schools to conventional public schools, and what interventions could be put in place to help such students to navigate successfully the transition from reserve schools to conventional public schools.
- A study could be conducted about interventions put in place to help build relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members to help address intergenerational racism.
- A long-term study could be conducted to follow early childhood education programs that permeate Indigenous education and observe the effects such programs would have on Indigenous students' success and on addressing intergenerational racism.
- A study could be conducted to measure the impact and influence of community demographics on Indigenous students' completion of high school.

Conclusion

The intent of this study was to provide educators with insight on how to improve high school completion rates for Indigenous students, as informed by the perspectives of Indigenous students. One goal was to provide insight on how to create more culturally infused and respectful learning environments for Indigenous students. Another goal was to highlight the successful strategies currently implemented by educators to support Indigenous students to succeed in high school. This study was also intended to provide educators with knowledge about how to address barriers to high school completion within conventional schools based on the perceptions of Indigenous students. Overall, the knowledge gained from this study was intended

to serve as a resource for educators on how to improve high school completion rates for Indigenous youths based on the insights gained from Indigenous students. The findings from this study could provide educators with insight on how to better support Indigenous students, but also could provide parents, community members, and society with insight on the barriers that are still in place for Indigenous peoples in Canada.

What ultimately emerged from this study were thoughtful, candid, and often heartbreaking stories of the lived experiences of the participants. These findings had monumental implications for my own classroom and personal practice. The findings and implication of this study could be applied broadly to help support improved educational experiences for Indigenous students. This study, in part, was a small act of moving forward with awareness, acknowledgement, atonement, and actions towards reconciliation, as heeded by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015). The lived experiences and stories shared by the participants were life-changing for me. To respect and honor the lived experiences bravely told by student participants in this study, I will share these stories broadly, and by so doing continue to focus on improving the experience of education for Indigenous students.

References

- Absolon, K. (2011). *Kaandossiwin: How we come to know*. Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing.
- Alberta Education. (2005). *Our words, our ways: Teaching First Nations, Métis and Inuit learners*. Edmonton, AB: Aboriginal Services Branch.
- Alberta Teachers' Association. (2016). *Education is our buffalo: A teachers' resource for First Nations, Métis and Inuit education in Alberta*. Edmonton, AB: Alberta Teachers' Association.
- Aquash, M. (2013). First Nations control of education: One community's experience. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 36(1), 59–76.
- Aseron, J., Wilde, S., Miller, A., & Kelly, S. (2013). Indigenous student participation in higher education: Emergent themes and linkages. *Contemporary Issues in Education Research*, 6(4), 417–424.
- Barnes, R., Josefowitz, N., & Cole, E. (2006). Residential schools. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology*, 21(1-2), 18–32.
- Beaudin, K. (2015, June 20). Time for Saskatchewan to apologize for 60's scoop. *Prince Albert Daily Herald*. Retrieved from <http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docview/1999961054?accountid=10248>
- Bell, N. (2014). Teaching by the medicine wheel: Anishinaabe framework for Indigenous education. *Education Canada*, 54(3), 14–16.
- Bell, N. (2018, April 26). Elders. *Deepening Knowledge: Resources for and about Aboriginal Education*. Retrieved from [https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/deepeningknowledge/Teacher_Resources/Curriculum_Resources_\(by_subjects\)/Social_Sciences_and_Humanities/Elders.html](https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/deepeningknowledge/Teacher_Resources/Curriculum_Resources_(by_subjects)/Social_Sciences_and_Humanities/Elders.html)

- Blacksmith, G. (2011). *The intergenerational legacy of the Indian residential school system on the Cree communities of Mistissini, Oujebougama and Waswanipi: An investigative research on the experiences of three generations of the James Bay Cree of northern Quebec* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Central; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection; Social Science Premium Collection. (875306609).
- Bougie, E., & Sénécal, S. (2010). Registered Indian children's school success and intergenerational effects of residential schooling in Canada. *International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 1(1), 1–41.
- Casey, K. (1996). The new narrative research in education. *Review of Research in Education*, 21, 211–253.
- Creswell, J. W. (2015). *A concise introduction to mixed methods research*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice*, 39(3), 124–130.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dion Stout, M., & Kipling, G. (2003). *Aboriginal people, resilience and the residential school legacy*. Ottawa, Canada: The Aboriginal Healing Foundation.
- Edelman, S. J. (2012). *The residential school settlement with Yukon First Nation survivors: A positive form of relationship renewal?* (Master's thesis). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection (1367253742).

- Elias, B., Mignone, J., Hall, M., Hong, S. P., Hart, L., & Sareen, J. (2012). Trauma and suicide behaviour histories among a Canadian Indigenous population: An empirical exploration of the potential role of Canada's residential school system. *Social Science & Medicine*, 74(10), 1560–1569.
- Feir, D. L. (2016). The intergenerational effects of residential schools on children's educational experiences in Ontario and Canada's western provinces. *International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 7(3), 1–47.
- Fox, R. (2001). Constructivism examined. *Oxford Review of Education*, 27(1), 23–35.
- Gallop, C. J., & Bastien, N. (2016). Supporting success: Aboriginal students in higher education. *The Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 46(2), 206–224.
- Government of Canada. (2015). Legistics First Nation(s) – Aboriginal. Retrieved from <http://canada.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/csj-sjc/legis-redact/legistics/p1p12.html>
- Government of Canada. (2017). Indigenous peoples and communities. Retrieved from <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100013785/1529102490303>
- Government of Canada. (2018, February 15). Research involving the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples of Canada. Retrieved from http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/tcps2-eptc2_2018_chapter9-chapitre9.html
- Hansen, J. G., & Antsanen, R. (2016). Elders' teachings about resilience and its implications for education in Dene and Cree communities. *International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 7(1), 1–17.
- Hare, J., & Pidgeon, M. (2011). The way of the warrior: Indigenous youth navigating the challenges of schooling. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 34(2), 93–111.

- Horn-Miller, K. (2009). *Sky woman's great granddaughters: A narrative inquiry into kaniienkehaka women's identity* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Central: Social Science Database (NR63412).
- Hughes, A. S., & Sears, A. (2004). *Situated learning and anchored instruction as vehicles for social education*. Vancouver, BC: Pacific Education Press..
- Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. (2006). Canada's relationship with Inuit: A history of policy and program development. Retrieved from <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100016900/1100100016908>
- Johnson, A. V. D. (2010). *Understanding academic success for Onkwehonwe (Indigenous) students through the use of an Onkwehonwe'neha (Indigenous methodology)* (Master's thesis). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (1018360201).
- Johnson, S. (2013). We are the ones we've been waiting for: Towards the development of an Indigenous educational advocacy organization for Indigenous children in Canada's custody. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 36(1), 126–145.
- Jones, A. M. (2014). *The use of a Native American medicine wheel to facilitate the implementation of a strategic plan at the University of Wisconsin-Extension - Cooperative extension: An action inquiry case study*. Available from Social Science Premium Collection. (201521989).
- Kearns, L., & Anuik, J. (2015). Métis curricular challenges and possibilities: A discussion initiated by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit education policy in Ontario. *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies*, 12(2), 6–36.

- Kemppainen, D., Kopera-Frye, K., & Woodard, J. (2008). The medicine wheel: A versatile tool for promoting positive change in diverse contexts. *Collected Essays on Learning and Teaching, 1*, 80–84.
- Kitchen, J., Cherubini, L., Trudeau, L., & Hodson, J. M. (2009). Aboriginal education as cultural brokerage: New Aboriginal teachers reflect on language and culture in the classroom. *McGill Journal of Education (Online), 44*(fall), 355–375.
- Kitchen, J., Cherubini, L., Trudeau, L., & Hodson, J. (2010). Weeding out or developing capacity? Challenges for Aboriginal teacher education. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research, 56*(2), 107–123.
- Laramee, M. (2013). *Teaching and learning as an act of love: An examination of the impact of seven traditional Indigenous teaching practices in teacher education and on teacher's [sic] classroom practices* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection; Social Science Premium Collection (1512636925).
- Lavallée, L. F. L. (2009). Practical application of an Indigenous research framework and two qualitative Indigenous research methods: Sharing circles and Anishnaabe symbol-based reflection. *The International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 8*(1), 20–40.
- MacDonald, D. B., & Hudson, G. (2012). The genocide question and Indian residential schools in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue Canadienne De Science Politique, 45*(2), 427–449.
- Madden, B., Higgins, M., & Korteweg, L. (2013). Role models can't just be on posters: Remembering barriers to Indigenous community engagement. *Canadian Journal of Education, 36*(2), 212–247.

- Mah, B. (2016, Sep 08). Half of Aboriginal students now finish Grade 12. *Edmonton Journal*. Retrieved from <http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/docview/1817859954?accountid=10248>
- Malterud, K. (2001). Qualitative research: Standards, challenges and guidelines. *The Lancet*, 358, 483–488.
- Manning, T. Y. (2016). *Tools for effective implementation of response to intervention in the elementary classroom*(Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Central; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection; Social Science Premium Collection. (1909356750).
- McGregor, H. E. (2013). Situating Nunavut education with Indigenous education in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 36(2), 87–118.
- McGuire, J. (2014). Researcher bias. Retrieved from https://cupo.blackboard.com/bbcswebdav/pid-835666-dt-content-rid-9632083_1/courses/20184041512-cup/resources/stage3/s3%20Researcher%20Bias-McGuire.pdf
- McMillan, J. H. (2012). *Educational research: Fundamentals for the consumer* (6th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Education.
- Métis National Council. (2011). Métis registration guide. Retrieved from www.metisnation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Métis-Registration-Guide.pdf
- Milne, E. (2016). Educational issues and inequalities: Experiences of Indigenous Canadian students. *Sociological Studies of Children and Youth*, 20, 65–80.

- Milne, E. (2017). Implementing Indigenous education policy directives in Ontario public schools: Experiences, challenges and successful practices. *International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 8(3), 1–20.
- Mombourquette, C., & Head, A. B. (2014). Building First Nations' capacity through teacher efficacy. *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, 34(2), 105–123.
- Momper, S. L., Delva, J., & Reed, B. G. (2011). OxyContin misuse on a reservation: Qualitative reports by American Indians in talking circles. *Substance Use & Misuse*, 46(11), 1372–1379.
- Neeganagwedgin, E. (2013). A critical review of Aboriginal education in Canada: Eurocentric dominance impact and everyday denial. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 17(1), 15–31.
- Nelson, A. (1998). *The learning wheel: Ideas and activities for multicultural and holistic planning*. Evergreen, CO: The WHEEL Council.
- Oskineegish, M. (2014). Developing culturally responsive teaching practices in First Nations communities: Learning Anishnaabemowin and land-based teachings. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 60(3), 508–521.
- Oskineegish, M. (2015). Are you providing an education that is worth caring about? Advice to non-Native teachers in northern First Nations communities. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 38(3), 1-25.
- Oskineegish, M., & Berger, P. (2013). The role of the non-Native teacher in remote First Nations communities in northern Ontario. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 36(1), 113–125.

- Pidgeon, M. (2016). More than a checklist: Meaningful Indigenous inclusion in higher education. *Social Inclusion, 4*(1), 77–91.
- Pidgeon, M., Archibald, J., & Hawkey, C. (2014). Relationships matter: Supporting Aboriginal graduate students in British Columbia, Canada. *The Canadian Journal of Higher Education, 44*(1), 1–21.
- Preston, J. P., & Claypool, T. R. (2013). Motivators of educational success: Perceptions of grade 12 Aboriginal students. *Canadian Journal of Education, 36*(4), 257–279.
- Preston, J. P., Claypool, T. R., Rowluck, W., & Green, B. (2017). Perceptions and practices of principals: Supporting positive educational experiences for Aboriginal learners. *International Journal of Leadership in Education, 20*(3), 328–344.
- Preston, J. P., Cottrell, M., Pelletier, T. R., & Pearce, J. V. (2012). Aboriginal early childhood education in Canada: Issues of context. *Journal of Early Childhood Research, 10*(1), 3–18.
- Restoule, J. (2004). *Male aboriginal identity formation in urban areas: A focus on process and context* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection (305070238).
- Richards, J. G., Vining, A. R., & Weimer, D. L. (2010). Aboriginal performance on standardized tests: Evidence and analysis from provincial schools in British Columbia. *Policy Studies Journal, 38*(1), 47–67.
- Sacher, M., Sacher, M., & Vaughan, N. (2014, July). A blended approach to Canadian First Nations education. *International Association for the Development of the Information Society, 21–28*.
- Saldaña, J. (2009) *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Sanderson, K., Hutchinson, B., & Grekul, J. (2013). Exploring the link between school attendance, developmental assets, and social capital in a First Nations community. *International Journal of Child, Youth & Family Studies*, 4(1), 42–53.
- Schwartz, D. (June 2, 2105). Truth and Reconciliation Commission: By the numbers. *CBC News*. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/truth-and-reconciliation-commission-by-the-numbers-1.3096185>
- Smith, D. G. (2001). The “policy of aggressive civilization” and projects of governance in Roman Catholic industrial schools for Native peoples in Canada, 1870–95. *Anthropologica*, 43(2), 253–271.
- Snowball, A. (2014). *Aboriginal education for non-Aboriginal learners: Engaging teacher candidates in an immersive cultural experience* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (1764222649).
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Starks, H., & Brown Trinidad, S. (2007). Choose your method: A comparison of phenomenology, discourse analysis, and grounded theory. *Qualitative Health Research*, 17(10), 1372–1380.
- Statistics Canada. (2015). *Aboriginal statistics at a glance* (2nd ed.). Retrieved from www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-645-x/89-645-x2015001-eng.htm
- Statistics Canada. (2016). *Aboriginal Peoples: Fact sheet for Alberta*. Retrieved from www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-656-x/89-656-x2016010-eng.htm
- Stavrou, S. G., & Miller, D. (2017). Miscalculations: Decolonizing and anti-oppressive discourses in Indigenous mathematics education. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 40(3), 92–122.

- Steele, L. K. (2013). *Urban aboriginal students at-promise of completing high school: A community's journey* (Doctoral dissertation) . Available from ProQuest Central; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection; Social Science Premium Collection. (1504616327).
- Stokes, D. (2001). Sage, sweetgrass, and the first amendment. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 47(36), B16.
- Strong, Z. H. (2014). *Native American youth voices on success, identity, and cultural values: Educational success and positive identity development through culturally responsive mentoring* (Master's thesis). Available from Social Science Premium Collection (1531931514).
- Tobias, J. K., & Richmond, C. (2016). Gimiigiwemin: Putting knowledge translation into practice with Anishinaabe communities. *International Journal of Indigenous Health*, 11(1), 228–243.
- Toulouse, P. R. (2016). *Achieving indigenous student success: A guide for secondary classrooms*. Manitoba, AB: Portage & Main Press.
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2012). *They came for our children: Canada, Aboriginal peoples, and residential schools*. Winnipeg, MB: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Honouring the truth, reconciling for the future: Summary of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. Winnipeg, MB: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to action*. Winnipeg, MB: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2018). *Our mandate*. Retrieved from <http://www.trc.ca/about-us/our-mandate.html>
- Verwoord, R., Mitchell, A., & Machado, J. (2011). Supporting Indigenous students through a culturally relevant assessment model based on the medicine wheel. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 34(1), 49–66..
- Walker, R. (2013). A fair country?: A feminist and postcolonial reading of Canada's colonial encounter. *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, 33(2), 117–131.
- Walking Together: Education for Reconciliation. (2017). First Nations treaties in Alberta: Treaty 6, *Stepping Stones*. Retrieved from <http://empoweringthespirit.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/PD-WT-16d-Treaty-6.pdf>
- Watters, H. (June 1, 2015). Truth and Reconciliation chair urges Canada to adopt UN declaration on Indigenous Peoples. *CBC News*. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/truth-and-reconciliation-chair-urges-canada-to-adopt-un-declaration-on-indigenous-peoples-1.3096225>
- Whitley, J. (2014). Supporting educational success for Aboriginal students: Identifying key influences. *McGill Journal of Education (Online)*, 49(winter), 155–181.
- Younging, G. (2018). *Elements of Indigenous style: A guide for writing by and about Indigenous Peoples*. Edmonton, AB: Brush Education.

Appendix A: Observation Checklist

Date: Class: Time: Number of Students:	<u>Physical Set-Up/Desk Arrangement</u>
Evidence of Indigenous Pedagogy	Physical Space Reflecting Indigenous Culture
Use of Language by Staff	Relationships Between Teachers and Students

Appendix B: Consent Form

Research Study Title: Insights from Indigenous Students on High School Completion

Principal Investigator: Melissa Steeves

Research Institution: Concordia University–Portland

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Julie McCann

Purpose and what you will be doing:

The purpose of this study is to explore insights from Indigenous high school students on how educators can better support Indigenous students in completing high school. The principal investigator expects approximately 16 volunteers. No one will be paid to be in the study. The principal investigator will begin enrollment on November 1st, 2018 and end enrollment on December 1st, 2018. To be in the study, participants will take part in two focus groups. Both focus groups will meet during school hours. Each focus group should take less than two hours, however, in order to allow for the full stories of the participants to be shared; the time may go above the two hour commitment. Student participants should be from ages 14-19. Participants under the age of 18 will require parental permission to participate. An additional parent information letter will be distributed with the consent form.

Risks:

The risks inherent with this study are potentially psychological or emotional and social risks to the participants. Students may disclose information regarding painful experiences within conventional schools. This could trigger emotional reactions connected to stress or discomfort. . The stories told by the participants are their own realities of their experiences within the school system. These stories may lead back to pleasant or painful experiences for the participants, as it may in a classroom discussion of similar content or fashion. Participants will be given the questions prior to beginning the focus groups, with the parent information letter. By providing the questions before the focus groups, participants will be given the opportunity to think about their responses. There will be no surprise questions or deception involved in the data collection process. The stories of one participant could potentially trigger discomfort in other participants. The social risks, related to the emotional risks, include that if there is a breach in confidentiality of participants, that the information shared by participants could be used in a negative manner, depending on what is said. For example, if there is a negative experience connected back to an educator in the school. In an attempt to address this, the confidentiality of the participants will be of the utmost importance. No identifying features of the participants will be included in the dissertation. Identifying features from the stories of participants, such as schools or classes will be omitted from the analysis. All transcripts will be destroyed. Consent forms will be the only place where the names of the participants will be included. Faculty, except the administrator and student services, at the school will not be informed as to the identity of the participants. Participants may miss classroom instructional time, depending on the allocated time and space from the school to conduct the focus groups.

Benefits:

Information participants provide may help to inform educators on how to better support Indigenous students' successful completion of high school within conventional schools. The information provided may help educators to improve learning environments and address barriers faced by Indigenous high school students. Participants could benefit from this study by having the opportunity to share their experiences in the conventional school system.

Confidentiality:

The study's findings will be published as partial completion of the principal investigator's dissertation. No identifying information will be included about participants. An exception to confidentiality to this is if a participant tells of abuse or neglect that makes the investigator seriously concerned for their immediate health and safety.

Right to Withdraw:

Participation is greatly appreciated, but the principal investigator acknowledge that the questions principal investigator is asking are personal in nature. The participant is free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. The participant may skip any questions they do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time the participant experiences a negative emotion from answering the questions, the principal investigator will stop asking questions on that topic.

Contact Information:

You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Melissa Steeves at email [redacted]. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email obranch@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).

Statement of Consent for Your Child:

I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my child’s consent for this study.

_____	_____
Participant Name	Date
_____	_____
Participant Signature	Date
_____	_____
Parent Name	Date
_____	_____
Parent Signature	Date
_____	_____
Investigator Name	Date
_____	_____
Investigator Signature	Date



Investigator: Melissa Steeves email: [redacted]
c/o: Professor Julie McCann
Concordia University–Portland
2811 NE Holman Street
Portland, Oregon 97221

Appendix C: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously- researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does “fraudulent” mean?

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

What is “unauthorized” assistance?

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

Statement of Original Work (Continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*.

Melissa Steeves

Digital Signature

Melissa Steeves

Name (Typed)

August 22, 2019

Date