

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Engaging Poo'miikapii & Niitsitapiisinni: The Development & Implementation of
Community-Based Graduate Programs to Support Community Wellness

by

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A THESIS

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Abstract

This thesis investigates how community-based graduate programs in local Indigenous approaches to wellness can be most effectively developed and implemented. The Poo'miikapii: Niitsitapii Approaches to Wellness, and Niitsitapiisinni: Real Peoples' Way of Life programs at the University of Calgary were used as examples to demonstrate this. Ten storytellers engaged in research conversations to share their feedback and experiences regarding the development and implementation of the Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs. Research conversations and course outlines were analyzed using Archibald's (2008) storywork analysis. Themes of relationship building and maintenance, Elder engagement, community-based Indigenous pedagogy and curriculum, and decolonizing and Indigenizing the academia were identified. A framework for universities, organizations, and communities to implement similar programs is discussed. Considerations of how to collaboratively develop and implement on reserve, community-based wellness programs with an emphasis on experiential, land-based, and Elder-guided learning are included. Given the vast diversity among Indigenous communities, this framework should be interpreted as a flexible guideline that can be altered to align with Indigenous communities' unique practices.

Keywords:

Storywork, Indigenous, Community-Based Research, Land-Based, Experiential-Learning, Development and Implementation, Indigenous Pedagogy and Curricula, Decolonization, Wellness, Blackfoot

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the development and implementation of community-based graduate programs to support community wellness. Before I describe the study's objectives and purpose, I must first position myself within the research, and discuss how as a non-Indigenous person, I can approach this research as an ally.

Reflections on Research as an Ally

When engaging in Indigenous research, it is important to locate oneself within the context of colonialism and to set decolonizing aims (Smith, 2012). As a non-Indigenous person, I knew this to be especially important as failure to do so increases the potential to cause harm or to misrepresent Indigenous peoples and knowledge. Furthermore, it was critical to reflect on my personal motivations for engaging in Indigenous research, and to consider how my personal biases and beliefs may impact the research process. To initiate the process of locating myself within the research, I felt it necessary to return to my geographical roots and my childhood.

Home, for me, is a small rural community in northwestern Ontario, which is southern Treaty 3 and Anishinaabe territory. My ancestors are European, with my paternal side having Irish, Icelandic, and English roots, whereas my maternal side is primarily Italian and English. Throughout my upbringing, we were a middle-class family; my father was an elementary school teacher and my mother was a social worker for an Indigenous Family and Children's Services agency. My mother's work greatly influenced me, and as a result, I was familiar and fairly comfortable with participating in certain Anishinaabe community events and ceremonies such as smudging, seasonal feasting, and pow wows. Growing up, my mother explained the history of oppression of Indigenous peoples, especially in relation to the imposition and forced attendance

of Indigenous peoples in residential schools, which stirred in me a strong sense of injustice. At a young age, I was upset by the inequality of the circumstances.

It was not until I was older and started working as a children's therapist at the same Indigenous Family and Children's Services agency, that I started to recognize the incredible healing power of cultural identity. In collaboration with Elders, community members, and other Indigenous mental health counsellors, we implemented cultural practices and ceremonies as part of our therapeutic approaches. In this setting, I had the opportunity to observe remarkable transformations in my clients, which I never would have anticipated at that time. It seemed that by engaging in cultural practices (e.g., playing hand drums, painting, or attending ceremonies), my clients were reconnecting with pieces of themselves that had been stolen through colonization. From this work, I learned that (re)connecting with culture is a crucial component to facilitate healing in a way that is meaningful for the client.

The process of reflecting on my experiences with Indigenous peoples has further enhanced my sense of responsibility to take action against the injustices of colonialism. Thus, I entered graduate school with a desire to engage in research that could contribute to a meaningful difference in relation to these injustices. However, I was concerned about engaging in this research as a White person. Ultimately, I knew I would be limited in terms of my ability to relate to the research in as personal of a way as an Indigenous researcher. The Canadian Race Relations Foundation (CRRF, 2015) considers an ally to be a member of an oppressor/privileged group who actively attempts to abolish particular forms of oppression that give her/him privilege. With this definition in mind, I felt I could approach this research as an ally and could focus on learning and promoting Indigenous values, as I believe that reclaiming and revitalizing culture is a key component involved in healing and thriving. Regan (2010) described a *settler mentality* as one in

which settlers have a biased or untrue understanding of colonial history, believing that the methods and circumstances of colonization were right and necessary. Regan indicated that Canada's historical narrative, which includes the representation of settlers as peacemakers, needs to be deconstructed to understand how colonial forms of denial, guilt, and empathy act as barriers to transformative sociopolitical change. Further, Regan explained how the primary challenge is to turn the mirror back upon ourselves, and answer the provocative question posed by historian Roger Epp (2003) regarding reconciliation in Canada: How do we solve the settler problem?

Turning the Mirror: Becoming Aware

In an effort to turn the mirror upon myself as an Indigenous ally, I engaged in an autoethnographic study examining my experiences with Indigenous communities. The purpose of this autoethnography was to locate myself within the processes of colonialism and ensure that I applied decolonizing aims throughout my thesis project. An additional aim was to enhance my self-awareness regarding my values, beliefs, biases, and motivations for engaging and working with Indigenous communities, and connect this awareness to wider cultural understandings and systems. Specifically, I used narrative autoethnography (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011) to interpret my experiences with Indigenous peoples and to reflect on how these experiences have impacted me as a researcher. Furthermore, the self-analytical and reflexive nature of autoethnography aligns with Indigenous cultural practices (Whitinui, 2014; Karki, 2016). During this process, I documented and analyzed experiences from my past, labelled "stories," that were particularly poignant and reflected various experiences with Indigenous communities from across my lifespan. Using narrative analysis, I derived five main themes from my stories, which included: (a) an outsider looking in; (b) consequences of colonialism; (c) navigation of privilege;

(d) community and belonging; and (e) transformative growth. The following is a brief description of each theme.

An Outsider Looking In

As a non-Indigenous person, I will never be able to fully comprehend what it is like to be Indigenous. This awareness highlighted the importance of accepting my own identity and culture in order to understand and relate to others. This was an initial step in locating myself within this research.

The Consequences of Colonialism

The contexts of colonialism, residential schools, and the child welfare system have contributed to significant feelings of guilt and shame for me as a White person with a settler background. Harnessing these feelings has fueled my desire to engage in positive change and action that supports the resiliency Indigenous communities already possess.

Navigation of Privilege

My White privilege is an aspect of my identity that I will always have to consider when working with Indigenous communities. Consideration of White privilege requires using my privilege as an allied researcher to promote Indigenous ways of thinking, rather than as a means of perpetuating oppression.

Community and Belonging

Genuine relationships and a strong sense of community belonging are crucial elements in building resilient relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, while also promoting healing and the reestablishment of trust. Through the analysis of my stories, I recognized that I have been welcomed into many Indigenous communities, and through personal and professional experiences, I have begun the process of honouring and respecting all my

relations with myself, my family, other humans, animals, plants, the land, spirits, and all living things to live harmoniously and in a moral manner (Wilson, 2008).

Transformative Growth

Respecting Indigenous beliefs, principles, and practices, and implementing this way of thinking is essential when working with Indigenous communities. In unlearning a settler mentality, steps toward trust, personal growth, and community growth are strengthened.

The five themes from my stories captured the navigation of my reflective process through my past and present, and provided preliminary guidelines for engaging in research with Indigenous communities. Overall, this process was useful in terms of helping locate myself in relation to Indigenous communities and colonization, while highlighting the importance of remaining conscientious and continually reminding myself to leave behind my learned settler mentality (Regan, 2010). In examining my thoughts, beliefs, biases, and motivations for this study, I have started a journey to engage in future work and research with Indigenous communities.

I have learned that when engaging in research with Indigenous communities, a sense of humility, authenticity, and respect is essential to form and maintain personal relationships with community members and Elders. Ultimately, my reason for engaging in this research is to learn about and promote the vast amount of Indigenous knowledge that exists regarding wellness, while supporting, as an ally, Indigenous communities in addressing their experiences of injustice. I recognize that there are limitations with this as a non-Indigenous person, but as there are currently multiple health crises affecting Indigenous populations, I also feel a sense of responsibility to take sociopolitical action, as the needs and concerns of Indigenous peoples are experienced in the realms of health, education, the economy, and community (Loppie Reading &

Wien, 2009). Given the historical circumstances of oppression and injustice, there is a need to protect and preserve Indigenous cultures (Smith, 2012). Engaging and working with Indigenous communities will be an ongoing learning process. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that identifying and leaving behind a settler mentality is a crucial step towards conducting effective and influential research with Indigenous peoples.

Defining Indigenous

In the Canadian context, the term *Indigenous* encompasses people who identify as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit, including those who are non-status (Government of Canada, 2019). Other collective terms currently in use include *First Peoples*, *Native Peoples*, *Aboriginals* or *People of the Land*; however, Indigenous is recognized as the most appropriate term (Indigenous Services Canada, 2018). Thus, Indigenous will be used throughout this thesis. According to the International Labour Organization as cited in United Nations (2004):

Indigenous communities, peoples, and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and precolonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal system On an individual basis, an Indigenous person is one who belongs to these Indigenous populations through self-identification as Indigenous (group consciousness) and is recognized and accepted by these populations as one of its members (acceptance by the group). (p. 2)

Although the term Indigenous is inclusive of those who are the first inhabitants of Canada, there is a need to recognize the distinct history and context of each community. Diversity within and among communities can include unique heritages, languages, and spiritual beliefs (Government of Canada, 2018).

Situating the Current Project

Together, Red Crow Community College (RCCC), Blackfeet Community College (BCC), community members from the Kainai and Amskapi Piikani Nations, and Karlee Fellner's Indigenous Wellness in Education team at the University of Calgary collaborated to develop two programs: Poo'miikapii: Niitsitapii Approaches to Wellness and Niitsitapiisinni: Real Peoples' Way of Life, which are part of the interdisciplinary Master of Education (MEd) program at the University of Calgary. This thesis investigates the development and implementation of community-based graduate programs, using the examples of Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni, in local Indigenous approaches to wellness. For this reason, I engaged in research conversations with people instrumental in the development or implementation of the two programs. It is my intention that the research be conducted in a respectful manner that honours and utilizes Indigenous philosophies and methodologies. This required a significant degree of collaboration (which I further discuss in Chapter Three: Methodology) with Indigenous community members and University of Calgary staff to ensure the results were accurately portrayed and representative of Indigenous perspectives. In addition, the research incorporated a strength-based approach aimed at highlighting the autonomy, strength, and survivance of Indigenous peoples, as opposed to focusing on deficits, a narrative which seems to dominate academic discourse (Fellner, 2018; Smith, 2012).

Tuck and Yang (2012) define colonialism as, “The biopolitical and geopolitical management of people, land, flora and fauna within the ‘domestic’ borders of the imperial nation” (p. 4). In turn, Waziyatawin and Yellow Bird (2012) define decolonizing efforts to be, “the meaningful and active resistance to the forces of colonialism that perpetuate the subjugation and/or exploitation of our minds, bodies, and lands” (p. 3). Through decolonizing research, colonial control over Indigenous peoples is removed, and power and voice are given back in ways that are in line with traditional Indigenous values and beliefs (Archibald, Xiiem, & De Santolo, 2019). For example, valuing oral discourses as a source of knowledge is vital to Indigenous cultures, and therefore, researchers who apply a decolonizing methodology would facilitate oral data collection when conducting research with Indigenous peoples (Smith, 2012).

At the outset of this project, I acknowledged that I have more familiarity with Anishinaabe teachings and practices than I do with the local Blackfoot culture. Thus, in an effort to form and maintain respectful relationships with Blackfoot communities, people, and land, I attended community events such as the Kainai Akokatsin (Sun Dance), where I was able to enhance my knowledge of and connection with Blackfoot ways of being, doing, and knowing. Further, as it was important to expand my knowledge about Indigenous paradigms of health, I attended a workshop led by my supervisor, Karlee Fellner, in which Indigenous approaches to wellness were discussed. These events provided me with invaluable opportunities to learn traditional knowledge from expert teachers such as Elders, and to personally experience some of the practices that were employed in the two programs studied in this project.

Siksikaitsitapi the Blackfoot Nation

The Siksikaitsitapi (Blackfoot-speaking people), also known as the Blackfoot Confederacy or Blackfoot Nation, is comprised of four nations: Kainai, North Piikani, South

Piikani, and Siksika (Bastien, 2004). All people of the Blackfoot nation are also known as Niitsitapii, meaning “the real people” (Bastien, 2004). The Blackfoot Confederacy’s traditional territory extends through parts of central and southern Alberta and Saskatchewan, into northern Montana (Figure 1; Blackfoot Confederacy, 2018). The territory spans as far west as the Rocky Mountains, as far east as the Great Sand Hills of Saskatchewan, as far north as Edmonton, and as far south as the Yellowstone River in Montana (Bastien, 2004). In the 2016 census of Canada, 22,490 people identified as having Blackfoot ancestry (Statistics Canada, 2016), and approximately 10,405 people identified as Blackfoot in the United States (The United States Census Bureau, 2010).

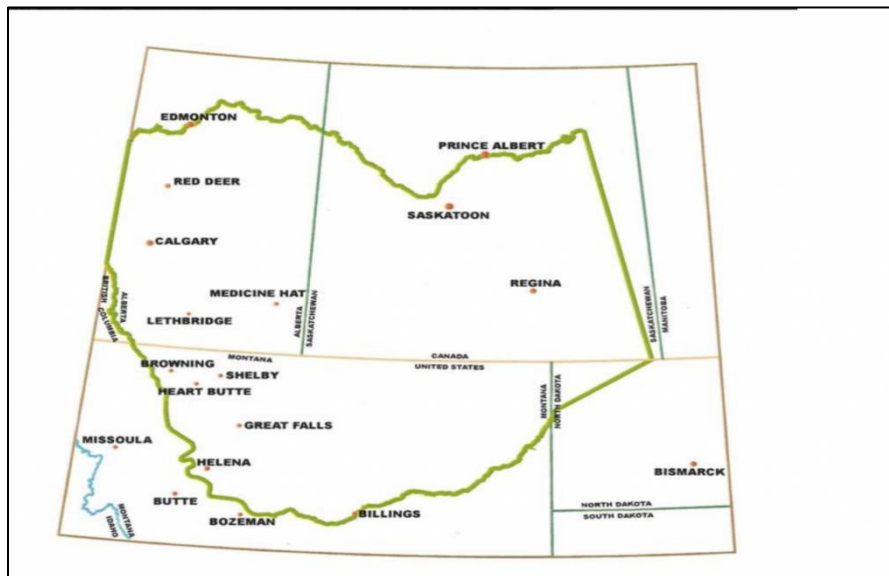


Figure 1. Traditional territory of the Blackfoot Confederacy. Retrieved from: <https://blackfootconfederacy.ca/our-history-purpose/>

The Blackfoot Treaty, or Treaty 7, was signed in 1877 between the Crown and five bands in southern Alberta: Kainai (Blood), Siksika (Blackfoot), Piikani (Peigan), Nakoda (Stoney), and Tsuu T’ina (Sarcee; The Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2016). The treaty was adjudged at Soyoohpawahko (Bowfoot Crossing), which today is on the Siksika Reserve (Dempsey, 2015).

The Blackfoot Nations signed Treaty 7 as means to promote peaceful coexistence, as they exchanged land for annuities of food and medical aid (Bastien, 2004). The Alberta Teachers' Association (2016) stated:

At this signing, the Canadian government attempted to assign one large reserve to two of the three Blackfoot-speaking tribes and the Tsuu T'ina. However, only the Siksika remained at the location of this originally assigned reserve. The Tsuu T'ina moved westward and settled close to what is now the city of Calgary. The Piikani chose their traditional area close to the Porcupine Hills, between what are now Pincher Creek and Fort Mcleod. The Kainai, who were to have shared a reserve with the Siksika and Tsuu T'ina, chose a reserve close to their traditional wintering grounds and the sacred Mookoansin (Belly Buttes) and Ninastako (Chief Mountain). Their reserve is bounded by the Belly and the St. Mary rivers and is the largest Indigenous reserve in Canada. (p. 13)

Historians have described Blackfoot people as self-reliant and self-sufficient (Bastien, 2004). The city of Calgary is situated on land adjacent to where the Bow River meets the Elbow River, traditionally named *Mohkinstsis* by the Blackfoot people (Fromhold, 2010). Their traditional territory was rich in natural resources, and their social and political systems had a strong foundation (Bastien, 2004). Although colonial policies disrupted Blackfoot systems, the nations held onto pride for their identity and were able to retain their traditional language and culture (Bastien, 2004).

The Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni Programs

The Kainai Nation declared a state of emergency first in March 2015, and again in March 2018 due to fentanyl-related deaths on reserve (Blood Tribe Police, 2015; Southwick, 2018). Despite ongoing community efforts to address the opioid crisis, there were 47 carfentanil

overdoses and four deaths from February 23 to March 25, 2018 (Laing, 2018). These concerns were further situated within the context of additional health disparities in the Kainai and surrounding Blackfoot communities, such as access to nutritious foods, sufficient income, and safe living conditions (Alberta Health, 2015; Loppie Reading & Wien, 2009). Starting in September 2016, Red Crow Community College's Council of Aawaahskataiksi (Elders and knowledge holders deemed eminent scholars) met with Karlee Fellner regularly on the Kainai reserve in Standoff to discuss how to address this state of emergency and the health disparities in the community (Fellner, 2016a).

The Blackfoot terms and curriculum used by the programs were derived by the Council of Aawaahskataiksi, which at that time consisted of Calvin Williams, Bruce Wolf Child, Sophie Tail Feathers, Evelyn Striped Wolf, Georgette Fox, the late Pete Standing Alone, and the late Andy Black Water, with support from community leaders Roy Weasel Fat, Tisha Wadsworth, and Dr. Betty Bastien. Of the 40 students who have completed or are currently taking the Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs, 78% are Blackfoot and 10% are Indigenous from other nations across North America. The Blackfoot students represent all four bands of the confederacy, including Kainai, Siksika, Piikani and Amskapi Piikani. These programs alone have significantly increased the number of Blackfoot students attending and graduating from the University of Calgary. This represents a profound act of reconciliation in relation to the original peoples local to Mohkinstsis.

Poo'miikapii course design. Informed by the recommendations of the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP; 1996) the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC; 2015a, 2015b), and a growing body of scientific literature calling for community-based Indigenous approaches to wellness (Fellner, 2016b; John, 2004; Linklater, 2014; McCormick,

1996; Waldram, 2008), the Council of Aawaahskataiksi and Karlee Fellner designed a four-course master's certificate titled Poo'miikapii: Niitsitapii (Indigenous) Approaches to Wellness, offered through the University of Calgary. The Poo'miikapii (which means collective harmony, balance, and unity) program takes place on the Kainai reserve in Standoff and reflects an ongoing and mutual collaboration between Red Crow Community College and the University of Calgary (Fellner, 2016a).

The Poo'miikapii program is centered in Blackfoot ways of knowing, being, and doing in relation to community wellness, and draws on innovative theory and practice in Indigenous health (Werklund School of Education, 2019a). The program is designed to address intermediate determinants of health (Loppie Reading & Wien, 2009) through a community initiative that addresses both health care and education, and builds capacity for sustaining Blackfoot approaches to wellness in service provision among the local communities (Fellner, 2016a). The four courses involve an in-depth exploration of Blackfoot approaches to wellness:

- Niitsitapii (a person of truth), sets a foundation for personal and collective wellness;
- Aksistoiypaitapiisini (being resourceful in the face of challenges) in Indigenous communities and iskaipima (guiding people onto a better path) in health service provision and education;
- Poo'miikapii (harmony, balance, unity) in Indigenous communities; and
- Ihpkim mootspi (passing on the teachings one has received) through community-based programming and organizational development.

As such, the program involves significant engagement with Blackfoot culture, language, and wellness practices. This program is designed for health service providers, educators, and other

community members who either currently work or who plan to work with Indigenous communities (Werklund School of Education, 2019a).

Poo'miikapii course delivery. The following course descriptions are taken from the Werklund School of Education's (2019a) website about the Poo'miikapii program's offering and delivery (see: <https://werklund.ucalgary.ca/gpe/programs-specializations/master-education-med-interdisciplinary-route/poomiikapii-niitsitapii>):

Niitsitapii - Foundations for Wellness Course: This course will introduce students to what it means to be Niitsitapii (a person of truth) as a foundation for personal and collective wellness. Elders and knowledge holders from the Kainai Nation will engage students in Niitsitapii practices that promote emotional, physical, spiritual, and mental wellness, with a focus on those practiced in the summer. Students will be introduced to cultural protocols for ceremonial and cultural engagement, and will explore the relevance of these protocols to their work with communities. The course will be delivered using traditional Niitsitapii pedagogical practices of experiential learning, oral knowledge sharing, and cultural mentorship. Students will also engage in scholarly learning that draws upon relevant academic sources. Course delivery: This course will run for approximately 8 days in late July/early August, with 39 hours of face-to-face instruction taking place at various times during the week (i.e., Monday to Friday). Specific days and times to be confirmed, as this will occur around ceremony. (paragraph 5)

Aksistoiypaittapiisinni & Iskaipima Course: This course will focus on aksistoiypaittapiisinni (being resourceful in the face of challenges) and iskaipima (guiding people onto a better path) in service provision and education. Aksistoiypaittapiisinni will be applied in deconstructing conventional Western Eurosettler conceptualizations of

trauma-as-pathology, instead honouring people's experiences of challenges as intergenerational and collective conversations that guide Indigenous people, families, and communities toward *poo'miikapii* (harmony, balance, unity) and social and environmental justice. Such approaches honour Indigenous survivance, including the ancestral, collective, and personal knowledges and wisdom that emerge through difficult experiences. Students will learn how to draw upon their learnings in the *Niitsitapii* (person of truth) and *Poo'miikapii* courses to bring an "all my relations," land-based, strength-based, culturally relevant, and historical sensitive approach to their work. This course will further introduce students to *iskaipima*, and other Indigenous approaches to counselling that may be directly applied in service provision and education with communities. Course delivery: This course will take place every other Saturday during the fall semester, for 6 hours (3 hours in the morning, 3 in the afternoon) each day. Specific dates TBA. (paragraph 6)

Poo'miikapii: Collective Unity, Harmony, and Balance Course: This course will expand upon what students have learned about being *Niitsitapii* through exploring how *poo'miikapii* (harmony, balance, unity) may be fostered in Indigenous communities. Elders and knowledge holders from the Kainai Nation will engage students in *Niitsitapii* practices that promote emotional, physical, spiritual, and mental wellness, with a focus on those practiced in the fall and winter. Students will continue learning cultural protocols for ceremonial and cultural engagement, and will explore the relevance of these protocols to their work with communities. The course will be delivered using traditional *Niitsitapii* pedagogical practices of experiential learning, oral knowledge sharing, and cultural

mentorship. Students will also engage in scholarly learning that draws upon relevant academic sources. Note: This course is a half-time course that runs over two semesters.

Course delivery: This course will take place one Friday a month during the fall and winter semesters, for 6 hours (3 hours in the morning, 3 in the afternoon) each day.

Specific dates TBA. (paragraph 7)

Iihpkim Mootspi - Capstone Course: This course will engage students in iihpkim mootspi (passing on the teachings one has received) through a service-learning project that involves working with a community group or organization to bring Niitsitapii approaches to wellness into their work. This project will be informed by students' learning throughout each of the courses, and through engagement with relevant academic sources. The course will introduce students to how to bring Niitsitapii ethics, standards, and practices into their programs, and will involve students in learning how to navigate colonial systems (e.g., funding, educational standards, and health care systems) so as to prioritize community and ceremonial protocols and ways of knowing, being, and doing in their work. This course provides students with the opportunity to engage with a community group or organization in an applied project that has a direct and immediate benefit to the community. **Course delivery:** This course will take place every other Saturday during the winter semester, for 6 hours (3 hours in the morning, 3 in the afternoon) each day. Specific dates TBA. (paragraph 8)

Niitsitapiisinni course design. Halfway through the first offering of the Poo'miikapii program, the first cohort of students expressed a desire for courses that would allow them to continue their learning. As a result, the Niitsitapiisinni: Real Peoples' Way of Life program was established in collaboration with community members from Amskapi Piikani and Kainai, as well

as Blackfeet Community College (BCC) on the Blackfeet Reservation in Browning, Montana. The Niitsitapiisinni program focuses on teaching Blackfoot language, history, politics, art, and storytelling (Werklund School of Education, 2019). Centered in Niitsitapii ways of knowing, being, and doing in relation to aistomatoominniki (coming to know your heart, Blackfoot epistemology; Bastien, 2004), these courses involve in-depth exploration of:

- Niitsi'tapiipohsinni (Blackfoot language);
- Kiipatahpiisinoon (our way of life) through understanding history, politics, and traditional governance systems; and
- Aakahtapiiyiitsiniksiin (old stories) through Niitsitapii art and storytelling.

This four-course topic area is designed for educators, school leaders, health care professionals, service providers, and other community members who are currently working with or planning to work with Indigenous communities (Werklund School of Education, 2019b).

Niitsitapiisinni course delivery. The following course descriptions are taken from the Werklund School of Education's (2019b) website about the Niitsitapiisinni program's offering and delivery (see https://werklund.ucalgary.ca/gpe/Niitsitapiisinni-Real-Peoples-Way-of-Life#quickset-field_collection_quicktabs_1):

Courses will take place in summer, fall, and winter semesters. The summer course in this topic will take place face-to-face off-campus at Red Crow College, in Standoff, Alberta. Learning experiences will take place both outside on the land and in classroom space in Standoff, Alberta.... The fall and winter courses in this topic will take place face-to-face off-campus at Red Crow College, in Standoff, Alberta and also at Blackfeet Community College, in Browning, Montana, USA. Learning experiences will take place on selected Fridays and Saturdays throughout the fall and winter terms both outside on the land and

in classroom space at Blackfeet Community College in Browning, Montana. (paragraph 4)

Niitsi'tapiipohsinni - Blackfoot Language I: A general introduction to Niitsitapii grammar and vocabulary, with a focus on both oral and written language acquisition. Niitsitapii language concepts will be connected with and reinforced by land-based and cultural activities. Students will learn both practical and ceremonial use of the language. Importantly, course assignments will focus on applied student projects that aim to contribute directly and immediately to language revitalization and preservation among the Siksikaitstapi through creative and innovative methods, including new media. The course will be delivered using traditional Niitsitapii pedagogical practices of experiential learning, oral knowledge sharing, and cultural mentorship, in addition to conventional language instruction. (paragraph 5)

Kiipatahpiisinoon - Niitsitapii History and Politics: This course will focus on kiipatahpiisinoon (our ways of life) through understanding history, politics, and traditional governance systems among the Siksikaitstapi. Students will learn through creation stories, Napi stories, how the Niitsitapii got their bundles and their helpers, Niitsitapii heroes and historical figures, and will span from the creation days to litotasimahpi limitaiks (the dog days), to Ao'ta'sao'si Ponokaomita (the era of the horse), to Ao'maopao'si (from when we settled in one place) to today. Students will learn about traditional governance systems, law and order, belief systems, social organization, and how the Siksikaitstapi came to be who they are. Students will learn about how Siksikaitstapi culture and lifeways have been influenced by colonization, including treaties and agreements, and will explore possibilities for future generations of Niitsitapii

carrying these ways forward. This course will further introduce students to Niitsitapii storytelling in preparation for EDER 655.02 (Art & Storytelling). (paragraph 6)

Aakahtapiiyiitsiniksiin - Niitsitapii Art and Storytelling: This course will focus on aakahtapiiyiitsiniksiin (old stories) through Niitsitapii art and storytelling. Students will learn about traditional forms of art, including petroglyphs, painted lodges, winter counts, war counts, ceremonial clothing and regalia, and personal art forms and designs such as beadwork and quillwork. Students will also learn about artistic developments since European contact and the reservation period, including modern art. This course will introduce students to Niitsitapii storytelling as a way of discerning traditional knowledge, and will cover traditional stories as well as contemporary forms of storytelling such as film, visual art, literature, and music. Students will learn how art and stories convey and promote Niitsitapii value systems, ontological responsibilities, and understanding themselves in relation to ohtsitappspii (the purpose of their Niitsitapii existence) through the generations. This course provides students with the opportunity to engage in applied projects in Niitsitapii art and storytelling. (paragraph 7)

Niitsi'tapiipohsinni - Blackfoot Language II: Continuing from EDER 669.24

[Niitsi'tapiipohsinni-Blackfoot Language I course], students will advance their learning in Niitsitapii grammar and vocabulary, with a focus on both oral and written language acquisition. Niitsitapii language concepts will be connected with and reinforced by land-based and cultural activities. Students will learn both practical and ceremonial use of the language. Importantly, course assignments will focus on applied student projects that aim to contribute directly and immediately to language revitalization and preservation among the Siksikaitsitapi through creative and innovative methods, including new media. The

course will be delivered using traditional Niitsitapii pedagogical practices of experiential learning, oral knowledge sharing, and cultural mentorship, in addition to conventional language instruction. (paragraph 8)

Addressing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs respond to a number of the TRC (2015b) calls to action, including:

(a) Drafting new Indigenous education legislation with the full participation and informed consent of Indigenous peoples. The new legislation would include a commitment to sufficient funding and would incorporate the following principles (#10):

- Developing culturally appropriate curricula; and
- Protecting the right to Indigenous languages, including the teaching of Indigenous languages as credit courses.

(b) Enacting an Indigenous Languages Act that incorporates the following principles (#14):

- Indigenous languages are a fundamental and valued element of Canadian culture and society, and there is an urgency to preserve them;
- Indigenous language rights are reinforced by the Treaties;
- The federal government has a responsibility to provide sufficient funds for Indigenous-language revitalization and preservation;
- The preservation, revitalization, and strengthening of Indigenous languages and cultures are best managed by Indigenous peoples and communities; and

- Funding for Indigenous language initiatives must reflect the diversity of Indigenous languages.

(c) Creating university and college degree and diploma programs at the post-secondary level in Indigenous languages (#16).

(d) Recognizing the value of Indigenous healing practices and implementing them in collaboration with Elders and healers (#22).

(d) Increasing the number of Indigenous health professionals and providing cultural competency training for professionals working with Indigenous peoples (#23).

(e) Providing an Indigenous health course in a post-secondary health program (#24).

(f) Establishing and supporting Indigenous healing centres that address the spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical harms related to colonization (#21) through engaging students in service-learning projects involving community-based program development and design that addresses the holistic wellness needs of local Indigenous peoples (Fellner, 2016a; TRC, 2015b).

Aims and Objectives of the Current Project

The current study explores the development and implementation of the Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs. Researchers have identified the need for Indigenous research and programming guided by traditional knowledge and teachings (Archibald, 2019; Fellner, 2016b; Lafrance & Collins, 2003; McCormick, 2009). This communal knowledge and wisdom are held by community members, knowledge holders, and Elders who know what is needed to heal their communities and people (Fellner, 2018; Weaver & Dennis, 2015). Therefore, this research will share the knowledge of key people involved in the development and implementation of the Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs, with the intention that this knowledge is to be

mobilized by Indigenous communities using a holistic approach. The following research questions were investigated:

- 1) How can community-based graduate programs in local Indigenous approaches to wellness be most effectively developed and implemented?
- 2) How can local Indigenous pedagogies be most effectively enacted in community-based graduate programs in local Indigenous approaches to wellness?
- 3) How can local Indigenous approaches to wellness be most effectively included in curriculum in community-based graduate programs in local Indigenous approaches to wellness?
- 4) How can culturally relevant assessment strategies be most effectively incorporated in community-based graduate programs in local Indigenous approaches to wellness?

Organization of Chapters

This thesis is comprised of five chapters that describe the process and findings of developing and implementing the Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs, which are community-based graduate programs centered in local Indigenous approaches to wellness. This introductory chapter is followed by a review of the literature that focuses on the negative impact of colonization; Indigenization and wellness; and, the relationship between Indigenous communities and research. In Chapter Three, I discuss community-based research methods and Archibald's (2008) storywork analysis, and how they were used in this study. In Chapter Four, the themes and findings of the project are presented. Finally, Chapter Five focuses on recommendations and the implications for developing and implementing community-based programs, as well as the strengths and limitations of the project, and areas for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Colonialism and Indigenous Peoples' Wellness

Processes of colonization have oppressed, marginalized, and disrupted individual and collective identities of the Indigenous peoples of Canada. As a result, there are significant health disparities among Indigenous peoples and the general Canadian population (Loppie Reading & Wien, 2009; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC], 2015a). Loppie Reading and Wien (2009) highlighted the distal, intermediate, and proximal health inequalities that Indigenous peoples experience, and emphasized the need to address the social determinants of health as they influence a wide range of vulnerabilities and capacities, behaviours, and health management. The researchers stated that distal health inequalities include colonialism, racism and social exclusion, and barriers to communities practicing self-determination. Intermediate health inequalities were found to include the absence of environmental stewardship and community infrastructure, such as community control over health care and education. Finally, proximal health inequalities include the behaviours and environments of an individual, such as access to nutritious foods, safe living conditions, and sufficient income.

Residential Schools

Early colonial policies and practices imposed by the Canadian nation-state not only physically separated families through designation of specific reserves, but also impacted traditional family systems and parenting through residential schools. Beginning in the 1870s, children were forcibly removed from their homes and placed in residential schools to unlearn their Indigenous ways and become more “civilized” (TRC, 2015a). They were forbidden to wear their own clothes, speak their own language, and engage in their own cultural and spiritual practices (Rose, 2018). The TRC (2015a) spent six years (2009-2015) travelling Canada and

learning stories about the experiences of residential school from more than 6,000 witnesses. The purpose of residential schools was to weaken family ties and cultural linkages, and to assimilate children into the Euro-Christian culture. Residential school children were stripped of their belongings and separated from their siblings as soon as they arrived.

Numerous stories pertaining to physical, sexual, and emotional abuse were conveyed, along with heart-wrenching accounts of children who died in residential schools under government care. The TRC (2015a) indicated that the education of students was neglected, with chores and the facility's upkeep being the children's responsibility. Survivors of residential schools describe the experience as lonely, alienating, and frightening. The poor quality of health of the students was caused by inadequate diets, poor sanitation, overcrowded conditions, and a failure to address the tuberculosis crisis. Additionally, the TRC (2015a) noted reoccurring health concerns of abuse (physical, sexual, and verbal) and diseases that were experienced by survivors of residential schools. A study conducted by the First Nations Centre (2005) found the harms of the residential school experience most frequently reported by survivors included: isolation from family (81%), verbal or emotional abuse (79%), harsh discipline (78%), loss of cultural identity (77%), separation from First Nations or Inuit community (74%), witnessing abuse (72%), loss of language (71%), and physical abuse (69%). Wilk, Maltby, and Cooke (2017) found health outcomes linked to residential school survivors to include: (a) poorer general and self-rated health, (b) increased rates of chronic and infectious diseases, (c) mental distress, (d) depression, (e) addictive behaviours, (f) substance mis-use, (g) stress, and (h) suicidal behaviour.

Data from the First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey (First Nations Centre, 2005) revealed that adults with at least one parent who attended residential school were more likely to think about (37%) and attempt (13%) suicide in their lifetime. Moreover, children of

residential school survivors are more likely to experience *stress proliferation*, which refers to a process in which an initial challenge or adverse experience contributes to additional stressors (Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2013). Bougie and Senécal (2010) noted that survivors of residential schools often had a lower income and had experienced food insecurity, which partially accounted for reduced school success of their children. Furthermore, Evans-Campbell (2008) discussed how survivors of residential schools did not have adequate parenting role models which not only impeded the transmission of positive parenting practices, but led to negative parenting practices. Thus, the socioeconomic variables and traumatic experiences of survivors of residential schools may restrict the resources and opportunities they can offer to their children (Bombay et al., 2013).

The legacy of residential schools (1870-1996) and the intergenerational effects of trauma are still impacting survivors, their families and Indigenous communities. This is reflected in the significant educational, income, health, and social disparities between Indigenous people and other Canadians, the intense racism and discrimination reported by Indigenous people, and in the endangerment or extinction of many Indigenous languages (TRC, 2015a).

The Sixties Scoop and the Child Welfare System

The Sixties Scoop epidemic that began in the 1960s continued to separate children from their families and communities. Indigenous children were unfairly apprehended and adopted out to non-Indigenous families, and the child welfare system became the new method of colonizing and assimilating Indigenous people (Blackstock & Trocmé, 2005; Sinclair, 2007). Much like residential schools, the child welfare system has exposed children to cultural disruption, and physical, emotional, and sexual abuse (Sterritt, 2011). The child welfare system maintains a sense of prejudice toward Indigenous parents, and a tendency to see poverty as a symptom of

neglect, rather than as a consequence of failed government policies (TRC, 2015a). The legacy of the Sixties Scoop and residential schools continues today, as there are currently more Indigenous children in foster care than there were at the peak of residential school enrollment. This new era has been labelled the Millennium Scoop (Sinclair, 2007), with colonialism, racism, and oppression occurring throughout both education and child welfare systems. A study conducted by Blackstock, Trocmé, and Bennett (2004) demonstrated the intergenerational effects of colonialism, and found that in comparison to non-Indigenous families, Indigenous families have significantly higher rates of poverty, less stable housing, younger parents, more parents who were maltreated as children, and higher rates of parent alcohol and drug abuse. Ultimately, the effects of colonization, residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, and the present Millennial Scoop show the disruption, oppression, and trauma of Indigenous peoples intergenerationally.

Colonial Trauma and Resilience

In contrast to individual experiences of trauma, historical trauma is collective, cumulative, and intergenerational (Gone, 2013). Brave Heart (2003) discussed historical trauma and its manifestation as depression, self-destructive behaviour, suicidal thoughts and gestures, anxiety, low self-esteem, anger, and difficulty recognizing and expressing emotions. Duran, Firehammer, and Gonzalez (2008) described the effects of historical trauma as the *soul wound*: “When the soul or culture of some persons are oppressed, we are all oppressed and wounded in ways that require healing if we are to become liberated from such oppression” (p. 1). This trauma has led Indigenous families and communities to experience social and health challenges including lower life expectancy, high infant mortality, suicide, family violence, and addiction (Fellner & Cottell, 2016; TRC, 2015a).

The ongoing effects of colonialism and oppression are fueling historical, collective, and intergenerational trauma by prohibiting Indigenous peoples to address, in their own way, traditional healing approaches. According to a review conducted by the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation (2018), poverty, education levels, and other social determinants of health are treated like a “disease” that can be cured by “medicating” symptoms which results in high rates of incarceration and hospitalization. The report argues that Indigenous control of health would bring about more widespread use of Indigenous practices to more adequately address the negative impacts of poor social determinants of health.

Fellner (2019) discussed trauma wisdom and survivance as alternative methods of describing trauma. Fellner explained that the colonial perspective of trauma pathologizes the individual rather than considering the systemic forces responsible for causing and perpetuating trauma responses. A shift away from deficit-narratives and toward Indigenous survivance is needed. Focusing on survivance empowers Indigenous peoples to acknowledge their ability to heal themselves, in ways that are congruent with Indigenous paradigms of health rather than mainstream, Western models (Duran, 2006; Fellner, 2019; Trimble, 2010). Moreover, research by Bendro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern (2002) on the intergenerational effects of trauma among Indigenous peoples, proposed the notion of intergenerational resiliency. Through a sense of belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity Indigenous peoples can thrive. Brokenleg (2012) posited that Indigenous cultures flourished pre-colonialism, thus, re-incorporating traditional practices and beliefs into mainstream society will be beneficial in ameliorating health disparities. He adds that although the goal of colonialism was to destroy Indigenous cultures, it did not succeed. Therefore, the sacred knowledge and teachings that survived continue to promote the healing that is needed for Indigenous peoples and communities to prosper.

Opioid Crisis

Colonialism has been directly linked to adverse mental and physical health outcomes, and has directly or indirectly contributed to the elevated substance use rates among Indigenous populations (Russell, Firestone, Kelly, Mushquash & Fischer, 2016). Gabor Maté (2019), a leading researcher in the field of addiction, explained:

Addiction is neither a choice nor a disease, but originates in a human being's desperate attempt to solve a problem: the problem of emotional pain, of overwhelming stress, of lost connection, of loss of control, of a deep discomfort with the self. In short, it is a forlorn attempt to solve the problem of human pain. Hence my mantra: "The question is not why the addiction, but why the pain?" (paragraph 4)

The overwhelming pain and loss Indigenous peoples have experienced in the wake of colonialism has contributed to an increased rate of substance use (Brave Heart, 2003).

First Nations communities participating in a national survey between 2008 and 2010 reported that alcohol and drug use were the number one challenge for wellness faced by on-reserve communities (82.6% of respondents), followed by housing (70.7%) and employment (65.9%; Health Canada, 2011). The opioid crisis in Canada is growing at an alarming rate, with both illegal and prescription substances contributing to opioid related deaths. The opioid crisis has affected every region of the country, with western provinces and territories (Alberta, British Columbia, the Yukon, and the Northwest Territories) having experienced the highest burden (Belzak & Halverson, 2018). Nationally, the greatest number of opioid related deaths occurred among males (74%), with individuals between 30 and 39 years of age accounting for the highest amount (28%; Statistics Canada, 2019). Indigenous people aged 15 years and older were more likely to report that they had used an opioid medication in the past 12 months, with 23.8% of

First Nations and 22.9% of Métis or Inuit reporting opioid use, as compared to 12.4% of the non-Indigenous population (Statistics Canada, 2019).

While this crisis is a complex issue, related to the impacts of colonialism discussed above, some of its roots lay within the treatment of Indigenous peoples in the health care system. Many Indigenous peoples living in remote communities trace their addiction to prescription drugs to “fly-in” physicians, as they often do not have continuous health care access (Webster, 2013). According to Health Canada (2011), 898 opioid prescriptions were dispensed per 1000 Indigenous individuals aged 15 years or older in Ontario in 2007. Physicians and the health care system have a responsibility to consider follow-up treatment for Indigenous peoples, especially ones living in remote communities. Colonization has undermined Indigenous health systems by banning spiritual, cultural, and economic practices; encouraging societal racism; and forcing dislocation from traditional lands. This disruption of traditional practices has made it difficult for Indigenous peoples to relearn and reconstitute pre-colonial ways of life and worldviews that would help address substance misuse (National Advisory Committee on Prescription Drug Misuse, 2013).

In response to the opioid crisis, there have been some interventions to minimize the severity of this problem including community-based opioid substitution treatment programs or medication-supported opioid tapering for pregnant women (Russell et al., 2016). However, these programs do not account for the contextual and systemic factors that Indigenous communities have as a result of colonialism. Russell and colleagues (2016) suggested cultural programs targeted at advancing holistic wellness would be better mechanisms of intervention. The health care system has a responsibility to support communities and individuals in accessing traditional

Indigenous healing services and ceremonies, which are included in the TRC (2015b) calls to action regarding health (discussed in Chapter One).

Suicide

Statistics have consistently shown that suicide rates are higher among First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people in Canada compared to non-Indigenous people (Statistics Canada, 2019). The impacts of colonialism have led to a breakdown of families, communities, and political and economic structures. Additionally, the loss of culture, exposure to abuse, intergenerational transmission of trauma, and marginalization are associated with high suicide rates (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2007).

While these are difficult barriers, there are resilience factors in Indigenous communities that are associated with lower suicide rates. These include “cultural continuity” factors, such as securing Indigenous title to traditional lands, achieving self-governance, having control over education, health care, police and fire services, establishing cultural facilities to preserve and enrich cultural lives, and having a high proportion (50% or higher) of people in the community with knowledge of an Indigenous language (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Hallett, Chandler & Lalonde, 2007; Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2016; Lalonde & Chandler, 2008). Re-establishing a cultural identity and connection to culture are essential components to foster resilience against suicide among Indigenous peoples. Fundamentally, there is a sense of urgency to address these issues as Indigenous peoples are dying younger and at more rapid rates compared to the general Canadian population (Fellner, 2016b; Statistics Canada, 2015).

Education and Academia

The world of academia is dominated by a Western worldview, with pedagogies that are substantially different than Indigenous ways of knowing and doing (Stewart & Reeves, 2013).

Moreover, some researchers speculate that enforcing a Western paradigm on Indigenous peoples is a continued form of colonialism and oppression (Gone, 2004a). Western society is founded in positivism, and it is held as the ultimate form of true knowledge with all other ways of knowing considered inferior (Duran, 2006). Battiste (2002) elucidated that many educational practices are essentially anti-theoretical to Indigenous philosophies and self-concept. Furthermore, Stewart and Reeves (2013) indicated that Indigenous students receiving post-secondary education are often forced to assimilate and adopt a Western framework of schooling, suggesting that, to be successful in academia, you must abandon Indigenous worldviews.

As education was one of the primary methods of assimilation through the implementation of residential schools, the Truth and Reconciliation Commissioner Justice Murray Sinclair, explained that education is also the foundation to establishing reconciliation within Canada (Anderson, 2016). This corresponds with Offet-Gartner (2008) who theorized that education is the key to unlocking career opportunities for Indigenous peoples, especially women. Offet-Gartner further proposed that education leads to not only career opportunities, but also independence. In her dissertation research, nine Indigenous women were interviewed about their experiences with education. Each saw education as the key to a brighter future for themselves, their children, and Indigenous peoples as a whole. The participants noted that ultimately, education provides everything that is needed for continued survival.

Stewart and Reeves (2013) explained that since Indigenous ways of teaching were directly attacked by colonialism, there is a strained relationship between Indigenous communities and the current education system. Indigenous youth living on reserve face especially low levels of opportunity regarding education and employment (Stewart & Reeves, 2013). The researchers explained that a possible barrier to some Indigenous youth trying to access employment is that

non-Indigenous people, who often have competitively high levels of post-secondary education, take many jobs within Indigenous organizations, despite frequently lacking the cultural understanding and sensitivity to successfully perform the work.

Marshall and colleagues (2011) discussed types of barriers and options for adolescents as they act upon their educational and occupational future. Indigenous peoples of Canada have had inequitable access to resources which affects their ability and opportunity to engage in the labour force and educational institutions (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP], 1996a, 1996b). Similarly, being on the margins of the Canadian economy is a result of Indigenous youth's lower rates of educational completion and employment earnings, and higher unemployment rates in comparison with non-Indigenous youth (Hango & de Broucker, 2007). Marshall and colleagues (2011) noted that the role of family within Indigenous adolescents' career development is instrumental in navigating toward a safe future, negotiating school continuance, fostering intergenerational continuity in tradition of care (financially caring for others and oneself), and ensuring family survival. Ultimately, the research demonstrated that acknowledging family values and traditions within education and career related decisions, plays a critical role for Indigenous adolescents.

A growing body of literature suggests that assessment tools and educational testing strategies are biased toward Indigenous students since people from Indigenous groups differ on measures of self-efficiency, career maturity, and self-directed search (Juntunen et al., 2001). Riley and Ungerleider (2012) explained that teacher bias can affect the class placement for Indigenous students, which in turn can affect their employment and financial wellbeing. Furthermore, validity in educational testing with Indigenous students is questionable as Indigenous self-concepts embodies collectivism (including family, extended family, and the

community), rather than individualism (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). Testing in general goes against Indigenous paradigms as any method of classifying people on a quantitative scale is contrary to basic values of equality and collectivity (McCormick, 1997). Stewart and Reeves (2013) indicated that university systems are operating from colonial and oppressive systems, that marginalize Indigenous students rather than support them. Ultimately, educational systems need to adapt and incorporate Indigenous pedagogies into academia, especially when working with Indigenous students, to promote less biased methods of teaching and assessment.

Indigenization and Wellness

Indigenizing colonial systems requires consideration of several core values. These include understanding Indigenous worldviews, holistic approaches to wellness, the connection to the land, and community-based research.

Indigenous Worldviews

In order to communicate, we must understand one another's languages and worldviews (Torrey, 1986). Worldview inevitably affects our belief systems, decision making, assumptions, and modes of problem solving (Ibrahim & Heuer, 2015). Thus, we must first consider how Indigenous worldviews differ from Western worldviews. Cross (2010) described two different types of worldviews: linear and relational. According to Cross (2010):

The linear worldview finds its roots in Western European and American thought. It is logical, time oriented, and systematic, and has at its core the cause-and-effect relationship. To understand the world is to understand the linear cause-and-effect relationships between events. (p.1)

In contrast, Cross (2010) described the relational worldview as shaped by cycles:

The relational worldview, sometimes called the cyclical worldview, finds its roots in tribal cultures. It is intuitive, non-time oriented and fluid. The balance and harmony in relationships between multiple variables, including spiritual forces, make up the core of the thought system. Every event is understood in relation to all other events regardless of time, space, or physical existence. Health exists only when things are in balance or harmony. (p. 1)

When examining these worldviews, Indigenous and Western cultures contrast on a fundamental level (Sinclair, 2003). Thus, it is important to consider how Western institutions may be applying certain expectations or practices where they are unwarranted. Often, Indigenous people have been measured with Western assessments and tools and have been deemed “lesser than” or “unfit,” when in reality they simply have different cultural norms and beliefs (Stewart & Reeves, 2013).

Indigenous ways of knowing value the presence of multiple realities, and find truth in what is subjective (Koster, Baccar, & Lemelin, 2012). Moreover, humans are viewed as equals to other living entities (both physical and metaphysical) with a high regard for interconnectedness, as seen in relationships that extend from family, community, and tribe to intergenerational connectedness with ancestors (Wilson, 2008). Additionally, Indigenous worldviews acknowledge the land as the source of human intelligence, and thus a source for knowledge and healing (Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, 2018). Finally, Indigenous worldviews of holism focus on the bigger picture, stating that parts do not exist without the whole (Wilson, 2008).

A Holistic Approach to Wellness: Mental, Physical, Emotional, and Spiritual

According to Archibald (2008):

An indigenous philosophical concept of holism refers to the interrelatedness between the intellectual, spiritual (metaphysical values and beliefs and the Creator), emotional, and physical (body and behaviour/action) realms to form a whole healthy person. The development of holism extends to and is mutually influenced by one's family, community, band, and nation. (p. 11)

From Indigenous perspectives, all of life is connected and interrelated (Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, 2018). Humans, animals, plants, rocks, visible and unseen forces of nature, and the universe coexist in balance and harmony with respect, and care (Wilson, 2008). Within Indigenous worldviews, valuing relationships and connection are central. These can include relationships with other humans, living entities and creatures, supernatural forces, and the universe (Fellner, 2016b; Hart, 2002; Wilson, 2008). Thus, wellness is relational and for balanced wellness to occur, an individual strives to be in right relation with all life forces (Duran, 2006; Fellner, 2016b). For individuals and communities to be well, a balance between the mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health is required (Simard & Blight, 2011; Stewart & Marshall, 2015). From this balanced setting, a sense of belonging and purpose is derived. Land, language, creation, and ancestry are components of how wellness is maintained and renewed, and it includes a caring environment and family (De Leeuw, 2015). Therefore, the land is alive offering healing and teachings, and it is thus the source of cultural identity and balanced wellbeing (Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, 2018).

The medicine wheel is a conceptual paradigm that may be used to understand holistic health and wellness. The medicine wheel focuses on a holistic interconnection of balance between each of its quadrants: physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual (Wilson, 2008). To be healthy, an individual must embark upon a journey that takes them beyond physical health and requires

balance among all aspects of life (Simard & Blight, 2011). Clarke and Holtslander (2010) discussed how a medicine wheel framework can be used to facilitate connectedness in an individual, family, community, and nation. Teachings from the medicine emphasize a sense of balance to promote overall wellbeing (Rountree & Smith, 2016; Stewart & Marshall, 2015). The conceptual paradigm and teachings of the medicine wheel varies among Indigenous communities and Elders, however, the emphasis of balance, wholeness, and connection between all components remains the same (Clarke & Holtslander, 2010).

Wellness and the Relationship with Land

Colonialism has impacted Indigenous peoples' relationship with the land by displacement from their traditional territories through legislation enacted in the 20th century (Loppie Reading & Wien, 2009). The creation of the reserve system and residential schools were two mechanisms that displaced Indigenous peoples from the land, giving access and control over vast natural resources to the government (Richmond, 2015). Indigenous peoples were forbidden or restricted to hunt, trap, or fish for the purpose of survival, which threatened their food sovereignty (Grey & Patel, 2015). Kelm (1998) postulated that the historical trauma experienced by many Indigenous peoples originated from the dislocation from land. This dislocation undermined their ability to pursue healthy and fulfilling lives (Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, 2018).

Environmental dispossession has brought about drastic curtailment in the opportunity for intergenerational exchange of Indigenous knowledge (Tobias, Richmond, & Luginaah, 2013). Indigenous knowledge concerns the everyday realities of living in a nourishing relationship with traditional lands and ecosystems (Cajete, 2000). The land represents more than just a physical location of healing, and rather should be understood as part of an intricate relationship between

the physical, spiritual, and symbolic realms of cultural identities that affects the everyday (Wilson, 2003). The connection between the health of an ecosystem and the health of humans is widely recognized, yet Indigenous knowledge is unique in honouring the land as a life source, above and beyond a resource to be exploited (Parkes, 2011). Researchers have found that traditional harvesting is correlated to a greater rapport with the land, an increased sense of self-reliance, and enhanced overall health (Wilson & Rosenberg, 2002). Therefore, strengthening the connection to the land is crucial in promoting wellness from a holistic approach (Fellner, 2018; Tobias et al., 2013).

Researchers conducted interviews with Gwich'in women from the community of Fort McPherson, Northwest Territories to explore the relationship between Indigenous values associated with the land (Parlee, Berkes, & Gwich'in, 2005). From the 75 women who were interviewed, the researchers identified nine values, including: individual preference and wellbeing, family wellbeing, social connectivity, cultural continuity, land and resource use, stewardship, self-government, and spirituality. The researchers noted that these values are not fixed in time and space, but are dependent on a healthy land base. Without the security of that base, which, in the case of this study was berries, the health and wellbeing of Gwich'in women, their families, and communities would diminish (Parlee, Berkes, & Gwich'in, 2005).

The land contributes simultaneously to physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health in a variety of ways. The land is believed to provide all resources (e.g., food and medicines) necessary for survival (Wilson, 2003). There is a strong link between food and medicine as certain plants, berries, and animals provided by the land, are not only consumed for nutritional reasons but can also be used as medicines. Wilson's (2003) study found that participation in certain activities, such as putting down tobacco, hunting, and harvesting medicines contributed to

an increased sense of wellness. More specifically, participants reported feeling cleansed and renewed. Wilson demonstrated how health and land are linked, and argued that the effects of this relationship are experienced daily and not just within the context of isolated events.

Researchers conducted a study exploring how Indigenous perspectives about land could offer insights into climate change (Ermine, Nilson, Sauchyn, Sauve, & Smith, 2005). The research also considered the direct correlation between the land and the health of Indigenous peoples. The researchers held an Elders' forum to discuss and learn about the connection between land and society, and the health implications of the drastically changing environments. The Elders noted a direct connection with the health of the land and the health of the human population. In their view, when people become disconnected from the land, the lines of communication between the natural and social world become severed. One of the recommendations from this comprehensive study was a return to "native science," suggesting that the Western scientific world incorporate Indigenous paradigms and frameworks. Ermine and colleagues (2005) explained that, "Native science stems from an intricate knowledge of the environment through a history of close connection with the land and its order" (p. 8). The Elders in the study specified that caring for the land creates reciprocal relationship; when humans take care of the land, the land will take care of humans. According to the Elders, the health disparities affecting Indigenous peoples can be decreased by returning to sacred knowledge and practices of caring for the land.

Tobias, Richmond, and Luginaah (2013) argued that sickness in the environment must be addressed before sickness in the community can be healed. Furthermore, the researchers contend the picture that has been painted of Indigenous communities as sick and unable to self-govern is inaccurate because it fails to consider the specific health issues that communities face.

Indigenous peoples have proven to be strong and resilient. However, a focus on wellness as opposed to a deficit-based narrative, has long been missing from the literature (Battiste, 2002; Stewart & Reeves, 2013). Indigenous cultural traditions, values, and belief systems have not only been sustained but have also flourished throughout generations, despite vast changes since European settlers first arrived. Researchers argue that concentrating on maintaining and transferring this knowledge should be a priority in supporting Indigenous communities' health and wellbeing (Tobias, Richmond, & Luginaah, 2013).

Land-Based Education as a Pathway to Wellness

One way that educators have attempted to address the forced disconnection from land is to incorporate land-based education that addresses Indigenous knowledges and wellness practices (Battiste, 2013). By incorporating teachings on the land, students can engage in experiential learning, which is a process of learning through experience, reflection, and doing (O'Connor, 2009). Unlike conventional educative processes, experiential learning is not passive or didactic (Beard, 2010). Beard (2010) explained that experiential learning requires active engagement that can involve physical, sensorial, emotional, cognitive, bodily, and inner psyche dimensions, interacting simultaneously and in balance. Beard indicated the experiential learning process is applicable in a variety of environments that may occur spontaneously or be planned. Cajete (2000) posited that in order to engage with Indigenous ways of knowing, we must interact with the natural world. Involvement through the experiential learning process mobilizes deep forms of change within the individual, which are characterized as transformational, with the possibility of both positive and negative learning experiences transpiring since it is believed that all experiences are valuable (Beard, 2010; Simpson, 2014). Fostering a relationship to the land requires participation and experiential learning (Schultz, Walters, Beltran, Stroud, & Johnson-

Jennings, 2016). Wildcat (2005) indicated that human existence is rooted in experiences with the environment and so, a connection to the land is vital for survival.

The land is the intersection of culture, identity, and health (Wilson, 2004). Incorporating experiential learning creates a cultural pathway to wellness that is facilitated by engaging with the land through Indigenous pedagogies (Schultz et al., 2016). Indigenous scholars and educators have long called for education that recognizes and includes Indigenous pedagogies (Alfred, 2004; Battiste, 2016; Battiste & Henderson, 2009; Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004; Smith et al., 2019). This has been reflected in the development of Indigenous education efforts that focus on reclaiming Indigenous knowledge practices and revitalizing cultural processes (Battiste, 2005). Decolonizing curricula involves fostering (re)connection to the land, as it is a powerful healer offering a place to let go of pain and trauma (Fellner, 2018; Linklater, 2014). Schultz and colleagues (2016) developed an experiential learning program for Indigenous women, with an emphasis on connection to land. The researchers found that the experiential learning process was necessary for change in health beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours, and overall, it contributed to a more holistic perspective of health. Correspondingly, O'Connor (2009) noted the benefits of land-based, experiential learning in elementary schools to include practical application of knowledge, recognition of environmental responsibility, understanding of the connection between the land and the community, and increased cultural and political self-awareness.

Land-based programs are being delivered by various organizations, elementary schools, and universities with the purpose of applying decolonizing and Indigenizing aims (Alfred, 2014; Ballantyne, 2014; Bang, et al., 2014; Mashford-Pringle & Stewart, 2019; Radu, House, & Pashagumskum, 2014; Wesche, O'Hare-Gordon, Robidoux, & Mason, 2016; Wildcat et al., 2014). Programs have noted the benefits of incorporating Indigenous languages (Bang et al.,

2014; Ballantyne, 2014; Mashford-Pringle & Stewart, 2019; Schultz et al., 2016; Simpson, 2014), traditional methods of hunting and gathering food (Alfred, 2014; Ballantyne, 2014; Wesche et al., 2016), ceremonies (Radu et al., 2014; Simpson, 2014), and Elders (Ballantyne, 2014; Fellner, 2018). Simpson (2014) explained that meaning is derived from interdependent relationships which are nurtured with and by the land. Correspondingly, the literature also notes that engaging in land-based programs promotes healing from colonial and historical trauma (Ballantyne, 2014; Bang et al., 2014; Julian, 2016; Radu et al., 2014; Simpson, 2014; Wilson, 2008).

Bang and colleagues (2014) provided the example of how engaging in land-based programming, situated in Indigenous pedagogies, is a decolonizing process for educational systems. In their study, a community-based design was implemented, in which youth and their families experienced weekly land-based programming that focused on relationship with the land by coming to know ancestral village sites, learning about plants as medicines, and understanding the impact of invasive species. The researchers found that engaging in Indigenous land-based programs contributed to a sense of agency and resiliency among the youth and their families. Similarly, instructors at the high school level have noticed that students who engaged in land-based programs developed a better sense of belonging and stronger relationships with their teachers (Eneas, 2019).

Other land-based programs in Canada include: (a) Charles J. Andrew Youth Treatment Centre, Labrador; (b) The Chisasibi Land-Based Healing Program, Quebec; (c) Dene Wellness Centre, Northwest Territories; (d) Kwanlin Dun Jackson Lake Camp, Yukon; (e) Makimautiksat Youth Camp, Nunavut; (f) Shibogama Traditional Land-Based Family Healing Program, Ontario; (g) Wikwemikong Outdoor Adventure Leadership Experience, Ontario; and (h)

Walgwan Centre, Quebec (Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, 2018). For a summary of each of these programs see: <https://thunderbirdpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Thunderbirdpf-LandforHealing-Document-SQ.pdf>. Many Indigenous communities are implementing other land-based programs at various levels however, they may not be reflected in the literature.

Land-based, post-secondary programs in Canada. Some Canadian universities have added land-based courses, programs, and learning activities into their curricula (Mashford-Pringle & Stewart, 2019). Mashford-Pringle & Stewart (2019) theorized that this is partly due to the TRC's calls to action (2015b), and a direct result of listening to local Indigenous communities in developing skills-based curricula. Land-based programs at the University of Saskatchewan (e.g., the Land-Based Indigenous Education program), the University of British Columbia (e.g., the Dechinta program), the University of Toronto (e.g., the Akiikaa Project), Algoma University (e.g., the Anishinaabe Studies program), and Laurentian University (e.g., the Indigenous Studies program) are offered at a post-secondary level. Many of these programs are offered at the certificate or diploma level or only offer the land-based component during the summer months. This sets apart the Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs at the University of Calgary as the land-based components are offered nine months of the year and at the graduate level. Although decolonizing and Indigenizing aims are being applied in land-based programs, more programs at the graduate level are still required. Furthermore, there is a need for these land-based programs to further incorporate local communities so their needs can be addressed while building self-sustaining capacity (Radu et al., 2014). The Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs respond to this through the involvement of the students' Capstone course and project, and through the programs' overarching learning aims of building relationships among other students, Elders, knowledge holders, and community members to promote wellness.

The Relationship Between Indigenous Communities and Research

Historically, research has been utilized to oppress Indigenous peoples. As Smith (2012) stated, “The word itself, ‘research’ is probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world’s vocabulary” (p. 1). Research was a critical tool of colonization as Indigenous storytelling was used to define, deter, and destroy the value of Indigenous peoples, knowledge, and practices (Archibald, 2019). Archibald explained, “More than a theft of cultural property, this ‘research’ was an intellectual, cultural, and spiritual invasion that cast Indigenous characters in particular roles, framed from the vantage point of the ‘hunter’” (p. 5). Wilson (2008) posited that there is a need to end Western claims of superiority over Indigenous ways of doing research and begin to respect the knowledge that is generated from Indigenous methodologies. By emphasizing Indigenous ways of knowing and cultural practices throughout the research process, community-driven results can be utilized to promote Indigenous ideologies and methods (Smith, 2012).

According to Wilson (2008), the concept of relationality weaves through the components of ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology to create an Indigenous paradigm. Furthermore, Indigenous ontology and epistemology are equal since reality is not an object but a process of relationships (Wilson, 2008). Thus, there is no definite reality, but rather different sets of relationships. These components work together in a circular fashion. Wilson (2008) makes the comparison of how the Cree language (and many other Indigenous languages) are relational in nature:

There is no word for “grandmother,” in Cree—it is either “*my* grandmother,” *nookoom* or “*your* grandmother,” *kookoom*. When I have asked people how to say grandmother, the response was, “You can’t be a grandmother without being attached to something.” (p. 73)

In Wilson's (2008) research paradigm, he explains that Indigenous axiology is built upon the concept of relational accountability with Indigenous methodology being the process that adheres to relational accountability. The components cannot operate in isolation, as the sum is greater than each part, and they blend from one area to the next (Wilson, 2008).

Kovach (2009) explored how qualitative research and Indigenous methodologies put researchers in an insider and outsider relationship. The insider space may be used to assist non-Indigenous researchers in forming an understanding of Indigenous research. While there are significant epistemological differences between Indigenous and Western research, ultimately Indigenous knowledges cannot be standardized as they are constantly evolving in relation to person and place (Kovach, 2009). Correspondingly, Battiste and Henderson (2000) noted that Indigenous knowledge is deeply personal, and Indigenous research requires an inward understanding through spirit.

Relationships are at the heart of Indigenous worldviews, necessitating research that is based in community relationships and that prioritizes reciprocity, respect, relevance, and responsibility (Archibald, 2008; Wilson, 2008). Researchers must observe the ethics of relationship referred to as relational accountability (Wilson, 2008). This also extends beyond the immediate research and applies to being ethical and in-relationship with all of one's relations, including the natural world, the cosmos, one's ancestors, and future generations (Wilson, 2008). In Canada, participation of Indigenous communities as partners in research is crucial (Castellano, 2008; Fellner, 2016b).

Kovach (2009) stated research with Indigenous peoples must follow an ethical process to promote wellbeing and reciprocity. A number of protocols have been created to guide researchers working with Indigenous communities and peoples. These include: (a) the Royal

Commission on Aboriginal Peoples *Ethical Guidelines for Research* (1996); (b) the guidelines set out by the Tri-Council Policy Statement's (2018) *Research Involving the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples of Canada*; and (c) the protocol outlined in the *Ownership, Access, Control, and Possession (OCAP)* manual (The First Nations Information Government Centre, 2014).

Researchers working with Indigenous peoples must observe these protocols and collaborate with the community throughout every phase from conceptualization to dissemination (Fellner, 2016b; Government of Canada, 2018). To meet the requirements for reciprocity in relationships, research must focus on mobilization, transformation, decolonization, and healing (Smith, 2012).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Chapter two highlighted the negative impacts of colonialism on wellness and discussed the need to Indigenize wellness by returning to the land. Relationships with the land promote healing among Indigenous peoples and reinvigorate cultural aims as healing methods at both the individual and community level. This study aims to explore how community-based graduate programs in local Indigenous approaches to wellness can most effectively be developed and implemented. This study specifically looks at the Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs at the University of Calgary, which were designed in response to widespread calls for community-driven approaches to wellness.

This chapter addresses methodology and how Indigenous research practices were specifically employed to honour Indigenous voices. In this study, the people who are conventionally identified as participants are referred to as storytellers. This is congruent with storywork analysis (Archibald, 2008), decolonizing research (Smith, 2012), and Indigenous perspectives that recognize each community member's contributions to collective knowledge (Wilson, 2008). The chapter begins with a description of community-based research and is followed by a brief overview of the ethics process and an introduction to the storytellers. This leads into a summary of the research procedure, and finishes with a description of the data collection and analysis using Archibald's (2008) storywork method for meaning making.

Decolonizing Research

Historically researchers have caused significant harm in Indigenous communities by engaging in unethical procedures and uninformed consent processes (Smith, 2012). Smith (2012) noted that Western researchers have also inaccurately portrayed knowledge and failed to credit the person who shared the knowledge or the process used in obtaining it. Alongside other acts of

colonialism, this abuse of power has fostered community distrust of researchers, particularly those who are non-Indigenous (Smith, 2012). Given this longstanding history, action-oriented and participatory research conducted in collaboration with Indigenous communities present more ethical and effective ways of proceeding (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008). In her seminal work, Smith (2012) explained the importance of using Indigenous research methodologies, which are infused with Indigenous paradigms, to centre the collaboration on the community in an ethical, respectful, and beneficial manner (Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). She also asserted that non-Indigenous researchers can conduct research with Indigenous communities as long as they engage in a collaborative process where community members are considered co-researchers.

This study was part of a larger project that applied community-based research (CBR) principles in developing, implementing, and evaluating (explored in a separate study) the Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs. CBR is based on three principles: it is community-driven, participatory, and action-oriented (Ochocka & Janzen, 2014). Through these foundational principles a partnership approach is generated with the purpose of evening out the playing field between researchers and storytellers. Strand, Cutforth, Stoecker, Marullo, & Donohue (2003) indicated that community-driven research engages members in defining and setting the terms of the work to be conducted. This study invited storytellers to become co-researchers throughout data collection and meaning making processes. This project will further involve storytellers in dissemination promoting positive, concrete social change that responds to community needs.

Smith (2012) suggested that decolonizing research methodologies empower a community to decide what will be useful and additionally provides opportunity to own the intellectual property rights to the research. Fostering the right to self-determination is essential when engaging in research with Indigenous communities, though this step has often been overlooked

by researchers (Archibald, Xiiem, Morgan & De Santolo, 2019). Congruent with CBR, the study involved myself as the researcher relinquishing the conventional researcher's role of "expert," and transferring that role to the community (Grimwood, Doubleday, Ljubicic, Donaldson, & Blangy, 2012). Castleden, Garvin, and Huu-Ay-Aht (2008) suggested that CBR processes effectively balance power, create a sense of ownership of the research, foster trust between partners, build capacity within the community in responding to their concerns, and honour cultural differences.

Essential to a collaborative partnership is the value of trust within the relationship. By demonstrating actions of commitment, reciprocity, and understanding (Smith, 2012), a trusting relationship can be formed. Relationships to land, community, self, and spirit are the foundations of Indigenous realities (Wilson, 2008) and thus should be reflected within the literature review and research methodology. Indigenous research is as much about developing relationships as it is about producing results (Iseke & Moore, 2011). I have done my best to integrate these principles within this study.

Ethics

Attention to ethical concerns is of paramount importance when working with Indigenous communities. As the researcher, I was conscious of the need to build and maintain respectful relationships with community members and all parties involved with this study. Although my direct time with the communities involved was limited, I was open to learning how to honestly address the development and implementation of the Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs for the benefit of these communities. While community members were instrumental in the project's development, the project did not undergo a formal community ethics review. However, during the developmental phases of the two programs, partners agreed that the development and

implementation of the programs would be documented, which is the aim of this thesis project. Additionally, the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB) formally approved this study as safe and ethical.

Following an examination involving me, my supervisor, and the CFREB, it was deemed that storytellers would experience no harm or risk from participating in this study. The storytellers were all professionals who are instructors, administrators, Elders, or community members involved with the development and implementation of the Poo'miikapii and/or Niitsitapiisinni programs. Thus, any potential for harm was no greater than it would have been in normal everyday encounters. Furthermore, it was deemed that storytellers might gain indirect benefits from participating as their knowledge and perspectives would contribute toward the development of future offerings of the programs, as well as to strategies to improve overall community wellbeing.

Research protocols were chosen to respect the identity of the Blackfoot people in a way that honoured the culture (Brascoupe & Mann, 2001). For example, tobacco and gifts were provided to each storyteller. In an attempt to balance power dynamics, I met with each storyteller individually and shared with them the purpose of the study emphasizing that it is more of an informal conversation where I am interested in learning about their experiences and feedback (Smith, 2012). I also went through an informed consent process and obtained written consent from storytellers (see Appendix A). I explained to storytellers that the conversation was entirely voluntary, that they could withdraw their consent at any time during the conversation, and they could refuse to answer any questions. Storytellers were also reminded of the terms and limitations of confidentiality, and how their information and feedback will be kept confidential. To protect their intellectual property rights, storytellers were asked to review all transcripts and

findings prior to dissemination to ensure their approval confirming that the results were accurate (Government of Canada, 2018).

Storytellers

From Indigenous perspectives, each community member is believed to have important knowledge that is to be valued and shared (Wilson, 2008). To explore how community-based graduate programs that incorporate local Indigenous approaches to wellness can be most effectively developed and implemented, 10 one-on-one conversations were conducted with storytellers. The 10 storytellers were selected for having played crucial roles in the development and/or implementation of the Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs. All storytellers consented to their full names being used in association with the general findings, while six provided consent to be associated by name with direct quotations taken from their transcripts. Four chose to remain anonymous in this latter regard. This is congruent with Indigenous methodologies that credit storytellers with their own knowledge (Smith, 2012). I also offered storytellers the option to de-identify any specific contributions they preferred to keep confidential because of the sensitive nature of the conversations. I aimed to create a sense of safety and comfort within the researcher-storyteller relationship.

The storytellers included the following instructors, administrators, Elders, and community members:

- Blair First Rider (Kainai Blackfoot Nation), Elder and Instructional Assistant of the Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs;
- Karlee Fellner (Cree/Métis), Program Coordinator and Instructor of the Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs and Associate Professor at the University of Calgary;

- Lisa Llewellyn, Team Lead/Graduate Program Administrator at the University of Calgary;
- Michele Jacobsen, PhD, Professor at the University of Calgary. Was the Associate Dean of Graduate Programs in Education (2013 – 2018) and Vice Dean (2018 – 2019) in the Werklund School of Education;
- Nevada Ouellette (Cree/Métis), Research Assistant, Program Helper of the Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs, and MEd (Counselling Psychology) student;
- Pat Braul, Manager in Graduate Programs in Education at the University of Calgary;
- Pretty Shields, Calvin Williams (Kainai Blackfoot Nation), Elder and Instructional Assistant of the Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs;
- Randi Sager (Lakota/Nêhiyaw), Financial Manager of the Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs, Registered Provisional Psychologist, and University of Calgary employee;
- Roy Weasel Fat (Kainai Blackfoot Nation), President of Red Crow College and knowledge holder; and
- Shelly Eli (Piikani Blackfoot Nation), Instructional Assistant of the Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs, and PhD (Education) student.

The storytellers consisted of three University of Calgary employees, three university employees who also identify as Indigenous community members, and four Blackfoot community members, knowledge holders or Elders. Seven storytellers identified as Indigenous from the Kainai Blackfoot Nation, Cree, Métis, Lakota, Nêhiyaw, or the Piikani Blackfoot Nation.

Procedure

The research questions for this study were initially developed by my supervisor, Karlee Fellner. Karlee received funding from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) to explore how community-based approaches to wellness can alleviate some of the health disparities among Indigenous peoples. The grant funded the development, implementation, and evaluation of the Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs.

Once clearance was obtained from the CFREB, Karlee and I began conversations regarding how to best conduct this research in a respectful way that honoured the community, while providing a useful framework to address health needs. I prioritized conducting my research in alignment with Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. Prior to beginning, I laid down tobacco, smudged, and prayed that I would hear the shared stories in an accurate and honest way, so that they could be represented in a manner that was respectful and beneficial to the community.

Recruitment

After consultation with my supervisor, 15 people were invited through email to participate as storytellers in the study (Appendix B). Potential storytellers were selected based on their involvement with the development and implementation of the programs by my supervisor and program co-ordinator, Karlee Fellner, who led development and implementation processes in both programs. Due to this selection process, it is possible that others who may have wanted to provide feedback about the programs did not have the opportunity. Elders, students, and a wider pool of community members have been invited to participate in a different branch of the project aimed at evaluating the programs. Of the 15 invited, 10 storytellers, listed in the previous section, agreed to engage in a research conversation. They chose the time and location of the

conversation to accommodate their schedules and show appreciation for their participation (Smith, 2012).

Research Conversations

In order to actualize decolonizing aims, collaboration and flexibility guided my approach. Research conversations were open-ended to create a safe space for storytellers to share freely, and to balance the power dynamics. I believed that storytellers would communicate what they thought was necessary and important information. Moreover, a collaborative approach aligns with the principle of relationality (Wilson, 2008) Furthermore, the use of research conversations is consistent with Indigenous research methods because they promote storytelling, leave room for indirect responses (requiring the listener to interpret the core message), and utilize metaphors which are common within a storytelling modality (Archibald, 2008).

The research conversations took place on Kainai territory in Standoff First Nation and the city of Calgary, Canada. Prior to asking specific research questions, I needed to build a rapport with the storytellers, especially with those who were Indigenous community members and Elders, in order to establish safety and trust. So, I began by introducing myself and the territory I am from, acknowledged myself as a visitor, and described my intentions for engaging in this research. Some of the storytellers wanted to know about my experiences with Indigenous communities and, I thought, were evaluating my credibility as a non-Indigenous researcher. When this occurred, I attempted to come from a place of humility while sharing the knowledge and experiences that I had, but ultimately expressed that I was in the learner position. Once a sense of rapport was established, the storyteller and I discussed the consent form, risks and benefits in participating in the study, informed consent, and permission to audio record our conversation. All storytellers agreed to be audio recorded.

After the consent form was signed, I presented the storytellers with tobacco, sweet grass, and a culturally appropriate gift as appreciation for their time and contribution to the research, while honouring the value of reciprocity in our working relationship. Offering gifts prior to data collection is consistent with Indigenous methodologies (Smith, 2012).

As I did not limit the time allotted for the research conversations, the length of each varied, with the shortest being 30 minutes and the longest lasting four hours, excluding time spent building rapport. First, each storyteller was provided with a preamble explaining the purpose of the study (Appendix C), and then they were invited to describe their role in one or both the programs. From there, I asked general questions which may have included the following:

- How was your experience developing and implementing the Poo'miikapii and/or Niitsitapiisinni programs?
- What are the most important components of the Poo'miikapii and/or Niitsitapiisinni programs that must be maintained?
- What do you personally consider the strengths of the Poo'miikapii and/or Niitsitapiisinni programs to be?
- What cultural protocols are important to follow when implementing programs such as Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni?
- What would you like to see incorporated or added to future offerings of the Poo'miikapii or Niitsitapiisinni programs in order to improve the program and its benefit to the community?
- How do the Poo'miikapii and/or Niitsitapiisinni programs best contribute to overall wellness initiatives in the community?

The questions were not asked in a specific order, but rather followed the flow of natural conversation. After each interview, I journaled about what went well, what I could improve upon, and the preliminary themes I had noticed.

Outlines of the eight courses that make up the programs were also included as data. The courses examined in the Poo'miikapii program included (a) Niitsitapii: Foundations of Wellness (summer term); (b) Aksistoiypaittapiisinni & Iskaipima (fall term); (c) Poo'miikapii: Collective Unity, Harmony, and Balance (fall and winter terms); and, (d) Iihpkim Mootspi: Capstone (winter term). The courses examined for the Niitsitapiisinni program included (a) Niitsitapii: Blackfoot Language I (summer term) (b) Kiipatahpiisinoon: Niitsitapii History and Politics (fall term); (c) Aakahtapiiyiitsiniksiin: Niitsitapii Art and Storytelling (winter term); (d) Niitsi'tapiipohsinni: Blackfoot Language II (fall and winter terms). The course outlines provided information about the course design and types of assignments students were required to complete. During the analysis, both the outlines and conversations were examined and cross-referenced as a way to synthesize data and fill in gaps in information that may have been missing from either area.

Data Analysis: The Storywork Method

The research conversations were transcribed and analyzed for themes using Archibald's (2008) storywork method. Storywork was created by Coast Salish scholar Jo-Anne Archibald (Sto:lo) and designed to assist researchers to view data from a story framework and explore various meanings behind each story. Storywork is embodied and realized fully through a holistic structure of action and is deeply connected to Indigenization, revitalization, and a return to reverence for the land and for the ceremony of living relational knowledge (Archibald, 2008; Wilson, 2008).

There are seven guiding principles that the researcher must adhere to in order to engage in credible and rigorous storywork analysis: respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy (Archibald, 2008). The four Rs (respect, responsibility, reverence, and reciprocity) are traditional values held and practiced by the storyteller and the listener (Archibald, 2008). The remaining principles, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy are values that shape the learning and meaning-making process. According to Archibald, Lee-Morgan, and De Santolo (2019):

Engaging in holistic meaning-making involves using the heart (emotions), mind (intellect), body (physical action), and spirit (spirituality), as well as recognizing the relationships of these realms to oneself, family, community, and/or environment, and wider society. Telling stories in a research context provides time and space for the research participant to tell the story that is pertinent in the situation...Developing, sharing, and representing these storied understandings requires a synergistic action on the part of the researcher to use applicable Indigenous storywork principles. This sharing may also spark an idea or understanding for the story listener or reader. (p. 4)

Therefore, the Indigenous storywork method embodies a holistic perspective and is action-oriented, with direct implications for the community that manifest through the meaning-making process.

The process of storywork requires active engagement and openness from the listener (Archibald, 2008). The role of the researcher is to first hear the story, and then become a storyteller by sharing what has been learned in an honest and respectful way. The listener must also consider the context in which the story is being told and understand the historical

components that have contributed to the storyteller's current situation or perspective (Archibald, 2008).

According to Archibald (2008), storywork requires researchers to reflect upon what they think the storyteller wants them to learn. I felt it was important to transcribe each research conversation myself, as it gave me the opportunity to thoroughly engage with the conversations. Following transcription, I re-read each conversation in its entirety twice before beginning to make notes about potential themes. Research conversations and the course outlines were analyzed for major themes related to the development and implementation of the two programs. Fundamentals of the course outlines, that were considered important and unique contributions to this study's themes, included the learning objectives, language components, ceremonies, and seasonal activities.

Both sets of data (research conversations and course outlines) were synthesized through storywork analysis by looking for core themes that were repeated by different storytellers, themes that could be interpreted as holistic, themes that were related to Indigenous paradigms, and themes that could be beneficial in community knowledge, engagement, or action. To derive these themes, I noted ideas that were explicitly indicated to be important by storytellers, repetitive points or key words, opinions that were particularly salient and related to other themes, and themes that highlighted Indigenous perspectives or addressed barriers of colonial systems. Archibald (2018) noted consultation with Elders and knowledge holders is appropriate when attempting to derive meaning from stories as these individuals often have wisdom and experience that can be beneficial to identifying themes. Due to this, I engaged in several conversations with my supervisor who has abundant knowledge of Indigenous perspectives and systems, to discuss the accuracy and relevancy of themes. Through this reciprocal process of

discussion, reflection, and revision, themes were refined to become more succinct, clear, and focused to create a holistic framework of the development and implementation of the Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs.

While I attempted to identify the stories' themes, I faced a limitation in that as an outsider to Indigenous communities, it is possible I could have missed a deeper interpretation of Indigenous knowledge that could inhibit the principle of reverence within the relationship between myself and the storytellers (Archibald, 2008; Furlan, 2018). Thus, there is always possibility for error. In an effort to combat this and to ensure reliability of the data, each storyteller was sent a transcript of the conversation, a list of direct quotations to be included as evidence for the themes, and a copy of the general findings of the study for their approval. Four of the 10 storytellers responded with minor changes. The other six storytellers indicated that they were in agreement with the transcript and how results were depicted.

Archibald, Lee-Morgan, and De Santolo (2019) described the meaning making process as one that is co-created by the storyteller and researcher. In other words, both perspectives are taken into consideration to create meaning. Story sharing, listening, interpreting, verifying, and resharing stories all contribute to the meaning making process (Archibald et al., 2019). By facilitating a collaborative process, themes are more likely to be accurate and representative of the shared stories. Ultimately, storywork analysis is diverse and flexible, with each researcher employing a slightly different approach to meaning making, due to an individual's subjective experience. Archibald (2019) indicated, "Indigenous storywork as methodology encompasses powerful forms of academic knowledge creation and production, enabling us [Indigenous peoples] to collectively assert a space that contests and challenges colonial research conventions"

(p. 8). In the following chapters, I share the results and what I have learned from this research process.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Archibald (2008) stated that stories are significant for “teaching, learning and healing” (p. 85). The current chapter presents my understanding of storytellers’ stories from our research conversations. This section includes core themes that were repeated several times by different storytellers, themes that could be interpreted as holistic, themes that were related to Indigenous paradigms, and themes that could be beneficial for community knowledge, engagement, or action.

The research conversations aimed to address the following research questions:

- 1) How can community-based graduate programs in local Indigenous approaches to wellness be most effectively developed and implemented?
- 2) How can local Indigenous pedagogies be most effectively enacted in community-based graduate programs in local Indigenous approaches to wellness?
- 3) How can local Indigenous approaches to wellness be most effectively included in curriculum in community-based graduate programs in local Indigenous approaches to wellness?
- 4) How can culturally relevant assessment strategies be most effectively incorporated in community-based graduate programs in local Indigenous approaches to wellness?

Description of Themes

Based on my understanding and interpretation of the research conversations, I have identified four main themes:

- a) Relationship building and maintenance;
- b) Elder engagement;

- c) Community-based Indigenous pedagogy and curriculum (including experiential and land-based learning, and centering of Blackfoot language and ceremony); and
- d) Decolonizing and Indigenizing academia (including decolonizing policies and practices, funding and finances, team approach, and Indigenizing assessment).

Listening to the stories, it was clear that these themes maintained a continuous and interconnected relationship with one another. I decided to display the four themes in a circle to represent this relationship (Figure 2). This circular model is similar to the conceptual model of the medicine wheel which denotes the interconnectedness of and balance between the quadrants.

In this model, each theme affects and is affected by the other themes. The equal quadrants symbolize equal relevance and weight of each main theme, and the importance of balancing these considerations when developing and implementing community-based health education programs. Furthermore, the relationships between the themes also suggest that elements of one theme may appear in another. For example, having Elders lead pedagogy and curriculum is an interaction between themes (b) and (c). Elders are essential in each theme; however, they can also be discussed as a separate theme. Similarly, while each theme is necessary individually, when taken together, they form a comprehensive whole. The following sections describe each theme and subtheme in detail, drawing attention to their connection to the development and implementation processes of the Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs, and to community-based local Indigenous approaches to wellness.

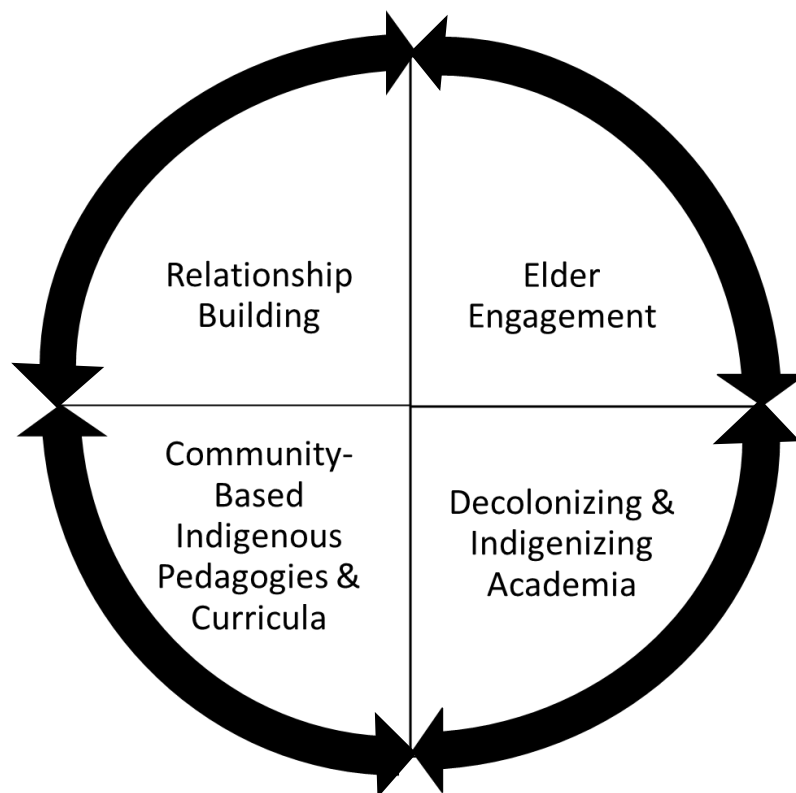


Figure 2. Circle model of themes identified in this study.

Relationship Building and Maintenance

The significance of forming and maintaining trusting relationships was a high priority mentioned by all storytellers—university employees, community members, and the university employees who were also Indigenous community members. According to storytellers, open and clear communication about the intentions, goals, values, and delivery is crucial when developing and implementing a successful program. The relationship between organizations or institutions must be one of respect and mutual understanding. When developing and implementing programs that are based in local traditional approaches to wellness, the parties involved must have an awareness and knowledge of how colonialism, in attempting to eliminate and destroy culture and language, has negatively impacted Indigenous communities. Michele explained the implications of different approaches when initiating relationship with Indigenous communities:

So it's also about making sure that we act in very ethical and appropriate ways when we approach the community and say here's what we want to do, who would you recommend is the person who has the expertise and knowledge that is needed for this particular purpose. It's not about us going to the community and saying, "Okay we'll hire you, you, and you and here's what we want to do." That's one way, that's not a relationship, instead that is a transaction. So, it is important to understand the difference between forming a relationship and carrying out a transaction, that's really important. And forming authentic relationships takes time.

Moreover, relationship building and maintenance were discussed in different contexts including between the university and the community, between the programs' staff and students, and between the students and the community. Karlee noted the trusting relationship that developed between staff and students:

That was really what I appreciated about the implementation—that we [did] become like a family, I feel very connected and very close with all of the students in a way that I haven't felt with other classes I've taught. It's a very different way of engaging and we're much more equals ... it's something about being on the land and being with Elders. It positioned me as one of their peers in some ways and I think that's really special, I think it's a strength.

In terms of developing the programs, a strong relationship between the program developers and the Elders' Advisory Council was essential in creating courses that were true to Blackfoot culture and ensuring the knowledge was taught in accordance with Blackfoot values. Karlee spoke about the significance of forming a trusting relationship between community Elders and researchers:

Indigenous communities have had some really exploitative experiences with researchers, especially those who aren't from the community, though even researchers in their own community often have to go through a rigorous process in terms of demonstrating their sincerity in the work. But especially somebody who's not from the community, having a PhD, being involved with the university, etc.—these things don't necessarily work in your favour with Indigenous communities. So even as an Indigenous researcher, it's really important to demonstrate that I genuinely want to build relationship with the community. I made everything my priority that the Elders suggested. This isn't just a program or a project, this work is about forming genuine and long-term relationships that benefit the community on the community's terms. That means attending events, ceremonies, just connecting and spending time with people. You have to be invested, it's not just a job and it's definitely not 9 to 5.

As a part of honouring the collaborative and trusting relationship, some storytellers said that properly acknowledging the contributions of the knowledge holders who helped develop course and program content was important. One storyteller also pointed out the importance of giving credit where credit is due regarding awards and formal recognitions. When a university employee received an award related to their work with the program, the storyteller felt glad but also noted that the recognition was inconsistent with the program's values. The storyteller said, *"The issue is that none of the Indigenous folks who worked on the program have been recognized with an award or any sort of recognitions, so it was kind of like the university acknowledging the university."* Acknowledging Indigenous peoples in ways that are beneficial and align with their cultural values is an area that needs to be improved upon to uphold a strong working relationship.

Elder Engagement

The engagement of Elders was another meaningful theme found throughout all research conversations. Michele noted how their active participation helped the entire program:

So, one of the huge benefits [to]the program was having a number of Elders who were willing to become involved and to stay involved over time to engage with graduate students, to share their stories and to share their expert knowledge with the students. The fact that it was place-based and that we went to the community enabled us to involve a lot more Elders.

As sacred knowledge is held and passed on by Elders, it is imperative that they be involved. Five storytellers spoke about the challenge of involving Elders when their credentials to teach are not recognized by mainstream regulatory bodies. Karlee identified a need to change hiring practices:

Elders have an abundance of knowledge and are the most qualified instructors, yet we couldn't always hire them because they did not have a master's degree. Mainstream systems, or the university need to change this because in our cultures, Elders are beyond PhD.

Roy provided complementary information about Elders' credentials:

What is an Elder, who is an Elder, how do you become an Elder? These guys they always go through a process of learning, and that is: number one, you join a spiritual group [or Society], you go through a process of learning for four or five years, then you transfer on. Then you start working with the knowledge you have accumulated your first four or five years in the Society and if you have the opportunity to rejoin you do so. Then you start learning again. So, it could be eight or 10 years in the Society, and two stints on. So,

you got 20 years knowledge you've accumulated and it's oral, nobody teaches these things with a notebook. You listen and learn.

While some Elders were involved with course instruction, a few storytellers noted that it was challenging to pay more than one Elder per course. One said the administrative rules did not coincide with the reality of how Indigenous knowledge is held and imparted.

We really need support for Elders and also having the one Elder per class cap just doesn't work sometimes. There [are] some classes where we [need] two Elders to come in because they would assist one another and [if] they bring somebody else there with them because of the complementary knowledge, which I think is really important, you can't say no to that because of something in the box. You can't expect one Elder to provide teachings for everything. Even in academia that doesn't happen. Each person has their area of expertise.

Another meaningful point derived from the stories concerned the decision of which Elders to include in the program. The Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs were created through Blackfoot teachings in the Kainai territory, where some community members are part of traditional Blackfoot ceremonial Societies, and some community members practice Blackfoot culture outside of the traditional Societies. Shelly noted the problems this presented in some cases:

I guess the challenge with that is that again, there's that colonized politics, where there were a few students, maybe three students, who were against bringing outside Elders who are not part of a Society into the classroom. But then the bulk of the students were happy and wanted the knowledge, and were happy with having other Elders come in.

In future, offerings of both programs should continue to review how to address students' learning needs while also honouring the community's teachings.

Finally, several storytellers brought up the importance of involving Elders in all steps of the program. For example, Elder Calvin Williams explained how it would be vital to include Elders in graduation ceremonies:

I just hope the Elders that are used are acknowledged and also, they're involved in the graduation ceremonies. They're the ones that shared their knowledge to shape some of these minds and you have to include them not just in the budgets. Don't just pay them honorariums and think that's the end of it. They should be able to see the graduation. There are ceremonies that we do, there's honour songs that we can sing for our students. So, where we begin, we like to end off also. Not necessarily honorariums but being involved from start to the end.

Community-Based Indigenous Pedagogies and Curricula

Experiential learning. The experiential learning component of the programs promoted a sense of wellness and healing among students and staff. Karlee noted how, because of the programs' design, students were able to internalize the teachings:

*In the moment the students are experiencing wellness. So, we're not teaching about Blackfoot wellness, we're **living** Blackfoot wellness and that's so important and makes these programs so different. They're on the land, learning from the land. It's right there at the medicine wheels, at the old camps, and tipi rings. The land is teaching us, the earth is a teacher, the sky is a teacher, the animals that come are the teachers, the plants are the teachers.*

Healing and wellness are derived from the land, and thus, it was essential that classes be held there. Michele noted the advantages of teaching on the reserve:

If we were trying to hold those classes on campus, it would have been very difficult to do things like smudge, it would have been impossible to do things like engage our students in the Sun Dance, or engage our students in the bison harvest, or engage them in the berry picking and medicine picking that they were able to do. There's no way we could have simulated, in an authentic way, those learning conditions on campus. So the opportunity to carry out the courses on reserve was a huge benefit.

A potential drawback noted by a few storytellers was that classes on the reserve were accessible for some but not all students. One storyteller expressed concern about access for students who lived far from the reserve:

Now a potential flip side of that is there are a lot of students that can't take part because it's place-based, so if you live in Edmonton, picking up and travelling is going to be a different kind of commitment for you than it would be someone from Calgary, where it's just an hour and a half south.

Conversely, having the program based on reserve or reservation land promotes accessibility for students who wouldn't normally be able attend to postsecondary education or who would be forced to move in order to receive graduate-level education.

Storytellers' accounts of land-based experiential learning revealed that students were not only learning how to heal themselves and others, but also learning about the history of Blackfoot people post-colonialism. One storyteller said students were confronted with and able to consider several aspects of colonial history:

I found the students were more aware of academic imperialism, neo-colonialism or colonialism, residential schools, the 60's Scoop, child welfare, all of these things that have affected us for 152 years, since Canada became a confederation.

Ultimately, experiential learning offers a method of learning that is not only congruent with Indigenous ways of teaching but is holistic and part of cultural revitalization. One storyteller mentioned in this regard the importance of creation stories:

What is gratifying about this kind of work is that when you get out on the land and you visit these sites then you have that connection, plus origin or creation stories. You are actually there in an origin or creation story site, where things are transcribed to us from our ancestors. Therefore, when we visit the sites, we honor the ancestors and then we continue their ways of sharing the knowledge.

Centering Blackfoot language and ceremony. Many community members expressed the importance of retaining and re-establishing the Blackfoot language and described the Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs as primary modalities through which students could accomplish this. One storyteller called for a greater emphasis on teaching the language because of its links to Indigenization:

Even though the second-year course is focused on language, I think that adding some language into the program overall is better. This is a primary method of connecting with identity, so within that there are decolonizing and Indigenizing aims. It's just good to speak the language.

Elder Calvin Williams explained how hearing the Blackfoot language spoken within postsecondary programs is valuable in overall community wellness:

So, it's really given hope to community members and also community to know that I'm going to send my child to school and make sure that they get their degree because it's going to provide a good life. They'll be able to provide for themselves. The thing that they also have to know is that you have to promote Niitsitapii ways of life, also the language. We have to relearn as the assimilation really injured our language.

The meaning making derived from the stories and the programs' course outlines established the importance of using the Blackfoot language. The programs' emphasis on Blackfoot language was demonstrated through the development and implementation of courses. The eight courses were intentionally given Blackfoot names and taught in Blackfoot and English languages. Learning outcomes in all courses also incorporated Blackfoot language concepts. Two classes in the Niitsitapiisinni program focused specifically on teaching the Blackfoot language. The other two courses, Aakahtapiiyiitsiniksiin: Niitsitapii Art and Storytelling and Kiipatahpiisinoon: Niitsitapii History and Politics, in addition to all four courses of the Poo'miikapii program: Niitsitapii: Foundations for Wellness, Aksistoiypaittapiisinni & Iskaipima (resourcefulness in the face of challenges and guiding people to a better path), Poo'miikapii: Collective Unity, Harmony, and Balance, and Iihpkim Mootspi (passing on the teachings one has received), emphasized and promoted Blackfoot culture.

Moreover, Blackfoot ceremonies and traditional practices were part of each of the courses. Students were taught and encouraged to reflect on how to incorporate these Blackfoot approaches to wellness into their professional and community-based settings, as a method of decolonizing mainstream systems and promoting relevant strategies towards community wellness. The courses were delivered using traditional Blackfoot pedagogical practices of experiential learning, oral knowledge sharing, and cultural mentorship. Several storytellers

discussed how ceremony and Blackfoot teachings are interconnected, and thus it is through the practice and engagement of ceremonies that learning and wellness are achieved.

Reciprocity and immediate impact. An unexpected way the programs were Indigenizing academia was through the incorporation of the Capstone projects. These community projects were the product of one course taken by all students in the program, and the meaning behind them was vast and impactful. Nevada described the experience of the projects:

The Capstone projects are beautiful experiences because the students had to take all that they had learned and apply it to a project that was going to benefit the community based on cultural ways. So, from there I think there's a minimum of 52 students that went and created beautiful programs that are based around culture, healing, and Blackfoot ways. Some of them are still being carried on. Like the radio show that's still revitalizing the Blackfoot language and the smudge box project.

Another storyteller described how the Capstone projects provided an opportunity for students to directly engage in community service:

The ripples were huge because you not only get the students, [but also] their families who are benefiting from what they are learning. This is touching everybody's lives. And then it also gives them the chance to make something happen right away, it's like that emphasis on action—it comes back to the urgency that people in the communities are dying and we need to take action.

Examples of the Capstone projects that students created included digital language revitalization resources, Blackfoot-based wellness programs in schools, workshops for medical professionals and school educators, making 1000 smudge boxes that were delivered to communities, offering

traditional smudging kits to the homeless and those struggling with addiction, art workshops and installations, and community workshops in ceremony, language, and protocols.

Decolonizing and Indigenizing Academia

Stories gathered through this research conveyed that the Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs provided authentic approaches to Indigenizing academia. The impacts of residential school created a negative relationship between many Indigenous peoples and the education system. With the programs' goals of holistic wellness, a different attitude towards education was fostered. One storyteller said, *"A couple of the Elders have said on various occasions, not even just once, 'This is the opposite of Residential School.' That is a direct quote. And then they talked about that as healing, because we're here teaching our Indigenous ways now."* Storytellers also expressed the power of education and how it contributes to the maintenance and retention of culture. One spoke of the long-term impacts of education on the community:

I'm a firm believer in education, and I've often shared with the teachers, resource staff, and the students that education is our new buffalo. The bison provided for us, food clothing, shelter, ceremony, and knowledge. Today I think in the interest of lifelong learning and continuing education, higher learning, these programs such as Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni can continue to advance our culture and language. That is why we emphasize land-based learning, all about language and land. I'm hoping that one of the outcomes will be retention and advanced retraining [in] our language because it's really threatened.

Additionally, by offering these programs, more Indigenous students are choosing to partake in graduate level education because they can obtain knowledge that is relevant to them and learn how to provide service to their communities.

A good chunk of our students—I can confidently say the majority of our students—have shared that they would have never gone to graduate school if this program didn't exist...A lot of them simply don't want to be colonized and they don't want to waste their time getting a piece of paper where they're forced to be somebody who they're not, where they're forced to play by the book, and where they're learning things that aren't going to help their community. So, what's really amazing about a program like this is that we're able to offer a space for knowledge holders, for Elders, language speakers, and [an opportunity for students] to get that Western credential and pursue a master's degree.

Decolonizing policies and practices. The stories portrayed the challenges when working within mainstream systems. Many storytellers discussed the importance of institutions, such as the university, remaining flexible and adaptable with their policies and practices so they can be inclusive of Indigenous ways of doing. Michele discussed the responsibility of institutions to address this need:

I would have to say more flexible and workable systems are needed because those are currently barriers that can kill a good idea like this place-based program. So, if it is so difficult to try and make sure we're adequately recognizing and compensating Elders for their contribution eventually the community is going to say you know what, University of Calgary is not a good partner for us to try and work with... It's up to us to make sure that programs and initiatives like this happen in a good way, and that we don't damage our reputation in the community by not being able to acknowledge and meet the expectations of the community as well.

This suggests that the flexibility required cannot come from just the community, but that powerful organizations such as the university have to also implement changes that reflect Indigenous protocols.

Additionally, Lisa relayed how the rigidness of policies and practices impedes on students' educational experience and unnecessarily increases student stress:

When all the administrative and technical part gets in the way, it causes a lot more stress for students than is needed. That's not the reason why you [become] a student, but with these types of rigid policies, it just creates more barriers that cause more stress.

Lisa provided this example:

The university has implemented this \$500 deposit across the board for course-based students in undergraduate and graduate programs, and as soon as you accept your offer of admission, you have to pay a \$500 deposit and it's just a way of securing that you're coming. So, with some of our students who have funders, like from tribal bands, the funders send a letter to student receivables saying their tuition will be covered from July 1st to April 30th of this year, but not all the letters say that they would [include] the \$500. You can't register or do anything until you pay that deposit, so classes start next week, and some people have realized that they can't register because of the fact that the \$500 is outstanding.

With more flexible policies and practices, students' experiences of the program would be enhanced, and the program's framework of being student-centered would be supported.

While developing the Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs, storytellers gave examples of reciprocal relationships and flexibility within policies. Michele discussed how being

flexible with recruitment styles and actually travelling to communities to make in-person appearances was beneficial for the program:

The recruitment is multifaceted. It is through face-to-face contact, it is through our website, it is at teacher's conventions, and through word of mouth. We also found that people who would apply were also good helpers to recruit other applicants because they would say, "Oh well I told my cousin about that, can they still apply or is it too late?" Or, "I told my friend—can they still put their application in?" So, we also realized that word would spread in interesting and unique ways about the opportunity. If we hadn't been able to send our own staff out to the community to meet with students and help with the process, then the program may not have been as full as it was.

Michele also shared how the programs were offered in two different countries, Canada and the United States, and that the university's openness and flexibility in offering the program in two places contributed to the enhanced learning experience for students:

Well, there are a lot of opportunities at the University of Calgary where students can travel to other locations and learn. What's interesting about this Indigenous program though is that these are international borders, if you think of Canada and the US as the specific nations involved. But if you think of the Blackfoot Confederacy, there is no national border. So, it is very unique in that we were able to negotiate [across] these other political and government boundaries I guess, in order to honour the fact that students were still learning on traditional Blackfoot territory.

Funding and finances. The funding of the program was a significant theme throughout many stories because the programs could not have been implemented without it. Notably, storytellers suggested that this is the area in which mainstream and Indigenous systems most

differ and, indeed, it proved to be the most challenging. Due to the land-based, experiential delivery and the resulting resources required, the programs were more expensive to run than conventional programs. The first year, the programs were funded through an external grant obtained by Karlee. However, once the grant was finished following the first offering, the program did not have the financial resources to provide all the same experiences and materials in its second-year offering. One storyteller noted with regret the differences in the program between the first and second year:

This past year the students didn't get to do as much. For example, we had to cut out making moccasins from the program. The students still wanted to make moccasins despite this, so they just had to organize it on their own. They had to get their own hide, their own beads, [though] last year we were able to supply everything. And to me that's how it should be, especially if institutions say that they support the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. They say they support reconciliation, and they say they support this Indigenous Strategy, well, then they have the responsibility to actually budget for programs like this and give back to community in this way.

Not being able to offer all wellness activities due to lack of funding restricted the range of experiences available to students, and placed the responsibility for learning particular teachings, such as making moccasins, onto the students themselves. While a student's responsibility for application of in-class learning may be accepted practice in conventional education systems, storytellers mentioned this being problematic in a land-based, experiential program that is designed to immediately give back to community through providing a range of wellness experiences. Moreover, it contradicts Indigenous pedagogies of mentorship, and Indigenous values for delivering the program in a good and respectful way.

All storytellers mentioned that additional funding is required in order for programs like this to be successful. One storyteller noted the funding required to deliver the programs:

Structures at the university have to change and resources need to be thought about in different ways in order to support this kind of programming. You have to ask, could every faculty or could every department offer this kind of four course pathway, or place-based programming like this? Only if they have all those additional resources. Can they do it out of their existing budget, I believe the answer is a firm no.

Some possible resolutions mentioned by storytellers include external funding and the university allocating money specifically for these kinds of programs:

Well, two ideas are either external funding through grants or increased allocations by the university where the leaders say, “Okay, if we’re going to do this kind of place-based education, this is what we’re going to have to make sure we allocate for sufficient resources.” So, it cannot just be done on the same funding model that works for other types of on-campus courses and programs.

Some storytellers felt very strongly that it is the university’s responsibility to contribute to these types of programs if they support the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Indigenous Strategy. One storyteller said it was the university’s responsibility to find the funding:

Just to reemphasize, the university needs to listen to what the community says the needs are, and if the community says we need money for a bison, for these horses, for this powwow, and they give the budget, listen to that. The university doesn’t dictate and say, “Oh that’s too much.” It’s like—no, the university’s job in the wake of the TRC and all this work that’s going on, is to say, “Okay, we’re going to figure how to make this happen.”

Moreover, storytellers discussed the challenges of accessing the grant money even after it had been awarded, and of having to justify program expenses that had already been outlined in the grant proposal.

We were doing everything that we said we were going to do when we applied for the grant to CIHR. The bison, the horses, and all that stuff, and yet university administrators were coming back and giving us trouble and [we had] difficulty getting reimbursed. And so, we ended up struggling to obtain our own money. This grant was already hard to get, and now we're fighting to get paid back. These are literally all expenses that we budgeted for.

The storytellers who were involved with accessing and distributing funding described engaging in multiple meetings to educate university administrators on program delivery in order to streamline the financial process. However, these storytellers described frustration that this education was not then passed on to all staff. One storyteller explained what happened when there were changes to the administrative staff at the university:

The first year I knew there would be bumps along the road, but the thing that I come across for the second year was the fact that we had meetings and it seemed to be everything went smoothly, but then all of a sudden different staff members would start to do finances and they were asking the same questions that had been initially asked. And so, the challenge at that point was that the University of Calgary wasn't educating their staff members on the programs, so we had to re-educate them. So, whoever came across our expenses was confused by them. So, to have a meeting to sit down with those in charge and say this is what you can expect, and that seemed to work for a while but then

I'd have someone new tell me I was submitting receipts incorrectly, and then we'd have to go through the whole process again.

Additionally, many stories were related to issues of having Elders and helpers being paid on time.

This is a huge issue. Many of these people have financial strains due to social inequities and having to support themselves and their families. They're coming in and giving their time, energy, efforts, and they need the money, they deserve the money, it's cultural protocol to make the offering right then and there. We should have the cash or the cheque to give to them the moment that they show up.

Another storyteller elaborated on the difficulty faced having cash available to give the honorariums to Elders on the day of their service, which follows Blackfoot protocol.

After a few meetings with the entire team of research accounting, we did set up a way we could get the cash advance to have the cash for the honorariums, but that was after numerous emails and meetings to explain why this was the way it was because, nothing against the University of Calgary, but they had a process and they had to follow that process which took time, and that would impede on our relationship with those who were getting the honorariums.

Finally, some storytellers discussed how extra expenses accumulated due to having to pay workers extra time that was not originally allotted for in the budget. This was in relation to the significant extra time it took for workers to process the submission and reimbursement of expenses:

More of my time was spent on doing the extra work, which they had to pay me for, and honestly it wasn't necessary if the process would have been more smooth. The funds could have been spent elsewhere in the project versus paying me to do it.

While this money could have been used for materials and resources for the programs, instead it was spent on explaining cultural protocols and justifying the program's costs. Another storyteller identified the discrepancy between conventional research projects and those that are community-based:

It was incredibly frustrating having experienced working on conventional Euro Western research projects where expenses were more easily reimbursed, to doing authentic community-based work where almost all our expense submissions were questioned or challenged. We spent hours upon hours of extra time and funds dealing with these challenges, whereas if we'd been doing a conventional Euro Western project, we could have put that time and grant money toward the work itself.

Storytellers pointed out how the extra time, and therefore, money required to justify and educate within the university system was a significant inequity faced in community-based Indigenous research and programming. They had seen that researchers, administrators, and educators doing conventional Western projects did not have to spend their grant funds justifying or educating within the system to be able to carry out their work. Storytellers who had experience with both conventional Western projects and community-based Indigenous projects like Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni at the same university, identified this as a form of institutional discrimination that was a significant barrier in this work.

Team approach. Some of the storytellers conveyed how the program did not have enough staff to sustain the workload required to coordinate so many land-based and cultural

events. The additional work required of these kinds of programs was taken on by existing staff as an uncompensated and unaccounted for labour overload. Karlee identified how the workload could be better handled:

There needs to be a dedicated position for programs like this where that person's job is to be the liaison with the community and to set up the ceremonies, to make sure everyone is paid, to do the budgeting, all that stuff.

Storytellers clearly conveyed the need for additional human resource support to run the programs. In comparison, mainstream programs typically have multiple positions (faculty members, instructors, administrators, deans, financial advisors, etc.) to assist with implementation. While limited funding for land-based, experiential programs was identified as a barrier, storytellers maintained that it is essential to have more than one or two key people responsible for making the program operational.

Other storytellers expressed their desire to support the program and offered additional assistance to Karlee in her role as the program coordinator:

So, I think how we could support her as a program coordinator more, when you're doing things at a distance. And you know she was working 24 hours a day, seven days a week while she was teaching right? And so, it was one more thing on her plate. Now wouldn't it be great if we could offer more support for her, even administratively? ... So we always worked it out in the end, but I think that maybe we could do that a little bit differently. It felt like there was a time lag and it's only because you get to the end of the day or the end of the week and it's like—so what happened this week? And for her, I think many of these programs, the face to face time, actually happens on weekends. So, it's not a regular classroom schedule, not the kind that most of us would think of here.

Inadequate staffing to implement and administer the program interfered with completion of particular tasks in a timely manner. Stories conveyed that streamlining processes and tasks related to program implementation will require a team of people to support the program.

Indigenizing assessment. Coursework was developed to align with Blackfoot ways of teaching, thus being on the land was crucial in this, as was creating assignments that were meeting the university's academic requirements while aligning with Blackfoot culture. Karlee stated:

A large portion of student grades were the oral presentation and orally and experientially demonstrating their learning in person, so that's big and that's in there. I really advocated for that because usually instructors aren't able to assign as much grade weight to oral presentations ... but we really advocated for that because these programs are based in an oral culture and oral teachings.

Another significant theme that was shared by storytellers was the way that students were graded or assessed in the programs. Karlee explained what assessing students' learning from a Blackfoot perspective might have looked like, but due to academic regulations and time constraints it was not feasible:

In an ideal world, the way that you are assessed for how you're learning is how well you're living the teachings. In an ideal world, we would have had the community come and say yes, that person is living in a good way about each of our students. That person is respectful, that person is humble. It's not that people need to be perfect, everybody makes mistakes, that's always acknowledged. It's not to say they never slip up, but just to say that person lives in a good way, they have a good heart and they're doing their best.

That being said, Karlee stated that an Indigenous framework for grading coursework was still emphasized:

I think it's important to have grading like that, where you're grading people relative to where they're at and not the way grading is traditionally done where everyone is marked on the same scale. So that's really important, [having] a lot of reflective assignments that helped students explore what they're embodying, how they're engaging, what they're learning, and sharing those stories.

Additionally, a self-evaluation component was employed in the programs to be congruent with Indigenous practices.

All the courses had a self-evaluation. That's how we got at the assessment piece, where the students submitted an evaluation for how much they engaged from a quantitative perspective because it's important to [get that information]. That was part of it and then the other part was obviously the quality. So, they had to report back on how they integrated the readings, because we did have some readings even though they were minimal, how well they worked with their peers, and embodied Poo'miikapii. How well they helped out in community as well with classes, and things like that. We had them evaluate the ways that they took up the learning.

From her perspective as course instructor, Karlee acknowledged that the way students are graded and assessed still requires improvement:

I don't think that's the be all and end all, I don't think we nailed it, I'm sure there's other assessments practices out there that I'm totally unaware of that come out of Indigenous scholars in Indigenous education. So, I think the assessment right now is something that could be improved on. I think it's good, but I don't think it's as good as it could be.

Conclusion

The experiences, feedback, and reflections of the storytellers offers a vital perspective into understanding how to best develop and implement programs about local Indigenous approaches to wellness that are responsive to community needs. Identifying and addressing the factors that create effective community-based programming is essential in fostering holistic wellness for students, communities, and academia.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Recovering and strengthening languages, relationships with land, and decolonized spirituality are vital to the revival of systems of Indigenous knowledge (Rorick, 2019). Postsecondary education systems can take responsibility for reconciliation and support these aims by providing a holistic approach to learning by incorporating land-based approaches into their programming. Land-based approaches support Indigenous students in mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual learning in relation to the nourishment and healing received from the land (Tobias & Richmond, 2014). Furthermore, since the land represents a place for connection and community for many Indigenous peoples (Berkes, 2012; Tobias & Richmond, 2014), transmission of knowledge and learning must take place on the land and in the community. Particularly when educational programs aim to cultivate community wellness, institutions need to support the land-based, experiential-learning processes that lend themselves to authentic and meaningful engagement and learning. In order to create a foundation for this support, universities, institutions, and organizations must take up decolonizing and Indigenizing aims, being mindful of the unique needs of Indigenous communities, while engaging in collaborative relationships.

Storytellers conveyed four primary themes in relation to developing and implementing community-based wellness programs: (a) relationship building and maintenance; (b) Elder engagement; (c) community-based Indigenous pedagogy and curriculum; and (d) decolonizing and Indigenizing academia. Broadly speaking, these themes highlight how local Indigenous pedagogies and curricula can be meaningfully developed and implemented to meet the needs of both students and communities. These themes are interconnected, reciprocal, and congruent with literature that addresses culturally appropriate Indigenous education (Battiste, 2002; Battiste,

2016; Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004). These findings support the work of Tobias and Richmond (2014) in which Elders conveyed how the transfer of knowledge, learning, health, and healing are related to the relationship with the land. The Elders emphasized the resiliency of communities engaged in fighting against colonial systems that impose or disrespect the land, and stated that through such resilience, community health is improved. These findings also support Battiste's (2013) work indicating that Indigenous pedagogy and curriculum need to be implemented at a postsecondary level, and that Indigenous ways of knowing should be honoured and accurately represented. Finally, the findings align with Alfred's (2004) assertion that ethical and respectful relationships are crucial in addressing the oppression and racism in academia.

This chapter integrates the findings of this study with the existing literature to provide a framework for universities, organizations, and communities to consider in collaboratively developing and implementing community-based wellness programs set on-reserve, with an emphasis on experiential, land-based, and Elder-guided learning. Given the vast diversity among Indigenous communities, this framework should be interpreted as a flexible guideline that can be altered to align with Indigenous communities' unique traditions and practices.

Starting in Right Relation

Gomes, Young Leon, and Brown (2013) indicated that engaging in right relation requires decolonizing and Indigenizing processes. Their work showed how increasing access to health care requires those in leadership positions to apply decolonizing aims through policy and practice. The authors wrote, "In resisting imposed structures of thinking, outdated systems and service delivery models and moving towards reconciling and recovering the sense of connection with the peoples of this land as our relatives, as treaty peoples, we began to build right relationship" (p. 566). Similar aims of decolonizing and Indigenizing are needed at academic

institutions to promote right relationships. The development and implementation of community-based wellness programs call for a collaborative and reciprocal relationship among stakeholders. Given the power and privilege that postsecondary institutions hold relative to Indigenous communities, the onus falls on the institutions to initiate and maintain relationships in a good way (Alfred, 2004; Gomes et al., 2013). If universities choose to exert their power by acting unilaterally and requiring community stakeholders to adapt, then inevitably, the community's needs will be overlooked. Historically, such unidirectional approaches have resulted in relationships with Indigenous communities that are oppressive and harmful, and that significantly contribute to loss of cultural identity and control, as well as dispossession (Smith, 2012).

Congruent with the literature (Fellner, 2018; Gomes et al., 2013; Linklater, 2014; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008), storytellers emphasized that establishing trusting relationships is crucial when working with Indigenous communities. This is particularly important considering the exploitation that many Indigenous peoples have faced in their experiences with research and colonialism (Blair, 2019; Smith, 2012). Consistent with Wilson (2008) and Fellner's (2016b, 2018) work about engaging in Indigenous research and building relationship, storytellers discussed the Indigenous aims of visiting communities, engaging in cultural protocols such as ceremony, listening to and incorporating the recommendations of Elders, and taking a proactive approach to the needs of the community, rather than challenging the resources or processes that the community has deemed essential for program delivery.

Creating strong relationships with Elders and working towards actively involving them is an integral component of developing and implementing community-based programs. With the Elders' guidance, students learned to create good relationships within their own communities.

For example, students learning the local protocols of respectfully approaching Elders (Fellner, 2018; Gomes et al., 2013). In accepting the value of the knowledge systems and ways of doing that are held by Elders, organizations and institutions can develop mutual respect and understanding with Indigenous communities (Wilson, 2008). Relationships are essential to Indigenous paradigms, thus when institutions engage in respectful and reciprocal relationship, the needs of the community can be met (Fellner, 2016b; Wilson, 2008).

Engaging Community Wisdoms

“Our communities know what we need to heal” (Fellner, 2016b, p. 320), and thus establishing wellness programs begins with the wisdom and knowledge of community members and Elders. Both the Poo’miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs were developed with Elders and knowledge holders, and storytellers emphasized the importance of this. Weaver and Dennis (2015) described the integral role Elders have within Indigenous communities:

Indigenous elders have always had and continue to play significant roles in sustaining the vitality of their families and communities. Elders are keepers of cultural traditions and teachings. They are the primary teachers of language, morality, ethics, and responsibilities. They guide younger generations in maintaining our ontology, living our values, and reminding us to focus on what is most important—our families, our communities and our people. They serve as our counselors, providing knowledge, wisdom and kindness when we are uncertain or when we face challenging situations. They also teach us skills and hone our talents and abilities; be that in traditional practices or in providing for and sustaining our families. (p. 2)

Elder involvement is a vital component in developing and implementing community-based programs. Their knowledge facilitates learning of Indigenous pedagogies, connection to the land,

revitalization of language, and the practice of spirituality (Fellner, 2018; Gomes et al., 2013). As some of the storytellers indicated, there is a rigorous learning process involved in becoming an Elder, and it is through this process that the community becomes aware of the specific knowledge and teachings of each Elder (Weaver & Dennis, 2015). Thus, it is important to confer with community members when deciding which Elder should be teaching course material, as the choice is a collective decision.

Perley (2011) noted, “Of the 53 distinct Native languages in Canada only three have a chance of surviving the next ten years, eight are facing extinction, 29 are deteriorating very rapidly, and 13 are moderately endangered” (p. 39). Revitalization of language is not only decolonizing, but also necessary in sustaining Indigenous cultures (Julian, 2016). The land is connected to revitalizing language, as it holds Indigenous knowledge, life skills, responsibility and value, with Elders helping foster this relationship between land and language (Julian, 2016). The Poo’miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs emphasize language and land-based experiential learning in both course outlines and through delivery. Elders co-created course outlines, and in emphasizing Blackfoot language concepts, promoted Indigenization and holistic wellness.

One of the barriers of program instruction mentioned by storytellers, was the issue of Elders’ credentials not being recognized by the university. The requirements of graduate degrees from a colonial system, are not aligned with the knowledge that Elders possess (Weaver & Dennis, 2015). Acknowledging the credentials of Elders and the knowledges that lie outside of a Western scholarly context is crucial. Elders, along with experienced knowledge holders, need to be instructing the programs as they are positioned to deliver a holistic perspective that integrates culture, spirituality, and ceremonies (Battiste, 2013; Fellner, 2016b).

Ceremonies and traditional teachings of wellness occurred communally prior to European contact (Nyman, 2012). Contemporary Indigenous practices and ceremonies are also being incorporated, with communities adopting and adapting ceremonies and practices from other Indigenous communities. One example is the Mâhtâhitowin (Give-Away Dance), which was traditionally held by the Plains Cree but is also practiced amongst Blackfoot nations (Government of Alberta, 2004). Another example is using different medicines, such as sage or sweetgrass, to smudge as it is practiced in many forms (McCampbell, 2011). The communities involved in both Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni have members and Elders who are involved with both traditional Blackfoot ceremonial societies and bundles, as well as members and Elders who have adopted and adapted ceremonies that originally came from other Indigenous nations. In cases of communities with diverse Indigenous practices, it is important for Elders, students, and university staff to come to an agreement regarding which teachings to incorporate into programming (Horn-Miller, 2013; Indigenous Corporate Training, 2017). In the Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs, there were students who expressed the value of learning practices and protocols that have been adapted from other nations as they found these to be relevant to their daily lives and/or community work.

Institutions such as universities maintain a disproportionate degree of power and dominance, and thus have a responsibility to use their power (e.g., resources) to generate positive change. Clark (2004) wrote that there is a need within academia to theorize, conceptualize, and represent Indigenous knowledge in order to improve the overall wellbeing of Indigenous peoples. Alfred (2004) suggested that Indigenizing aims within university settings involves Indigenous knowledges, values, modes of organization, and peoples to be respected, with Indigenous ways of doing and knowing being integrated into the larger system. The colonial and

imperialist structures and systems within universities need to be dismantled so there is space to honour and teach Indigenous pedagogies and curricula. Fellner (2018) elucidated that embodying decoloniality requires university staff and course instructors to challenge the colonialist systems, and to teach students to challenge these systems to address community needs.

Decolonizing and Indigenizing Policies and Practices in Academia

Mihesuah and Wilson's (2004) work regarding Indigenizing the academy discussed the colonial, oppressive, and racist policies that exist within academia. Mihesuah (2004) explained how the world of academia has a gatekeeping system, where double standards are enforced by people in positions of power. "They take advantage of the oppression of Indigenous peoples ... and they decide who is amiable enough to be hired, neutral enough in their writings to be published, and Euro-American enough in their outlooks to earn awards or qualify for grants and fellowships" (p. 31). This suggests that Indigenous scholars and their work must be nonthreatening to colonial systems. Decolonizing policies and practices within academia is of paramount importance to create more socially just systems that combat institutional racism, and balance Indigenous and Western knowledge. If universities uphold the TRC (2015a, 2015b), then they are obliged to adapt and support Indigenous pedagogies, curricula, and practices within their policies.

Mihesuah and Wilson (2004) wrote that Indigenous scholars are often left out of decision-making conversations and chances to disseminate their work (such as invitations to provide keynote addresses or present at conferences) because their work does not align with the status quo or it challenges colonial systems and policies. Fellner (2018) provided an example of a barrier she encountered when university policies prevented her from smudging with students in class. Fellner recounted how this experience provided students with a concrete example of the

type of oppressive colonial policies that are regularly encountered by Indigenous peoples. As a result, the students created a petition to challenge this policy, and in doing so, engaged in decolonizing processes to create systemic change. The issues of cultural practice, hiring Indigenous staff, and unlearning settler mentalities are related to developing Indigenized policies. Policies can be changed to become more inclusive of and accommodating to Indigenous pedagogies and curricula, as was demonstrated with the Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs' cross-national border delivery. When colonial policies act as barriers, it is important to challenge these processes to enhance the education and wellbeing of Indigenous students (Battiste, 2016).

As institutional oppression and racism continue in many colonial systems, it is beneficial for community-based programs to teach students to identify and address lateral violence that can occur when enforcing policies and practices. Fellner (2018) described how lateral violence is a frequent barrier that arises when attempting to employ decolonizing aims. Perspectives of survivance (Vizenor, 2008) and compassion in addressing lateral violence can be empowering for Indigenous peoples as they promote a sense of self-awareness and acknowledge that colonial practices can negatively impact relationships. In addressing lateral violence, students may be offered an opportunity to engage in teachings and relationships that are congruent with Indigenous philosophies that promote balance and overall wellbeing (Fellner, 2018).

Stewart and Reeves' (2013) research indicated that the worldviews of Indigenous students are not reflected within university settings and suggested that Indigenous ways of knowing are not as valued as Western knowledge. However, one storyteller's statement of how the Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs are the opposite of residential schools highlights how culturally relevant programs are healing not only for students but also for communities.

Decolonization is an important part of healing (Battiste, 2013; Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2019), and as education was one of the primary targets used to control and destroy Indigenous peoples, it is therefore the key to reconciliation (TRC, 2015a). In implementing the types of programs that rejuvenate cultural identity, universities can honour the TRC (2015a, 2015b) and engage in respectful relationships with Indigenous students, communities, and territories.

Living Wellness in Community-Based Programs

The Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs are in land-based settings to support experiential-learning. The experiential learning component promotes immediate action and experiences of wellness (O'Connor, 2009). Outdoor, on-the-land experiences, in which students participate in hands-on activities that relate directly to the local environment have been shown to improve student learning, especially in the transmission of environmental knowledge (Kossack & Bogner, 2012; Simpson & Coulthard, 2014; Wildcat, McDonald, Irlbacher-Fox, & Coulthard, 2014). Julian (2016) indicated that land-based education is necessary for the resurgence and sustenance of Indigenous life and knowledge. Maintaining a connection to the land and other spirits, defines being Indigenous (Wilson, 2008). Therefore, a connection to the land plays a crucial role in overall health and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples (Mashford-Pringle & Stewart, 2019) and needs to be incorporated into community-based programs.

The connection to land is a vital component of Indigenous pedagogy and thus it should inform how a curriculum is taught. Root (2010) argued that to decolonize environmental education practices, we must begin to recognize the specific connections that Indigenous peoples and communities have to geographical territories. As Elder Calvin Williams noted in this research, the land-based component of the programs re-establishes independence that was taken away through colonialism. When it is land-based, education becomes a form of resistance to

settler mentality (Twance, 2019). Furthermore, intergenerational transmission of knowledge is a foundational characteristic of Indigenous epistemology (Simpson, 2014; Tobias et al., 2013; Twance, 2019). Research by Twance (2019) indicated that education is vital in understanding Indigenous peoples' identity, but that education must include learning about the history through an Indigenous land-based perspective, while becoming aware of responsibilities the collective community has to the land. Julian (2016) noted that the relationship with the land through ceremonies is key to revitalizing Indigenous languages. Ultimately, engaging in ceremonies, revitalizing Indigenous languages, and (re)connecting to the land contribute to individual and communal healing and wellness (Fellner, 2018; Mashford-Pringle & Stewart, 2019; Wilson, 2008).

When implementing community-based programs such as the ones studied here, storytellers noted the importance of serving students who would not typically pursue graduate level degrees. By hosting these programs on reserve land, students who are geographically close can be enrolled. According to Statistics Canada (2016), 11.4% of Indigenous people with Registered Indian status aged 25 to 64 living off reserve had completed a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with only 5.4% of those living on reserve. Indigenous students wanting to attend post-secondary education, especially at a university level, face more barriers in accessing education (Stewart & Reeves, 2013). Thus, the need for these programs outweighs the geographical limitations. Education is a primary tool in improving health discrepancies, thus, accessing education is crucial for Indigenous peoples (Loppie Reading & Wien, 2009; Offet-Gartner, 2008; Stewart & Reeves, 2013).

As Indigenous communities have been subjected to traumatic experiences through colonialism, the programs emphasized decolonizing trauma approaches, including trauma

wisdom and survivance perspectives (Fellner, 2018; McCormick, 2009; Trimble, 2013). A decolonizing trauma approach involves honouring people's experiences, understanding that their challenges have intergenerational roots, and then focusing on the collective conversations that guide Indigenous peoples, families, and communities toward *poo'miikapii* (harmony, balance, unity) and social and environmental justice (Werklund School of Education, 2019a). By redefining trauma, Indigenous peoples can return to traditional teachings when managing and learning from challenging experiences (Duran, 2006; Fellner, 2018). Therefore, teachings of decolonizing trauma and resilience are essential in programs that address Indigenous healing and wellness (Fellner, John, & Cottell, 2016; McCormick, 2009).

The literature indicates that services offering access to traditional Indigenous healing practices, particularly in urban environments, are linked to culturally relevant healing which in turn contributes to personal and collective healing and wellness (Reeves & Stewart, 2015; Ross, 2014; Waldram, 2008). The *Poo'miikapii* and *Niitsitapiisinni* programs are examples of how community-based Indigenous programs can provide graduate level education while simultaneously empowering Indigenous peoples and communities in practicing wellness.

Holistic Curricula and Assessment Strategies

Reflecting Indigenous Pedagogies in Curriculum

While the *Poo'miikapii* and *Niitsitapiisinni* programs are rooted in Blackfoot knowledge and language, institutions wishing to implement similar programs should sanction the use of local communities' languages and teachings. Course outlines and delivery should reflect a commitment to honouring and revitalizing local Indigenous languages and ceremonies as they have an interconnected and reciprocal relationship with Indigenous pedagogy and curriculum (Julian, 2016). In the case of the programs studied here, courses were taught at a time of year that

corresponded with the course content (e.g., harvesting teachings being taught in the fall semester), reflecting how Blackfoot pedagogy influenced the course design and delivery.

Corresponding to the findings of Battiste and Henderson (2009), Indigenous pedagogies were emphasized in the programs to promote holistic learning. Students were encouraged to submit assignments through various creative modalities such as videos, audio recordings, poetry, and artwork to highlight decolonizing aims consistent with their skills, beliefs, and values (Fellner, 2018; Graveline, 1998). Curricula should be designed in conjunction with Elders in an effort to create meaningful, personal, and reflective ways to demonstrate the integration and enactment of principles and values taught in the courses (Battiste, 2013; Fellner, 2018; Gomes et al., 2013). Curricula should also emphasize oral components as Indigenous cultures are rooted in oral teachings and storytelling (Archibald, 2008). Moreover, assignments should meet the university's academic requirements, but should not be limiting or colonizing through their delivery or methods. Thus, flexibility is needed when developing holistic Indigenous curricula with similar aims (Mashford-Pringle & Stewart, 2019).

Storytellers indicated that the inclusion of the Capstone projects was an essential component to the curriculum because it provided an opportunity to engage in service to the community, while implementing their knowledge and teachings. Additionally, the Capstone project and its coursework discussed how to navigate colonial systems and apply Indigenizing policies and practices outside the program (Fellner, 2018; Werklund School of Education, 2019a). The implications of these projects were vast and instantaneous, allowing students to embody their learning while addressing community needs (Fellner, 2018; Werklund School of Education, 2019a). Therefore, when creating similar programs at other institutions, it is encouraged that a Capstone course and project be maintained in the curriculum. Since the

overarching theme of the programs is to promote Indigenous pedagogies and enhance wellness, it is also recommended that students not be restricted by colonial systems or policies when choosing the subject of their Capstone projects.

Self-Reflective and Holistic Assessment

Storytellers noted the importance of assessment and grading strategies consistent with Indigenous methods. Indigenous scholars recognize that knowledge is derived from multiple sources that include traditional teachings, such as oral narratives, genealogies, empirical observations derived from experience, and internal intuition (Battiste, 2002; Brant-Castellano, 2000; Simpson, 2014). Thus, a self-reflective component that allows students to identify their areas of growth and areas still requiring improvement is beneficial in these types of programs. The self-assessment component is consistent with Blackfoot culture and the experiential-learning framework since reflection on learning contributes to the overall experience and supports a holistic process (Beard, 2010; O'Connor, 2009). A self-reflection component is also consistent with many mainstream models of assessment where students' internal growth and development are emphasized, such as in the University of Calgary's counselling psychology program (Kassan & Green, 2019). One storyteller recommended adding a self-evaluation practice where students, on the first day of class, write down their motivations for enrolling in the program. Then, at the end of the program, the students would revisit these written responses and evaluate if and how they met their intentions in order to measure their growth and learning. These types of assignments contribute to self-reflection and can be incorporated into assessment.

Based on the stories that were shared, improvements are needed in promoting and utilizing an Indigenous framework for assessment. Finding a compromise that would satisfy the university's requirements while still honouring the community's methods of learning proved to

be a challenge. In their research, Claypool and Preston (2011) interviewed Indigenous parents, caregivers, and grandparents about how Indigenous children are assessed in school. Most participants believed that Western assessment measures could not accurately evaluate Indigenous students. Grandparents had a particularly interesting perspective, noting that Indigenous students needed to have a sense of belonging for accurate assessment to occur. The researchers suggested that teachers should amplify students' gifts by nurturing a sense of pride and belonging within Indigenous cultures.

Johnston and Claypool (2010) proposed a multi-method assessment model that illustrates how data sources, assessment methods, and areas assessed can be combined so that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of knowing are respected and considered. Moving away from a cognitive-focused framework, and towards a holistic physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual one, would benefit many Indigenous students. The authors proposed an educational zone of trustful intuition, where educators promote a style of learning that targets the development of students' emotional and spiritual domains, while encouraging students to acknowledge their emotional reactions and immediate instincts when approaching learning situations and important decisions. Students' self-assessment in the physical, emotional, spiritual, and cognitive domains should be intricately woven into all learning experiences. The researchers theorized this could be achieved through modalities of observing and/or participating in cooperative events, storytelling, demonstrations, role modelling, group discussion, self-reflection, talking circles, community events, and other in vivo experiences. This study shows that practices must adapt to ensure that decolonizing and Indigenizing aims are reflected in assessment frameworks. Moving away from assessments founded on student deficits and toward

a model that focuses on student strengths, is needed to foster decolonizing practices and community-based programs (Roundtree & Smith, 2016).

Staffing Community-Based Wellness Programs

As respectful relationships are an essential aspect of effective program delivery, staffing community-based wellness programs is an important consideration (Gomes et al., 2013).

Institutions implementing programs grounded in Indigenous pedagogies must be prepared to hire a team that includes a program administrator, a cultural coordinator, finance manager, graduate program liaison, and a council of Elders. These positions can be expanded upon depending on the purpose and nature of the program, the number of students, and program length. Staff should have an understanding of Indigenous values, beliefs, and knowledge and should be hired in consultation with Elders and community members. Employees who have a thorough understanding of protocols and practices within the community, in addition to the required job skills, are ideal candidates (Mihesuah, 2004). Additionally, training staff on the negative impacts of colonialism, decolonizing trauma, and holistic wellness is recommended (TRC, 2015b).

Hiring an Elder's council would help guide the process and ensure appropriate Indigenous pedagogies and protocols are applied (Fellner, 2018; Weaver & Dennis, 2015). As traditional teachings are interconnected, more than one Elder would be needed to provide instruction for the course material. However, storytellers noted the benefits of the same Elders teaching a specific topic. This could look like one Elder teaching about language and another Elder teaching about hunting and food sovereignty, with the possibility of collaborating when topics merge during class. Storytellers indicated they valued the Elders' teachings, and that having Elders instruct courses that aligned with their knowledge and skills was beneficial. Furthermore, when Elders are involved in educational programs from creation all the way

through to dissemination, the program's quality and credibility will increase (Weaver & Dennis, 2015).

Mashford-Pringle and Stewart (2019) discussed the benefit of talking circles in engaging stakeholders in program design. Such circles could include Elders, community members, program coordinators, university administrators, financial officers, and instructors. The aim would be to ensure that program goals and protocols, as well as staff roles, are clear and agreed upon prior to and during implementation. Talking circles should also be conducted at regular intervals (i.e., halfway through the academic year and at the end of the program's cycle), as they provide a culturally appropriate platform on which to discuss program highlights (e.g., what went well, what needs to be improved, etc.; Mashford-Pringle & Stewart, 2019). Talking circles can provide a safe and communicative environment where all members' opinions are respected, and the collective need of the community is emphasized (Marsden, 2005).

Funding Community-Based Wellness Programs

Concerns regarding the inflexibility of the university's usual financial policies and procedures frequently arose in the stories that were shared. These financial issues ultimately speak to the involved parties operating from different worldviews, and they act as barriers to program implementation (Fellner, 2018; Wildcat et al., 2014). Financial policies and procedures need to be flexible and adaptable. Storytellers conveyed an example of this, indicating that cash honorarium are more appropriate payment methods for Elders. The onus is on mainstream systems to adapt and be flexible since they are working with people who continue to endure marginalization and oppression (Miheisah & Wilson, 2004; Smith, 2012). If Indigenous communities are practicing both in mainstream and culturally specific ways, but the university is only practicing from a mainstream approach, then true reciprocity is not being honoured

(Wilson, 2004). Thus, the ability to collaborate on financial procedures will be a sign of respectful relationships (Battiste, 2013).

When universities agree to support the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015a), they must be willing to fund new initiatives, as opposed to simply expressing a desire or plan to incorporate decolonizing and Indigenizing methods (Ballantyne, 2014). Furthermore, this study suggests that the funding to deliver these programs should be provided from the university's budget, with external grants being supplemental rather than the sole source of income.

Addressing colonial systems of oppression and discrimination through community-based wellness programs, requires adequate funding so that programs can implement their healing work (Alfred, 2014).

Finally, due to the land-based, experiential-learning delivery additional funding may be required to implement community-based wellness programs (Wildcat et al., 2014). Institutions must consider how the diverse materials and resources needed can be delivered in an effective and culturally appropriate manner. For instance, programs may require materials for moccasin making, transportation to sacred sites, food for ceremonies, horses, a buffalo for harvesting, etc. As shown in this study, university staff should be knowledgeable about program and Indigenous protocols and should refrain from challenging the need for these kinds of materials and resources, especially if such resources have already been approved in the overall budget. Wildcat and colleagues (2014) indicated that land-based education is necessary in academic settings, and thus, requires Indigenous communities, organizations, and institutions to work together to fund sites for learning.

Implications for Counselling Psychology

In light of the TRC (2015a, 2015b) findings, the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) and the Psychology Foundation of Canada (PFC) established a task force to develop concrete, action-oriented recommendations to improve the services provided in the field of psychology to the Indigenous peoples of Canada (CPA & PFC, 2018). General guiding principles for psychological practice with Indigenous Peoples in Canada include cultural allyship, humility, collaboration, critical reflection, respect, and social justice. In relation to the role of the psychologist, the CPA and PFC (2018) stated:

The task force encourages psychologists to view themselves as facilitators and supporters of the healing wisdom and knowledge that is already present in Indigenous communities. Psychologists providing treatment should be aware of the important role of culture in healing and be well versed in how to appropriately empower people in their pursuit of reclaiming their culture, including language and ceremony. (p. 22)

The CPA and PFC (2018) suggested that psychologists adopt a holistic approach with special attention to collectivism, spirituality, and connection to the land in their assessment and intervention methods. Gone (2004b) indicated that substantial transformations are needed in the profession of psychology in recognizing Indigenous views of mental health and wellbeing as reputable. Psychologists should also be familiar with culturally specific treatment modalities, such as Aboriginal focusing-oriented therapy, while conceptualizing from a framework where, instead of pathologizing, interventions are strength-based and bring relief (CPA & PFC, 2018; Trimble, 2010).

The Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs are aligned with the CPA and PFC's (2018) task force recommendations. First, the community-based approach of the programs

privileges the concerns and needs of the community, while prioritizing the community's agenda. Second, the land-based, experiential learning framework provides a holistic approach to healing that is grounded in Indigenous pedagogies, paradigms, languages, and ceremonies. Third, the decolonizing and Indigenizing aims of the programs empower the community to promote a sense of healing, wellness, and transformation. Finally, the programs address wellness by attending to relationships with humans, the land, and spirits, and emphasize balance, harmony, and growth which are congruent with Indigenous philosophies (Fellner et al., 2016; Wilson, 2008). Therefore, land-based community wellness programs such as Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni offer a meaningful, authentic opportunity for therapists, counsellors, and psychologists to learn Indigenous approaches to wellness that can inform culturally safe and competent practice with Indigenous peoples. This is critical given psychology's problematic legacy with Indigenous peoples (CPA & PFC, 2018), and underscores the need for psychologists to pursue education and training in applying decolonizing aims within their respective areas of practice.

Strengths and Limitations

The current study has several strengths. First, it highlights the significance of community-based approaches to research when working with Indigenous populations. In collaboration with partners, a culturally relevant research topic was selected. Furthermore, the methodology emphasized Indigenous methods of data collection through oral conversations and analysis through storywork meaning making (Archibald, 2008). Another strength of the study is that through the process of reflecting on the Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs, a framework for other universities to develop and implement similar programs has been created. Finally, a significant strength of the study was the research process, which facilitated a strengthening of the existing relationship between the University of Calgary and the Blackfoot communities involved

through engagement in ongoing discussions to improve community-based graduate programs in local Indigenous approaches to wellness.

The current study also has several limitations. For one, I am an outsider to the Kainai community. Although the research was able to proceed due to the welcome and generosity of the community, as a non-Indigenous researcher it is possible that I may have overlooked certain information, despite proactive measures being taken to reduce this possibility (e.g., reviewing and editing by Indigenous storytellers). Furthermore, Indigenous research is a large undertaking and an extensive process. For example, situating the research requires a review of the historical oppressions of colonialism, while also discussing its current and future impacts. This topic alone is expansive enough to be its own research project. Thus, I may not have discussed certain elements due to the sheer breadth of Indigenous research.

Additionally, in this study, time could be considered both a strength and limitation. Building and maintaining relationships with communities, knowledge holders, storytellers, and Elders is an essential component of ethical and effective research (Smith, 2012). Time spent in community, learning and visiting, contribute to deep and valuable knowledge that cannot be adequately captured when using quantitative approaches (Kovach, 2009). Given the restrictions of academic deadlines and processes, this study may have been strengthened from additional time and planning alongside community members. As a note, conventional western research paradigms often consider subjectivity a limitation. However, Indigenous perspectives consider subjectivity in research a strength and inevitability (Kovach, 2009). Kovach explains that Indigenous research, from either an insider or outsider perspective, requires the researcher to acknowledge their personal background, experiences, and biases (as I have discussed in Chapter One), allowing readers to interpret the validity of claims. Providing context and an explanation

for engaging in the research is an honest approach to research that is in alignment with Indigenous worldviews and values (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008).

Finally, as this study focused on the contributions of key people involved in the development and implementation of the Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs, student perspectives are not represented. This was a deliberate choice, as the current study focuses on the creation and delivery of the programs. However, students' perspectives are highly valuable, and a holistic account of these programs cannot be fully depicted without them. Student perspectives and their evaluation of the programs are therefore included in the larger research study, in which data collection is currently ongoing.

Future Directions

This research provides a framework for developing and implementing community-based graduate programs in local Indigenous approaches to wellness. When incorporating programs similar to Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni, universities must recognize the valuable knowledge of Indigenous communities that has long been repressed and discredited. Forthcoming research is investigating student perspectives and experiences of the Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs, focusing specifically on program evaluation and implications. Additionally, further research is needed regarding each of the main themes of (a) relationship building and maintenance, (b) Elder engagement, (c) community-based Indigenous pedagogy and curriculum, and (d) decolonizing and Indigenizing academia in how they can support community-based programming. Moreover, research utilizing Indigenous methodologies that explore the specific health benefits of culturally immersive programs such as Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni would be beneficial.

Since the literature is in early stages of discussing Indigenous methodologies, additional research that utilizes these methodologies is required. However, Indigenous communities' needs and philosophies should be at the centre of such future research, and an ongoing consultation process with community members is necessary. Even if the literature suggests a specific study is needed, that does not necessarily mean the community wants this topic to be researched. Thus, before engaging in any form of research with Indigenous communities, it is important to determine whether the research is actually needed or wanted. If communities decide it is beneficial, future work may explore the specific participation and outcomes of therapists, counsellors, and psychologists in community-based Indigenous wellness programs. Finally, additional work focusing on wellness rather than pathologizing problems is needed to shift the colonial narrative towards one of strength and resiliency amongst Indigenous peoples.

Final Reflection

Throughout this journey, I have grown as a researcher. I am more aware of, and place increased value on Indigenous pedagogies, methods, and practices. Approaching research from Indigenous frameworks was a challenging process as I had to continuously remind myself to leave behind a settler mentality (Regan, 2010). Nevertheless, my work also felt instinctively warm and familiar, as I had a clear purpose. While I was familiarizing myself with the literature, I felt discouraged and angry about the health disparities that Indigenous communities are encountering. The correlation between colonization and intergenerational trauma was quite clear, yet, from my perspective, Canadian society has embraced a dismissive and indifferent attitude towards the original peoples of our land. It was not until I started engaging in the data collection and analysis processes that I felt a sense of hope and reassurance. Indigenous communities are reclaiming culture and promoting a sense of pride and belonging, while applying their traditional

ways to heal colonial wounds. One of the ways the Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni programs achieve this restoration of cultural identity is through the emphasis on relationships with the land, providing opportunities for students to reconnect and restore balance by acquiring traditional Indigenous knowledge and being of service to others. The land-based nature of the programs has led me to reflect on my own connection with the land to promote a sense of balance.

The community-based approach is pertinent to Indigenous peoples as the collective consciousness is a central focus (Smith, 2012). Furthermore, institutions and organizations wanting to implement programs such as these must be prepared to work in a collaborative, reciprocal relationship and prioritize the value of this relationship over inflexible policies and colonial systems. Smith (2012) indicated the research process is just as, if not more important, than the results. This is advice that I have taken to heart. In the previous research I had conducted, I had considered the results and implications sections to be the most important as I felt these truly contributed to the literature. Now, when I take a step back and re-evaluate from a more holistic perspective, the process of learning has become as important as the product because it is where relationships are built and maintained.

Being trusted to honour and share the stories that have been imparted to me has been a humbling experience. Having opportunities to conduct research on the land, hear stories in traditional tipis, engage in ceremonies, and walk the same earth the Blackfoot people have lived on for thousands of years were unforgettable experiences. Engaging in this research has reaffirmed my belief that Indigenous peoples are resilient and know what they need to heal their own communities. By taking a holistic approach to my research where I was aware of my own emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual needs, I reconnected with myself on a deeper level than

anticipated, and I believe that I am a better person because of it. This leads me to wonder about the potential benefits that could occur if all organizations were more willing to engage in holistic, community-based approaches that generated changed systems and policies. Programs such as Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni demonstrate that the ripple effects of healing and growth are boundless. The collective wisdom from past, current, and future generations is powerful and impacts how we learn and share knowledge. Sherri Mitchell Weh'na Ha'mu Kwasset (2018) wrote:

When we connect with our ancestors and put their wisdom into action, we are evolving our collective consciousness. We are transporting the ancient truths of our collective past and birthing them into our future. What we create out of those truths extends the wisdom of all those who have gone before us, and it provides a guide for all those who will follow. (p. 13)

By recognizing and employing communal wisdom and strength, wellness can be brought to all that has life.

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Appendix A: Consent Form

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Title of Project:

Blackfoot Approaches to Wellness: Community Wellness through Health Education

Sponsor:

Canadian Institutes of Health Research

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

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

Purpose of the Study

This study will document both the development and implementation of the *Poo'miikapii: Niitsitapii Approaches to Wellness* and *Niitsitapiisinni: Real People's Way of Life* programs. This study is being completed as a thesis project for a Master of Science in Counselling Psychology degree, and will inform Indigenous health education as part of a larger project of community-based health service development and implementation. This project will also offer an opportunity for community members in Kainai and the surrounding communities to access and integrate these approaches into their work and daily lives in order to address identified health disparities. Ultimately, findings will be used to create a model and framework that Indigenous communities and academic institutions may use to support community-based capacity to respond to community wellness needs in sustainable, culturally relevant ways.

What Will I Be Asked To Do?

1. You will meet with Master's student Haley Keast for an informal individual research conversation lasting approximately one hour. You will have the opportunity to share your impressions, experiences, and feedback in relation to the development and implementation of the *Poo'miikapii* and/or *Niitsitapiisinni* programs.
2. Following transcription and synthesis of conversations, you will be sent both your transcript and a draft of the findings to review. You will be invited to participate in a second conversation wherein you will be asked to share your feedback and recommended revisions in response to the documents. Participation in this conversation is completely voluntary. You are also welcome to share your feedback with one of the research team members via email or phone.

During the individual conversation, you will be asked for permission to be both video and audio-recorded. You are welcome to decline either or both. Please note that video-recording is being used in this study so that non-verbal communication between the research team member and yourself may be considered for Indigenous holistic meaning making. All recordings will be kept strictly confidential.

You may modify or withdraw your consent as indicated at any time during the study without giving a reason and without any negative impact. Participation is completely voluntary, and you may refuse to participate altogether, may refuse to participate in parts of the study, may decline to answer any and all questions, and may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Please note that if you wish to fully withdraw your contributions from the study, you must do so any time up until the completion of the reviewing data phase. Data that is not withdrawn by this time will be transcribed and included in the synthesis of the findings.

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?

Should you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to provide your name, email and/or phone number, age, and your ancestral background(s). Your age and ancestral background(s) will be collected in order to provide general information regarding the participant sample in the dissemination of results. This information will not be associated with your records unless you specifically request to

have yourself identified this way in the research.

Your name and email/phone number will be used for contact with the research team throughout the study, but will never be disclosed outside of the study. Only the principal investigator and co-investigator listed above, in addition to any research assistants involved with the project, will have access to the list of participants.

Below, please clearly indicate your consent to participate through checking the appropriate options. You may modify or withdraw your consent as indicated below at any time during the study without giving a reason and without any negative impact.

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

I grant permission to be audio-taped: Yes: ___ No: ___

I grant permission to be video-taped: Yes: ___ No: ___

I wish to keep my name private, but you may refer to me by a pseudonym: Yes: ___ No: ___

The pseudonym I choose for myself is: _____

You may quote me and use my name: Yes: ___ No: ___

Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?

We do not think there is anything in this study that could harm you or put you at risk in any way. Given that you are an instructor, administrator, Elder, or community member speaking about your perspectives and experiences in relation to the ongoing *Poo'miikapii* and/or *Niitsitapiisinni* programs, any potential harms are no greater than those you normally encounter in your everyday life related to the research.

Given that you will have an opportunity to provide feedback regarding the *Poo'miikapii* and/or *Niitsitapiisinni* programs, you may find that participation benefits you through your feedback regarding program development and implementation. Further, the findings of the current study will inform future offerings of these programs, which may have an impact on these programs in relation to your work and/or community.

Further, this project will offer Indigenous communities a framework that supports community-based capacity to respond to community wellness needs in sustainable, culturally relevant ways, and you may find that participation benefits you through the application of results through publication and presentation of findings. Further, you may benefit from having a space in which to voice your

perspectives on the research topic. Finally, you will also have the opportunity to discuss your perspectives with other community members and stakeholders, opening possibilities for networking and the exchange of ideas that may inform your work in the community. If you choose to have your name identified in this study, you will also have the option of being listed as co-author on any publications or presentations resulting from this thesis.

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

What Happens to the Information I Provide?

The principal investigator and co-investigator listed above will have access to the information collected, in addition to any research assistants involved with the project. You will be assured confidentiality by having a specific pseudonym of your choice. You will not be identified by the use of your actual name or initials, and your identity will be kept strictly confidential in any publication resulting from this research. All transcribed conversations and recordings will be assigned pseudonyms and stored in a locked filing cabinet. All digital files will be encrypted and password-protected on Dr. Fellner's private, password-protected computer. Five years following completion of the research, recordings and hard copies of transcripts will be destroyed. At this time, you will be given the option of having your individual recordings and transcripts returned to you or discarded. Digital copies of all transcripts will be kept on a password-protected external hard drive for an additional five years, at which time they will be permanently deleted. You will be offered co-authorship on any publications that result from this study, and will be given a written copy of any publications resulting from this study regardless of your participation as an author.

Should you choose to withdraw from the study, all data that you have contributed to this research will be permanently deleted and destroyed.

Participation is completely voluntary. You are free to discontinue participation at any time during the study. No one except the principal investigator and co-investigator, in addition to any research assistants involved with the project, will be allowed to see or hear any of the research conversations. There are no names on the videos or transcripts unless you have chosen to be identified by name in the options above.

Signatures

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

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this

research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's Name: (please print) _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name: (please print) _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Questions/Concerns

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

Dr. Karlee Fellner, Assistant Professor
Werklund School of Education or
University of Calgary
(403) 818-6446; kfellner@ucalgary.ca

Haley Keast, Master's Student
Werklund School of Education
University of Calgary
(807)-271-0855; hkeast1@ucalgary.ca

If you have any concerns about the way you have been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services, University of Calgary at 403.220.6289 or 403.220.8640; e-mail cfreb@ucalgary.ca.

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

Appendix B: Letter of Invitation

**Werklund School of Education**

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

Phone 403-220-6794

Fax 403-282-5849

<http://werklund.ucalgary.ca>

Letter of Invitation**Blackfoot Approaches to Wellness: Community Wellness through Health Education**

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

Co-Investigator: Haley Keast, Master's in Counselling Psychology Student
 Werklund School of Education
 University of Calgary
 (807)-271-0855; hkeast1@ucalgary.ca

To whom it may concern:

As a member of the organizing team with a valuable perspective on the recent *Poo'miikapii: Niitsitapii Approaches to Wellness* and/or *Niitsitapiisinni: Real People's Way of Life* program, you are invited to participate in a research project that will document the development and implementation of these programs.

Despite ongoing calls for community-driven approaches to wellness to address identified social determinants that create and perpetuate health inequities in Indigenous communities, many communities do not have the financial, structural, or human resources to support such approaches. For example, there is a significant need for more Indigenous and culturally competent health professionals who have the skills to apply community-based approaches to wellness.

Accordingly, there is a need for culturally relevant research that supports the development, implementation, and evaluation of community-driven wellness initiatives. The current project aims to do this through developing and implementing the *Poo'miikapii and/or Niitsitapiisinni Programs*, which apply Niitsitapii (Blackfoot) ways of knowing, being, and doing in relation to wellness and Niitsitapi ways of life. The goal of this portion of the research is to use an Indigenous research paradigm to answer the questions: ***1) How can Indigenous communities most effectively develop and implement community-based graduate programs in local Indigenous approaches to wellness? 2) How can local Indigenous approaches to wellness most effectively be included in curriculum in community-based graduate programs in local Indigenous approaches to wellness? 3) How can local Indigenous pedagogies most effectively be enacted in community-based graduate programs in local Indigenous approaches to wellness? 4) How can culturally relevant assessment strategies most effectively be incorporated in community-based graduate programs in local Indigenous approaches to wellness?***

The study will consist of one informal individual research conversation (approximately one hour) regarding your impressions, experiences, and feedback in relation to the development and implementation *Poo'miikapii and/or Niitsitapiisinni Programs*. You will also be invited to review and revise your transcripts and provide feedback on the findings of the current study. You are welcome to withdraw participation in the study at any time.

Once complete, research findings will be made available in research publications, national and international conferences, and formal and informal community gatherings. Further, community reports of research findings will be distributed among community members and stakeholders of the Kainai Nation and the surrounding communities of the Tsuu T'ina, Stoney Nakoda, Piikani, Siksika, and Amskapi Pikuni Nations.

If you are interested in participating in this study, or would like more information, please contact Haley Keast at 807-271-0855 or hkeast1@ucalgary.ca or Dr. Karlee Fellner at 403-818-6446 or kfellner@ucalgary.ca.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Haley Keast (Co-Investigator)

Appendix C: Sample Research Conversation Prompts

Sample Research Conversation Prompts

Research Questions

- 1) How can Indigenous communities most effectively develop and implement community-based graduate programs in local Indigenous approaches to wellness?
- 2) How can local Indigenous approaches to wellness most effectively be included in curriculum in community-based graduate programs in local Indigenous approaches to wellness?
- 3) How can local Indigenous pedagogies most effectively be enacted in community-based graduate programs in local Indigenous approaches to wellness?
- 4) How can culturally relevant assessment strategies most effectively be incorporated in community-based graduate programs in local Indigenous approaches to wellness?

Principal Research Conversation Prompt

I'm interested in having a conversation about your impressions, experiences, and feedback in relation to the development and implementation of the *Poo'miikapii* and/or *Niitsitapiisinni* Programs. Any comments you have about how the programs were developed, and/or how they were run – for example, the involvement of Elders, the format of the classes and how they were organized, the kinds of ceremonies and cultural activities that were included, the assignments and how they were graded, and any other details about implementation. It is our hope that the findings from this research will be used to inform future offerings of these programs, community wellness initiatives moving forward, and other communities and academic institutions who are interested in better serving the wellness needs of their local Indigenous communities. I look forward to hearing your thoughts, so begin anywhere you like, and we'll go from there.

Additional Research Conversation Prompts/Questions

- How was your experience developing and implementing the *Poo'miikapii* and/or *Niitsitapiisinni* Programs?
- What would you have done differently when developing and implementing the *Poo'miikapii* and/or *Niitsitapiisinni* Programs?
- What are the most important components of the *Poo'miikapii* and/or *Niitsitapiisinni* Programs that must be maintained?
- What cultural protocols are important to follow when implementing programs like

Poo'miikapii and Niitsitapiisinni?

- What would you like to see incorporated or added to future offerings of the *Poo'miikapii* or *Niitsitapiisinni Programs* in order to improve the program and its benefit to the community?
- How do the *Poo'miikapii* and *Niitsitapiisinni Programs* enhance community wellness and/or affect community wellness initiatives, if at all?
- Based on your experience, how do you think Indigenous community-based health education programs can most effectively be developed and implemented in ways that benefit the community?
- Based on your experience, what advice would you provide to communities or academic institutions wishing to implement community-based health education programs?
- In your experience, what do you feel has been most helpful or beneficial about the *Poo'miikapii and/or Niitsitapiisinni Programs*?
- In your experience, what do you feel has been least helpful or beneficial about the *Poo'miikapii and/or Niitsitapiisinni Programs*?
- Is there anything you would like to change about the *Poo'miikapii and/or Niitsitapiisinni Programs*?
- What would you like to see incorporated or added to future offerings of the *Poo'miikapii and/or Niitsitapiisinni Programs* in order to improve the program and/or its benefit to the community?
- How can the *Poo'miikapii and/or Niitsitapiisinni Programs* best contribute to overall wellness initiatives in the community moving forward?