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Impressions and Experiences of Blackfoot Artists Involved in a Community-Led Art Intervention for Student Wellness and Educational Engagement

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by

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Abstract

Since the initiation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, there has been increasing demand for culturally-rooted interventions to support the wellness of Indigenous youth. The context of colonialism in Canada has serious implications for the wellbeing of Indigenous people. To address the source of illness, this study used a decolonizing, community-based approach in both the implementation of an intervention and the study of that intervention. An Indigenous approach was considered throughout the research process to support the centring of Indigenous voices in research. In the present study, the purpose was to gain an understanding of Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) artists' experiences and impressions of an art workshop/intervention as it related to student wellness and educational engagement. For this purpose, an Indigenous storywork method was used to analyze research conversations with Niitsitapi artists who took part in facilitating the art workshop. The findings of this study have practical implications for the integration of art in a pedagogical framework to improve student wellness and educational engagement.

Keywords

Storywork, Indigenous, Community-Based Research, Art Intervention, Anti-Oppression Pedagogy, Decolonization, Culturally-Rooted Intervention, Indigenous Youth, Wellness, Educational Engagement, Blackfoot, Niitsitapi Artists

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Further, I could not have done this research without the support and guidance of my supervisor, Dr. Karlee Fellner, who opened my eyes to the possibilities of Indigenous research. As well, though I have not met him, I must thank Shawn Wilson, the author of *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (2008), for the profound guidance I found in reading his book. Wilson's words and stories made the process of learning about the history of Indigenous people in Canada, an Indigenous paradigm and approaches to research, and the need for such an approach to research possible. Further, I must acknowledge the many authors and researchers who came before me as they provided a foundation I could build upon.

Dedications

To my parents, Mark and Shawna, your support has meant the world to me and I would not be where I am without you. Thank you for always encouraging me to follow my ambitions and for supporting me through each of my academic ventures. Thank you also for allowing me to use your deck for writing when I desperately needed a change of scenery and a breath of fresh air.

To my life partner and partner in crime, Jason, your love and care through the long days and sleepless nights of my graduate studies got me through to the end. Thank you for knowing what I needed before I did and for going through this journey with your hand in mine.

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PROLOGUE: INTRODUCING MYSELF

Relationality is a foundational construct that must be considered when conducting research with Indigenous people (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2016; Wilson, 2008). It is a component of an Indigenous worldview that stresses a value on the role relationships play in forming reality or making meaning. Indeed, relationality dictates that "reality *is* relationships" (Wilson, 2008, p. 73), meaning that, from this perspective, concepts are only understood within the context of relationship. Relationality then requires that I share myself with the readers so that they can better understand the contexts from which I write, and thereby the contents of this thesis (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2016; Wilson, 2008). I am a 26-year-old, white, able-bodied, cis-gender female born and raised in Calgary, Alberta. On my father's side, my family has lived in Alberta since the 1890s. They immigrated as part of a French colony that founded the small town of Beaumont, Alberta. Since then, the French culture and language have been lost among my family members and we all identify only as Anglophone-Canadian. My mother was adopted in the 1960s by an English-Scottish Canadian couple and she too was raised to identify solely as Canadian. Her biological makeup is unknown due to the closed nature of her adoption, and thus any cultural practices that may have been associated with her ethnic background were lost. I myself identify as Canadian, acknowledging that I have European roots.

I consider myself to be non-religious, but I am in touch with my spirituality. I was raised in a non-religious household, though I did attend Catholic school for my primary and secondary school educations. I do not ascribe to a particular religious belief system. My spirituality comes from a sense of connectedness that I have with nature and the people around me. That connectedness keeps me grounded and mindful and has been an important part of my journey through this research project.

I came to this research topic by way of chance and passion. I started my program with another supervisor, who was no longer able to supervise me after I was a year into the program. Left in need of a supervisor, I had to re-evaluate what I wanted to research. I reflected on what was important to me about the previous topic I had planned to focus on, and it became clear to me that my passion was to support marginalized populations, specifically youth. Upon meeting with Dr. Karlee Fellner, the opportunity to focus my research on an intervention that could benefit Indigenous youth came up, and I decided to take this on as my master's thesis. As I went through this process, it began to feel as though this was where I was meant to be, as I could use the privileges I hold in this world to help disseminate the voices of those who have previously been silenced.

My values and beliefs are, and need to be, inherent in this research project. The words on these pages represent my own subjective relationship to the research, and I do not claim it to be anyone else's. It is important to know where I come from and my relationship with the research so that the readers can form a relationship of their own with me and with the research (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2016; Wilson, 2008).

A Reflection to Check My Heart

As a mental health professional who aims to be a registered psychologist in Canada, I believe it is important to conduct research that aims to support non-dominant and oppressed populations in Canada. To do this, it is important to act in a way that builds cultural competence by approaching research through a lens of cultural self-awareness, awareness of participant culture, and cultural sensitivity (Collins & Arthur, 2010a). For me, a pivotal moment in my journey of self-awareness and awareness of others occurred in the first semester of my graduate studies after reading Jason EagleSpeaker's (2014) *UnEducation: A Residential School Graphic*

Novel. This reflection differs from the others that are later shared in this thesis in that it occurred before the process of my thesis began. It demonstrates how I "checked my heart" (Wilson, 2008, p. 60) prior to engaging in research with an Indigenous community. I believe that this reflection demonstrates that my motives are good, which hopefully translates in producing research that is more likely to benefit all those involved (Wilson, 2008). Here, I share my reflection on this piece in its full form. To capture this fully, I have included the art piece through which I shared my voice in *Figure 1*. This reflection was submitted as a course assignment for EDPS 625 at the University of Calgary on October 5, 2016.

Figure 1. Art piece associated with personal reaction/reflection paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of EDPS 625 at the University of Calgary on October 5, 2016.

I will start off by explaining the art piece I am submitting with this reflection paper. This piece is a reaction to Jason EagleSpeaker's graphic novel: UnEducation.

At the centre of attention is an Indigenous woman. Naked - exposed for everyone to see her flaws. With no mouth – no voice to speak up with. She is reaching out for

support and is surrounded by fingers pointed at her. They are blaming her for her reactions to the oppression and genocide of her people. This woman may be inflicted by addiction, maybe she has continued a cycle of abuse, maybe she is unstable and living on the streets. For this people blame her. They ridicule her and they hate her. They do not listen to her and they do not empathize. They look down upon her. This angers me.

Her children are suffering as they have been taken from her. They have been taken due to matters of child welfare. These children now float in "the system". They have been put in foster care, or group homes, or residential treatment centres, where they live and go to school. They didn't want to go. The children love their mother … Now they sit in "the system", away from their family and away from their culture. Sound familiar? I thought so too. This saddens me.

My people, the dominant culture of Caucasian people descendent from Europe, did this. We broke an entire culture. We tore their families apart and we started the cycles of abuse and trauma that are circulating today and will continue to circulate for a long time still. It seems glaringly obvious to me now that cycles of abuse and trauma do not just include abuse, homelessness, addictions and other mental health afflictions. There is a cycle caused by residential schools that causes youth to be raised away from their families and their cultures – never being able to fully form their identities. I am deeply saddened for not seeing this before and not fully acknowledging it in my work with Indigenous youth. For this, I feel guilt.

I still believe that … no child should have to live in unsafe conditions. I just believe it differently now. I used to only see the role a parent plays in creating an unsafe home for their child, but now I see the role history plays as well. Which brings me to the

next part of my art piece: the hand offering support. This is my hand reaching out to the Indigenous woman and making a promise to her. I am promising to take accountability for my own role in perpetuating ignorance that minimized the recognition of oppression that took place in Canada. I am promising to [do what I can to] help heal the wounds of intergenerational trauma while I work with her and her children. I am promising to … help them connect with both family and culture. I am promising to do what I can to help her children end [the] cycle. Finally, I am promising to speak up for her and her people and to take every opportunity to teach others who may not know what I know now. This gives me hope.

I completed this art piece in permanent marker. History is permanent. The way we treat people is permanent. We cannot erase our mistakes. What we can do is add new moments that improve the picture. Add more hands reaching out to overpower those pushing blame. I want to be one of those hands, and I want to encourage others to do so as well. I refuse to remain ignorant. "I didn't know what I didn't know, but now I know and I can't un-know" are words that were spoken in this class that resonated with me strongly. I will be taking these teachings into my future practice as a counsellor. For this I feel proud.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I outline the need for addressing culture in ethical counselling, the need for conducting research that can effectively guide counselling practice, and the need for employing research as a tool for reconciliation with Indigenous communities. The purpose is to provide a rationale for the current study. This rationale is based in my perspective as a researcher and student of counselling psychology. This establishes a base from which the other four chapters are built.

This study took place through the University of Calgary, which is situated on the traditional territories of the Tsuu T'ina, Stoney Nakota, and Blackfoot Nations, including the Kainai, Piikani, Siksika, and Amskapi Piikani Nations. The other researchers involved in this study and I worked in collaboration with members of the local Kainai Nation to support the implementation and evaluation of a cultural art workshop that was held at Tatsikiisapo'p Middle School. Dr. Karlee Fellner, who is Cree/Métis from central Alberta, was the principal investigator of this project and led the collaboration with the Kainai community, specifically Kainai Board of Education (KBE) faculty. *Niitsitapi* (Blackfoot for "real people," the term Blackfoot people use to refer to themselves; C. Williams, personal communication, 2018) artists facilitated this workshop, each of whom (a) shared their medium of art with the youth in their group; (b) guided the youth in learning about that medium of art; and (c) shared stories with the youth on topics such as the importance of self-representation, art as therapy, art as a voice, traditional examples of art in culture, and contemporary Indigenous art politics. Niitsitapi is how Blackfoot people refer to themselves, it means "'real people,' i.e., Indigenous people" (Bastien, 2004, p. 1), thus I use Niitsitapi rather than Blackfoot when referring to the people and community who collaborated on this study. This study is a qualitative exploration of the artists'

impressions, experiences, and feedback regarding the art workshop. Through this research, I sought to centre the voices of Niitsitapi community members, specifically artists, by sharing their perspectives on art's relationship to wellness and to the educational engagement of Indigenous youth.

A Need for Culturally-Rooted Counselling

In the field of applied psychology there have long been guiding *paradigms*, often referred to as the forces of psychology: the first three being psychodynamic, behavioural, and humanistic, respectively (Hunsley & Lee, 2010). A paradigm is "a basic set of beliefs that guides action" (Guba, 1990, p. 17). The *fourth force* in counselling psychology has been described as contextual, systemic, and *multicultural* (Pedersen, 1988, 1989). Multicultural does not, and should not, refer exclusively to race, ethnicity, or cultural practices and ceremonies (Hays, 2008; Moodley, 2007); rather, it refers to "a wide range of identity factors, most commonly: ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, mental and physical ability, socio-economic status, religion, and age" (Arthur & Collins, 2010a, p. 15). The *fifth force* that has arisen in counselling psychology is *social justice* (Ratts, 2009). A social justice approach in counselling highlights a need to advocate on behalf of marginalized populations, empower clients by addressing issues of oppression *with* them, and collaborate with communities (Ratts, 2009). Further, such a perspective requires using "social advocacy and activism as a means to address inequitable social, political, and economic conditions that impede on the academic, career, and personal/social development of individuals, families, and communities" (Ratts, 2009, p. 160).

As the field of psychology and our society continue to shift toward these perspectives that place importance on multiculturalism and social justice, it becomes the responsibility of psychologists to incorporate these perspectives into all aspects of their work, including research

(Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). This approach has been described as *cultural sensitivity* (Arthur & Collins, 2010a; Hays, 2008). Beyond the need for sensitivity is a need for *cultural humility*, defined as "having an interpersonal stance that is other-oriented rather than self-focused, characterized by respect and lack of superiority toward an individual's cultural background and experience" (Hook, Davis, Owen, Worthington, & Utsey, 2013, p. 1). More than a suggestion, cultural humility is a matter of ethical conduct for psychologists in Canada. Indeed, in the *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists* (Canadian Psychological Association [CPA], 2017) cultural sensitivity is considered a crucial matter. To follow ethical principles, psychologists must engage in all professional activities, such as counselling or research, with cultural sensitivity and humility (Hertzsprung & Dobson, 2000; Pettifor, 2010).

Being culturally insensitive or failing to account for culture when designing and developing psychological services may be considered *cultural malpractice* (Arthur and Collins, 2010b; Hall, 1997). Undeniably, there are consequences to recipients of psychological services when those services are not culturally appropriate (Arthur & Collins, 2010b; Hall, 1997; Williams, 2002). Such consequences can include: clients experiencing increased barriers in accessing psychological services; clients receiving inadequate care due to the psychologist's failure to establish a culturally sensitive working alliance; clients receiving services that do not reflect their cultural needs; and clients feeling pressured to acculturate to Western norms in order to receive adequate care (Williams, 2002). Until recently, theories and research in counselling psychology have mostly been based on Western Eurocentric worldviews (American Psychological Association [APA], 2003; Pedersen, 1997), and these continue to be the dominant views represented in practice (Truscott, 2010). This bias often results in a disservice to clients, as many psychologists are unlikely to consider worldviews outside of their own experience and

training, therefore disregarding the worldviews of their clients who do not subscribe to Eurocentric perspectives (Sue, 1977; Sue et al., 1992; Sue & Zane, 1987). This neglect can result in wrongfully marginalizing and pathologizing clients who do not fit into the dominant Anglo-Saxon, heterosexual, male culture (APA, 2003; Arthur & Collins, 2010a, 2010b; Sue et al., 1992).

To support psychologists' work in a way that is culturally sensitive, ethical frameworks provide professionals in the colonial world with a means to integrate their personal values with professional standards, training, and research (Truscott & Crook, 2013). Some experts have argued that ethical systems and guidelines help professionals make culturally sensitive decisions (Truscott & Crook, 2013). Sandra Collins and Nancy Arthur (2010a) developed one such framework for multicultural counselling competency and sensitivity. Collins and Arthur's *Culture-Infused Counselling Competency Framework* is an empirically based framework that addresses ethical considerations for professionals working with clients of non-dominant cultures and with clients whose cultures differ from their own. They advise counsellors to consider three domains: (a) cultural self-awareness; (b) awareness of client culture; and (c) the culturally sensitive working alliance.

To address cultural self-awareness, psychologists can look inward and engage in reflective activities (Collins & Arthur, 2010b). To address awareness of client culture, however, psychologists must look outward and may rely largely on research as a guiding tool for working with clients who differ from themselves culturally (Collins & Arthur, 2010b; Kaplan, 2005; Nathan & Gorman, 2002). Thus, for ethical counselling to take place, research must be conducted that offers guidance for working with non-dominant populations.

Euro-Western ethical frameworks such as that posed by Collins and Arthur (2010a) provide a good starting place for ethical counselling; however, they are ultimately insufficient for work with Indigenous people as they do not address the unique contexts of Indigenous people in Canada (Fellner, 2016; Wilson, 2008). When working with Indigenous people, it is critical to go beyond being just culturally sensitive and toward being *culturally-rooted*, acknowledging and honouring Indigenous people and their worldviews as sources of wisdom and knowledge regarding best practice in intervention and research processes (Fellner, in press). Further, the socio-historical factors that impact Indigenous people, such as colonialism and cultural genocide, must be considered in work with Indigenous people for counselling to be appropriately culturally-rooted (Duran, 2006; Monchalin, 2016).

A Need for Applied, Community-Based Research

Fundamentally, the purpose of research is to gain knowledge and understanding about phenomena (Halseth, Markey, Ryser, & Manson, 2016). Going beyond understanding, in *applied research* investigators are required to consider the practical utility of their studies (Halseth et al., 2016). In the field of psychology, applied research is necessary for guiding practice so that mental health professionals are not left in the dark, guessing what may or may not be helpful starting points for their clients (Kaplan, 2005; Nathan & Gorman, 2002).

There is increasing support for the view that research being conducted should benefit the communities involved in research (Castleden, Morgan, & Lamb, 2012; Greenhalgh, Jackson, Shaw, & Janamian, 2016; Halseth et al., 2016), particularly with Indigenous communities (Smith, 2012). *Community-based research* (CBR) aims to contribute to research that supports, benefits, or makes a difference in the communities where research is conducted by involving those communities throughout the research process (Halseth et al., 2016). CBR involves "a two-

way relationship between – and set of responsibilities for – both researchers and communities" (Halseth et al., 2016, p. 4). Communities inform CBR, and CBR requires community involvement throughout the process (Halseth et al., 2016). CBR can appropriately guide culturally-rooted practice and support professionals in becoming more aware of their clients' cultures (Castleden et al., 2012; Greenhalgh et al., 2016). The question then becomes which communities may stand to benefit most from a partnership in research using CBR.

A Need for Reconciliation

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC; 2015a; 2015b) Calls to Action highlight the need for significant change and support for Indigenous students within schools given the history of colonialism and cultural genocide in Canada. Due to factors associated with colonization and ongoing oppression (TRC, 2015a), Indigenous youth in Canada are statistically at higher risk than the general population to abuse drugs, self-injure, commit suicide, or engage in criminal activity (Corrado, Kuehn, & Margaritescu, 2014; McKenzie, Dell, & Fornssler, 2016; Pollock, Mulay, Valcour, & Jong, 2016). As a note of caution, these statistics should be interpreted carefully given that Indigenous communities vary widely regarding risk, with some communities having little to no incidence of these challenges among youth (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Fortin, Bélanger, Boucher, & Muckle, 2015). Youth that do engage in these high-risk behaviours often do so out of a need to release pain (Dhingra & Ali, 2016; Duran, 2006; Fox, Perez, Cass, Baglivio, & Epps, 2015). This pain can be physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual in nature (Duran, 2006), and can be passed through generations (Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2014; Monchalin, 2016).

Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, Josephine Chase, Jennifer Elkins, and Deborah Altschul (2011) provide an explanation for the ongoing experience of trauma among many

Indigenous people that was originally put forth by Brave Heart (1998). Brave Heart and colleagues (2011) purport that accompanying *historical trauma* – "cumulative emotional and psychological wounding across generations, including the lifespan, which emanates from massive group trauma" (p. 283) – is *historical unresolved grief*: "the profound unsettled bereavement resulting from cumulative devastating losses, compounded by the prohibition and interruption of Indigenous burial practices and ceremonies" (p. 283). In line with the concept of historical trauma is the notion of a *soul wound*, put forward by Eduardo Duran (2006), which he defines as the intergenerational and ancestral wounding caused by colonization that happened in the souls of Indigenous people (Duran, 2006). It is important to address that injury from cultural genocide, oppression, and abuse was not only physical or psychological, but also spiritual (Duran, 2006). From this perspective, the cultural genocide enacted through colonialism led to a collective injury and devastation in the souls of Indigenous people that can be passed through generations.

According to Brave Heart and colleagues (2011), historical unresolved grief is one component of a *historical trauma response* that includes features such as depression, symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, anger, dissociation, poor emotion tolerance, low self-esteem, and the high-risk behaviours discussed earlier (Brave Heart, 1998; 1999; 2003; Whitbeck, Adams, Hoyt, & Chen, 2004). One specific example of pain associated with a historical trauma response that can lead to high-risk behaviours is self-deprecating thoughts (Duran, 2006). Self-deprecating thoughts are associated with *internalized racism* and that are a symptom of a soul wound (Duran, 2006). Internalized racism is a product of oppression (Speight, 2007). It is the feeling of being less-than or inferior to the dominant group, and even hating one's self (Speight, 2007). Furthermore, it can include believing the negative stereotypes about one's self and self-

blaming for being the victim of racism and oppression (Carter, 2007; Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000). Internalized racism is just one component of the soul wound and historical trauma response that highlights a need for reconciliation with Indigenous people in Canada.

Reconciliation with Indigenous people involves all Canadians working toward meaningful change that builds relationships and supports Indigenous people (TRC, 2015c). Duran (2006) and Brave Heart's (1998; 1999; 2003) conceptualizations of trauma have implications for therapeutic interventions with Indigenous people; healing the soul wound and addressing a historical trauma response and historical unresolved grief may be pivotal in supporting Indigenous people (Duran, 2006; Brave Heart et al., 2011). Brave Heart (1998; 1999; 2003) conducted various research studies that support the integration of traditional cultural engagement as well as psychoeducation about genocide, residential schools, and oppression in wellness-focused interventions with Indigenous peoples (Brave Heart et al., 2011). With youth, meaningful change may occur by centering community perspectives and drawing upon Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing in order to advance Indigenous education in a culturally appropriate way (Jackson & Hodge, 2009; Sessions & Lightburn, 2006; Wilson, 2008). Further, centering community perspectives is critical in bringing healing to Indigenous people and communities. This involves focusing on Indigenous student wellness as a preferred goal for Indigenous students, their families, and communities (Sanders & Munford, 2014; Scales & Leffert, 2004; Wilson, 2008). Reconciliation involves culturally-rooted interventions, which are at the heart of the healing process for Indigenous youth (Jackson & Hodge, 2009). Indigenous youth benefit from culturally-rooted interventions in the classroom (Kazina & Swayze, 2009; Stock & Grover, 2013), and creative cultural interventions that utilize art and visual methods (Stewart, Riecken, Scott, Tanaka, & Riecken, 2008; Victor et al., 2008).

Despite some promising research and ongoing calls for interventions that benefit Indigenous youth, many communities and school districts do not have the financial, structural, or human resources to support the implementation of such interventions (Auditor General of Canada, 2018; Langley, Nadeem, Katoaka, Stein, & Jaycox, 2010). Although research done in one Indigenous community can often act as a starting point for supporting other communities (Wilson, 2008), researchers should work with individual Indigenous communities to develop interventions that work to meet their needs within their specific context.

Purpose, Objective, and Research Questions

This research aimed to explore Niitsitapi artists' impressions and experiences of how a community-led intervention involving the implementation of traditional and contemporary cultural and artistic engagement for students addressed the needs of a local Indigenous community, Kainai First Nation. The research was developed in close collaboration with community members at Kainai Board of Education. I am hopeful that the findings of this community-based project will play a role in informing the integration of culturally-rooted art interventions in schools, specifically KBE, and may further add to the body of research that informs counselling practice. Ultimately, this integration may further the process of reconciliation in Canada through increasing community-based approaches in the classroom.

This study aims to prioritize Indigenous voices, which produces community-based research with a *decolonizing* aim (Smith, 2012). Ultimately, this research focus is a small step toward self-determination, development, recovery, and survival through healing, decolonization, transformation, and mobilization (Smith, 2012). Decolonization is the empowerment of Indigenous thought and freeing of Indigenous peoples from the constraints of a Western worldview (Braun, Browne, Ka'opua, Kim, & Mokuau, 2014; Smith, 2012). In the context of

this research, decolonization entails taking a community-based approach to incorporate Indigenous worldviews and knowledges and to center community voices throughout this research process by following methods for decolonizing that I discuss in greater detail in chapter two, such as: (a) being aware of self and other; (b) addressing multiple ways of knowing; (c) centring Indigenous voices; (d) incorporating a community-based Indigenous paradigm; and (e) bringing the soul back into psychology.

Since it is impossible for research to be acultural (Arzubiaga, Artiles, King, & Harris, Murri, 2008; Meyer, 2001; Wilson 2008), this research is culturally-based, and is therefore rooted in community-based ways of doing, being, and knowing. As a non-Indigenous researcher, the guiding principle of *two-eyed seeing* proved to be helpful when navigating the integration of Indigenous knowledge throughout this research process. Albert Marshall, an Indigenous Elder from the Mi'kmaw Nation, first presented the concept of two-eyed seeing in 2004 (Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2012). Two-eyed seeing is the process of learning to use one eye to view the strengths of Western ways of knowing, and the other to see those of Indigenous knowledges, then using both eyes for the prosperity of all (Bartlett et al., 2012). For me, this process of learning began with my interactions with the Kainai First Nation community, was built upon through active engagement with literature on Indigenous knowledges, and will continue to grow and change as my lifelong journey of learning continues (Bartlett et al., 2012).

For this research, I used the CBR approach (Halseth et al., 2016) to explore the perspectives of Niitsitapi artists who supported the implementation of an art workshop for youth at Tatsikiisaapo'p Middle School. This research aims to centre the voices of Indigenous artists in order to inform the ongoing development and implementation of cultural interventions in the classroom emerging from community-based ways of knowing, being, and doing. Findings will

also be compiled and synthesized with similar ongoing research projects to articulate a framework that Kainai and other Indigenous communities may use. The following questions guided this research:

(1) How does engagement in traditional and contemporary Niitsitapi culture and art benefit Niitsitapi students?

(2) How do Niitsitapi artists experience participation in traditional and contemporary Niitsitapi cultural and artistic engagement as a means to address student wellness and educational engagement?

(3) How can traditional and contemporary Niitsitapi cultural and artistic engagement be included in pedagogy and curriculum to better serve Niitsitapi students?

Organization of This Thesis

This introduction provided a brief rationale for conducting community-based research with Indigenous communities to work toward reconciliation and to provide guidance for culturally-rooted interventions in Indigenous communities. This rationale is based in what I learned in my master's coursework, as this is what informed my initial rationale to pursue this research project. Thus, these sources are primarily Euro Western. However, once this research began, it became clear that it was necessary to look beyond the field of psychology and consider Indigenous sources. Therefore, the remaining chapters build on this initial rationale and utilize sources that address Indigenous approaches to community-based research. The following chapters include: (1) a literature review that provides context for this research; (2) a methodology and design section that explains the processes and procedures that occurred throughout the research project; (3) the findings of this study; and (4) a discussion of these findings and their implications.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this review of the literature, I aim to orient the reader to the relevant context of the study. First, I explain the choice of terminology used. Second, I share the relevant historical context of Indigenous people in Canada. Third, I outline the necessary actions required for decolonization. And fourth, I explain the current needs of the Kainai First Nations, as Indigenous peoples in Canada overall. This review provides a rationale for the methodology and design used in this study, emphasizing the importance of decolonizing interventions and approaches to research.

Defining "Indigenous"

The term *Indigenous* is used to describe all first people who are originating from or native to the land they inhabit (Duran, 2006). This is inclusive of the Canadian terms for different groups of Indigenous people: Métis, Inuit, and First Nations, as well as such groups outside of Canada (Indigenous Services Canada [ISC], 2018). While these groups are very diverse, using the term Indigenous recognizes shared experiences of colonization, genocide, and trauma, as well as a shared relationship to the land (TRC, 2015c). Further, this is an appropriate term to encompass a way of knowing that is common amongst Indigenous people (King, 2003), which I describe further in chapter three under the section of this paper on integrating Indigenous approaches to research. Thus, while I conducted this research with the Kainai First Nation within the Blackfoot confederacy, the focus on wellness and educational engagement is relevant to all Indigenous peoples, as these are areas of concern caused by colonization (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health [NCCAH], 2013). Eduardo Duran (2006) states that:

> regardless of the colonial identity given in a name, there is a unifying thread of identity for Original People all over the world and these different names have been used as a

> divisive tool of oppression. Most Native People prefer to call themselves 'Human Beings' (p. 11).

"Human being" may appropriately describe Indigenous people, acknowledging that all people share similarities in basic biology and have been involved in colonization in some way (Duran, 2006; TRC, 2015c). However, shared ways of knowing and experiences of colonization, cultural genocide and trauma are better encompassed by the term Indigenous, as not all human beings share these (King, 2003; TRC, 2015c). Indigenous communities are diverse, and each has its own individual differences in values and belief systems, and it would be ideal to use the people's names for themselves to acknowledge this (Wilson, 2008). Therefore, I refer to the community I worked with as Kainai First Nation and the people as Niitsitapi (Blackfoot for "real people;" C. Williams, personal communication, 2018) to acknowledge the specific people that collaborated on this project and the knowledge they shared. I then use Indigenous when discussing shared experiences that are common among many Indigenous communities in Canada.

Locating the Current Research in the Context of History

Beyond what Collins and Arthur (2010b) have suggested regarding awareness of a client's culture, it is also important to focus on socio-historical factors that impact Indigenous people (Duran, 2006). For research to be relevant and beneficial, researchers must orient themselves in the context of history while also utilizing all of their training (Duran, 2006). To meet this requirement of conducting culturally competent research, I review a brief history of colonization and of the research done on, with, and by Indigenous people.

Colonization

Indigenous people across Canada have a shared history of colonialization by Europeans (Duran, 2006; Monchalin, 2016). In 1497, a European voyager, John Cabot, travelled to what

some Indigenous groups refer to as “Turtle Island”, now commonly known as North America, arriving in what is now called Newfoundland (Monchalin, 2016; Williams, 1992; Wilson, 2008). European settlers then followed suit and brought with them ethnocentric ways of being, doing, and knowing, which included their power structures (Monchalin, 2016; Williams, 1992; Wilson, 2008). European thinking privileged Westerners as the dominant group with a right to rule and dominate over others (Kovach, 2009). In fact, legal documentation dictated that Europeans had the right to dominate any non-Christian people (Williams, 1992). This way of thinking provided a justification for violent colonization (Miller, 2005; Williams, 1992).

Upon their arrival to Canada, Europeans declared the land *terra nullius*, unoccupied territory (Asch, 2002). Indigenous people were de-humanized and viewed with indifference as colonization began (Monchalin, 2016; Wilson, 2008). As European settlers colonized Canada, they viewed Indigenous people as pests who interfered with settlers’ development of the land (Coombs, 1994; Miller, 2005; Wilson, 2008). Europeans then put policies in place which would “eliminate Aboriginal governments; ignore Aboriginal rights; terminate the Treaties; and, through a process of assimilation, cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada” (TRC, 2015c, p. 3). This process in Canadian history was *cultural genocide*, the shattering of culture, systems, and self-determination of Indigenous people (TRC, 2015c; Monchalin, 2016). European colonizers denied Indigenous people human rights to vote, engage in their own spiritual practices, speak their own languages, leave the reserves that they had been forced to live in, and raise their own children (TRC, 2015c). This was enforced by laws that made it illegal for Indigenous people to engage in their own cultural practices and spiritualities (TRC, 2015c). As well, Indigenous children were forcibly taken from their homes and made to attend Indian Residential Schools

(IRS) where many youths were physically, socially, emotionally, spiritually, sexually, and mentally abused by the school faculty and religious leaders (EagleSpeaker, 2014; TRC, 2015c). The purpose of residential schools was explicitly to "kill the Indian in the child" (Young, 2015, p. 65). Thus, education was a primary tool of colonial violence and oppression, making education a critical area for decolonizing and community-driven change (TRC, 2015b).

The effects of colonization in Canada are widespread and long-lasting (TRC, 2015a, 2015c). Colonialism persists in Canada via *systemic racism* and *intergenerational trauma* (Monchalin, 2016). Systemic racism is the unequal distribution of resources and power in society due to ethnocentric norms, laws, and rules (Henry, Tator, Mattis, & Rees, 2000; Monchalin, 2016). Currently, the Canadian systems of government, education, and social policy remain woven with colonial thought, placing Indigenous people in a disadvantageous position in society (Monchalin, 2016). Intergenerational trauma is cumulative trauma that is passed through generations (Bombay et al., 2014), a process that an extensive body of research has substantiated (e.g., Bombay et al., 2014; Thoits, 2010; Walters et al., 2011). The acts of violence, oppression, and cultural genocide enacted through colonization have led to this complex, collective trauma that continues to affect Indigenous people and communities (EagleSpeaker, 2014; TRC, 2015c). Importantly, colonialism and its associated trauma also continue to directly impact communities through the ongoing occupation of Indigenous lands.

Eduardo Duran (2006) affirms that the mental health profession has perpetuated colonial trauma with its treatment of Indigenous people. He argues that mental health professionals hold a degree of power and social control; they influence the labels put on people and dictate what is pathological. Further, he purports that these professionals have inappropriately pathologized and diagnosed Indigenous clients, an approach that does not fit with Indigenous worldviews.

According to Arthur and Collins (2010b), this is cultural incompetence, which many people consider cultural malpractice or an act of violence against the client (Duran, 2006; Hall, 1997). Given that colonialism persists in current Canadian society, the role of mental health professionals in that colonization, and the calls to action required by the TRC (2015a; 2015b; 2015c), it is important for mental health professionals to take action toward reconciliation and advocate for change in how Indigenous people should be supported in Canadian society. One medium for advocating for such change is research (Castleden et al., 2012; Greenhalgh et al., 2016; Halseth et al., 2016; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008).

Research Done On, With, and By Indigenous People

Indigenous people might be the most studied in the world (Rigney 1999; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). However, much research with Indigenous peoples has been harmful in both process and content. In relation to Indigenous peoples, the word "research" is often associated with being mistreated, misrepresented, unheard, and uncared about (Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). Within Canada, an outsider, Western-European vantage point has dominated most research done *on* Indigenous people (Smith, 2012). Non-Indigenous people became "experts" on Indigenous culture, disregarding the expertise of Indigenous people themselves (Smith, 2012).

Early on in colonization, in the terra nullius phase, Colonizing Europeans disregarded Indigenous people, seeing them as pests and as less than human (Monchalin, 2016; Wilson, 2008). When formal research on Indigenous people started in the early 1900s, it was conducted without their consent, and aimed to prove their humanity or inhumanity (Beckett, 1994; Wilson, 2008). Their intelligence was tested in a way that disregarded cultural context and lacked respect for local authorities (Darou, Hum, & Kurtness, 1993). Research was designed to justify the power hierarchy of Europeans over Indigenous people and to support the poor treatment of

Indigenous people (Wilson, 2008), who were viewed as three things: “the Noble Savage, the Civilizable Savage and the Blood-thirsty Savage” (Green, 1993, p. 323). Toward the middle of the twentieth century, non-Indigenous researchers and academics positioned themselves as the experts on Indigenous people’s social structures and lifeways (Beckett, 1994).

Research done by these non-Indigenous “experts” focused on the negatively framed problems and circumstances experienced by Indigenous people, such as violence, substance abuse, and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, further fueling the argument that Indigenous peoples were lesser than Western-Europeans (Beckett, 1994; Wilson, 2008). This supported the idea that Indigenous people required Western intervention and government control to “fix” their problems (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP], 1996), without regard to how these very interventions led to such problems to begin with. This research was used to further support acts of cultural genocide against Indigenous people in Canada. Fournier and Crey (1997) contested that this research provided a rationalization for assimilating Indigenous children into Western society by framing the removal of Indigenous children from their homes with the objective of “kill[ing] the Indian in the child” (Young, 2015, p. 65) as a solution to “the Indian problem” (RCAP, 1996, p. 173).

It is clear that research was historically used as a tool for social control. Indigenous people did not ask for or want this research, and they were viewed as objects to be studied rather than as active participants (Duran, 2006; Monchalin, 2016; Wilson, 2008). Additionally, research compared the risk behaviours of Indigenous people to non-Indigenous people, automatically ranking non-Indigenous above Indigenous (Novins et al., 1997). This led to a superficial, problem-saturated understanding that was claimed to be full understanding, which effectively pathologized entire communities (Duran, 2006; Novins et al., 1997; Wilson, 2008). This poor

research has lead to poor or inappropriate care, as by disregarding the perspectives of Indigenous people, the mark is missed entirely in therapeutic practice (Arthur and Collins, 2010b; Duran, 2006). As was discussed earlier, forcing a Western perspective on an Indigenous client is a form of violence that can lead to internalized racism and oppression (Arthur and Collins, 2010b; Carter, 2007; Hall, 1997 Speight, 2007; Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000).

Research becomes more useful in appropriately guiding practitioners when those being addressed in the research are involved in conducting it, becoming research *with* and *by*, not *on* participants (Rigney 1999; Steinhauer 2002). Since the latter end of the twentieth century, this approach has become more prevalent, along with an increase in Indigenous scholars conducting their own research (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). Some Western research paradigms have been helpful in moving toward positive research being done with and by Indigenous persons. For example, feminist and relational psychologies can be adapted to suit Indigenous perspectives (Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008), and participatory action research can defer to the voices of Indigenous participants to guide the research process (Ball & Janyst, 2008; Flicker et al., 2014; Lavallee & Poole, 2009; Victor et al., 2016). Wilson (2008) reported that it wasn't until the late 1990s to early 2000s that collaborative research was considered, and that Indigenous voices were desired in research. Further, he said that there is now a demand for research involving Indigenous people to effectively include the worldviews and voices of those people.

Therapeutic practice is rooted in research (Duran, 2006). To guide appropriate treatment, it is paramount that research should focus on supporting interventions that are relevant to the population at hand (Duran, 2006). According to Eduardo Duran (2006), the perspective of many Indigenous people is that the traumas that occurred due to colonization happened in the soul or in

the spirit; therefore, relevant interventions might focus on "heal[ing] the 'soul wound'" (p.7). To adequately address this need, research must come from Indigenous or decolonized perspectives (Duran, 2006; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). Importantly, relevant interventions must emerge through Indigenous voices, as their "communities know what [they] need to heal" (Fellner, 2016, p. 320). The purpose of such research is to raise awareness: "By raising awareness of the healing process, we will empower individuals and communities to obtain long overdue social justice and healing" (Duran, 2006, p. 10). This consciousness raising begins with decolonizing research such that it is with, by, and for Indigenous people (Duran, 2006; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008).

A Reflection to Acknowledge My Role in Research

Researchers working with Indigenous communities should not allow themselves to hide behind their positions of power (Duran, 2006). Researchers who hold privilege, and thus power, should use it to speak up (Duran, 2006; Hays, 2008; McIntosh, 2006). As a white person of Western-European descent, finding my place in community-based Indigenous research has been a tricky process. I was raised in a typical colonial Canadian education system, which certainly impacted the shaping of my own worldviews. As a graduate student at the University of Calgary, I have been exposed to theories and concepts that continue to shape this worldview. I take a *constructionist* perspective of the world, which is the belief that knowledge is subjective, and people use language to define themselves through interaction with others and the world around them (Anderson & Burney, 1996; Anderson & Goolishian, 1988). As well, I believe that our social and family systems play a large role in the formation of our personal constructs or worldviews (Anderson, 2000; Bertalanffy, 1975).

Through my experience, I have constructed a worldview that places great importance on a need for ally-ship and advocacy. I believe that it is my responsibility as a person with many unearned privileges to share that privilege with groups who, at no fault of their own, have been oppressed (Arthur & Collins, 2010b; Hays, 2008; McIntosh, 2006). To me, this is my role in decolonizing research: to be a catalyst for the voices of those less heard. To do this, I must undergo a decolonization process myself so that I might better understand the needs of an Indigenous community from their perspective (Wilson, 2008). This is an ongoing journey that I have only just begun. Thus, the perspectives shared in this paper are only representative of this point in time, as my own worldviews and understanding of Indigenous worldviews will continue to change as this journey progresses (Anderson & Burney, 1996).

Decolonizing Methods for Reconciliation

On the topic of decolonizing research, Indigenous scholars first used Western frameworks to conduct their research, fearing marginalization if they opted for Indigenous paradigms (Urion, 1999). Indigenous scholars then moved toward decolonizing Western methodologies (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012), where existing Western methods were adjusted to fit Indigenous paradigms. Finally, Indigenous paradigms were encouraged for Indigenous people to articulate their own methods in their own contexts (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). The latter two approaches continue to be emphasized today (e.g., Fellner, 2016; Henderson et al., 2018; Lucero et al., 2018) and require the researcher to address multiple factors in the process of decolonizing. Eduardo Duran (2006), Shawn Wilson (2008), Margaret Kovach (2009), and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) are among the notable and respected Indigenous authors who have provided guidelines for working with Indigenous populations in a decolonizing way. The methods for decolonization outlined in this paper are based on their contributions. Such methods

include: (a) being aware of self and other; (b) addressing epistemological hybridism; (c) centring Indigenous voices; (d) incorporating a community-based Indigenous paradigm; and (e) bringing the soul back into psychology.

Being Aware of Self and Other

As was established earlier, Indigenous people have historically been misrepresented in research; they have at different times been portrayed as less than human, as the noble savage, and as the lazy drunk, all damaging misrepresentations (Beauvais, 1998; Walter, 2006). The internalization of such oppressive labels can lead to Indigenous people holding impossibly high expectations of themselves to be wise spiritual healers (Wilson, 2008), or to believing that they will never amount to anything (Harding, 2006). This is in part a result of Indigenous people being the objects of research and observation that was done without input from or an awareness of Indigenous people or culture (Duran, 2006; Wilson, 2008). To remedy this, researchers and mental health practitioners must be aware of the cultures of the populations they work with (Collins & Arthur 2010b; Hays, 2008; Sue et al., 1992). Culture plays a significant role in determining helpful counselling interventions and research methodologies (Bernal, Jiménez-Chafey, & Domenech Rodríguez, 2009). When professionals working with cultural groups that are unlike their own make an effort to understand their clients' or participants' worldviews, they are more likely to produce work that is meaningful and helpful for their clients (Bernal et al., 2009; Jones, Begay, Nakagawa, Cevasco, & Sit, 2015).

A researcher must also reflect on their own history and be aware of how their behaviours are connected to the portrayal of the communities they work with (Collins & Arthur, 2010b; Duran, 2006). It is important that they understand themselves and the groups they are working with to avoid projecting their own worldviews and feelings onto the participants, contributing to

oppression (Fowers & Davidov, 2006). Thus, for research to benefit and be meaningful for the community it is being done with (Halseth et al, 2016), researchers must be aware of their own cultures if only because the process of gathering and sharing knowledge is impacted by the subjective views of the researcher (Arzubiaga et al., 2008; Meyer, 2001). To be self-aware and understand how their cultural and historical contexts have influenced their worldviews, a researcher should explore their own culture, the role they have played in history, and the role they can now play moving forward (Collins & Arthur, 2010b; Duran, 2006). Cultural self-awareness is required for a researcher to engage in *epistemological hybridism* (Collins & Arthur, 2010b; Duran, 2006; Fowers & Davidov, 2006), a term that is discussed as its own method for decolonization after the following brief reflection on awareness.

A reflection on awareness. My reflection of awareness of self and other that was executed in this research process is demonstrated throughout this paper. My increasing awareness has unfolded as a journey over the course of this project and thus new awareness is shared and becomes clearer throughout multiple sections of this paper. That said, I am a novice in this field of research, and have much yet to learn. This thesis is written from my current perspectives and understandings as a Eurosettler researcher striving to be an ally to Indigenous communities. These perspectives and understandings will likely shift as I continue to learn through my experiences and relationships with future clients and communities I work with. Thus, I will continue developing my awareness beyond this paper, and work to do my best with my current understandings in the meantime.

Addressing Epistemological Hybridism

Duran (2006) defined epistemological hybridism as the capacity to think or see truth from multiple perspectives. In the context of conducting research, this concept dictates that no idea or

way of thinking should be categorized as better than another (Duran, 2006). In fact, "epistemological hybridism takes the actual life-world of the person or group as the core truth that needs to be seen as valid just because it is" (Duran, 2006, p 14). This perspective is required in the process of decolonization as it demands equal value be placed on different ways of knowing, thus empowering Indigenous voices (Braun et al., 2014; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). The guiding principle of two-eyed seeing I defined in chapter one of this thesis is an example of epistemological hybridism, as it encourages academics to consider both Indigenous and Western perspectives, specifically when working with Indigenous communities (Bartlett et al., 2012).

A reflection on balancing academic requirements. Duran (2006) contended that epistemological hybridism removes the need to justify non-dominant ways of knowing in research. He argued that to be required to justify an Indigenous way of knowing or doing was alienating and was even a form of neo-colonization. This concept invoked an internal struggle in my research journey. I agreed fully with this notion, yet knew that I would not be understood if I did not provide an explanation for the perspective I was sharing in my thesis. Academia requires a degree of conformity that is based in a colonial way of knowing (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2016). I respect this way of knowing as much as Indigenous ways, but to fully take on the perspective of both is a seemingly impossible task. However, what I can do is integrate the applicable strengths from each perspective (Bartlett et al., 2012). Per academic requirements, I have justified a need for decolonizing and for incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing and doing into this thesis. I see providing such a justification as a strength of mainstream knowledge, as it allows the reader to better understand the context of the research and where the present study fits in the existing body of knowledge. For this study, a significant strength of drawing from Indigenous knowledge throughout the process is that it allows me as a non-Indigenous researcher to better present this

topic in a way that is beneficial to the community. This allows me to present a decolonizing community-based paradigm that integrates Indigenous approaches as a truth that was considered and referred to throughout this research process. This study represents my understanding of and capacity to enact two-eyed seeing as I am in this moment; however, to master such a skill is a lifelong learning journey that may not have an end-point to learning (Bartlett et al., 2012).

Centring Indigenous Voices

Indigenous people have been and continue to be marginalized and oppressed as a result of colonization, their voices ignored and characterized as inferior (Battiste, 2000; Monchalin, 2016; TRC, 2015c). "The voices of these victims of empire once predominantly silenced in the social sciences, have been not only resisting colonization in thought and actions but also attempting to restore Indigenous knowledge and heritage" (Batiste, 2000, p. xvi). To grow toward healing, Indigenous voice needs to be at the centre of the research done with Indigenous people (Jackson & Hodge, 2009; Sessions & Lightburn, 2006; Wilson, 2008). For research to be useful, Indigenous people need to want the research and need to choose what should be studied, as well as what should be shared (Wilson, 2008). Indigenous voice needs to be visible in the methodology chosen and the worldviews that are reflected in the research (Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). Research highlights the wellness benefits of centering Indigenous youths' voices. For example, Flicker and colleagues (2014) found that by centering their voices through art, Indigenous youth felt empowered and built self-esteem. In conclusion, research can be decolonizing and even empowering when the voices of Indigenous people are made present throughout each step of the research process.

Incorporating a Community-Based Indigenous Paradigm

Doing research with and for Indigenous people requires that I have an open mind to worldviews that are unlike my own (Duran, 2006). Some scholars, such as Linda Smith (2012) have provided supportive guidelines for how existing methodologies might be decolonized. Others such as Shawn Wilson (2008) and Margaret Kovach (2009) have suggested that conducting this research should not require researchers to decolonize Western methodologies to force a fit with an Indigenous paradigm, but rather, research should begin with an Indigenous paradigm that informs the methodology. Wilson (2008) stated:

> Indigenous people have come to realize that beyond control over the topic chosen for the study, the research methodology needs to incorporate their cosmology, worldview, epistemology and ethical beliefs. An Indigenous research paradigm needs to be followed through all stages of research (p. 15).

As a non-Indigenous researcher, I cannot necessarily implement an Indigenous research paradigm; however, I can engage in epistemological hybridism to enact a community-based paradigm that centres the ways of knowing, being, and doing of community members to the greatest extent possible. An Indigenous research paradigm and the Indigenous research approaches that I used are explained in chapter three of this paper.

Bringing the Soul Back into Psychology

Although modern psychology is defined as "the science of behaviour and mental processes" (Lefton, Brannon, Boyes, & Ogden, 2008, p. 4), psychology quite literally means "soul science" or "study of the soul" (Rank, 1996). This interpretation of psychology is overshadowed in Western psychological practice by a focus on pathology and diagnosis (Senier, 2013). However, the concept of a soul wound and a need for healing that wound is present in an

Indigenous worldview (Duran, 2006). Injuries caused by the violence spread from intergenerational trauma hit physical, psychological and spiritual aspects of the impacted persons (Bombay et al., 2014; Duran, 2006). Indeed, from an Indigenous perspective, knowledge is not only attained through traditional science; research involves the senses, culture, and spirit as well (Steinhauer, 2002; Wilson, 2008*)*. To not acknowledge this need when working or conducting research with Indigenous persons, or to focus only on cognitive processes, would be unethical and culturally incompetent (Arthur & Collins, 2010b; Duran, 2016). Further, research has shown that spirituality positively influences wellbeing and life satisfaction and is correlated with lower rates of risk behaviour (Brawer, Handal, Fabricatore, Roberts, & Wajda-Johnston, 2002; Fallot, 2001). There is research that supports the integration of spirituality in counselling because of these benefits (Plumb, 2011), thus it is reasonable to expect that similar benefits may be true in a research setting.

A reflection on soul. Eduardo Duran (2006) argues that to appropriately utilize an Indigenous paradigm or to combine Western with Indigenous models, one must engage in spiritual practice. Duran explains that the methods of an Indigenous approach to research are "part of a holistic approach to being in the life-world" (p. 2). Thus, regular engagement with the spiritual part of one's life is a necessary component of implementing culturally-sensitive research (Arthur & Collins, 2010b; Duran, 2006). As I shared in my introduction, I am in touch with my own spiritual practices. The process of engaging with the Kainai community throughout this project has brought me closer to my spirituality and reminded me of the importance of this aspect of my life. Through each phase of this study, I have engaged in activities that help me acknowledge my soul and focus on my spiritual connections, some of which included spending

time in nature, doing yoga and meditation, and participating in traditional Indigenous ceremonies. I return to speaking about these in later reflections.

From Decolonizing Methods to Action in Research

To integrate the integral factors necessary for decolonization, it is important to implement a suitable research methodology that supports the use of each of these methods for decolonizing (Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). One such methodology is outlined in community-based research (CBR; Halseth et al., 2016). CBR requires researchers to consider how they can meet the needs of the communities they work with (Halseth et al., 2016). The TRC (2015a; 2015b; 2015c) is an excellent example of a large-scale CBR project that demonstrates how CBR can be used for the purpose of decolonization. The TRC is an initiative that gathered statements of Indigenous people who had attended IRS's as well as others who felt they had been affected by them (TRC, n.d.). Over 6,200 statements were collected and informed the actions taken by the TRC (TRC, n.d.). This led to the TRC taking action toward reconciliation by acknowledging Indigenous peoples' experiences of IRS's, promoting awareness of the impacts of IRS's, and developing a report with recommendations for further reconciliation (TRC, n.d.).

Meeting the Needs of the Community

Given the context of colonialism, wellness is an ongoing concern for Indigenous communities in Canada (ISC, 2018). Wellness refers not only to physical health, but also includes mental, emotional, and spiritual balance (ISC, 2018). Compared to the general population, Indigenous communities experience considerably higher rates of chronic disease (ISC, 2018) as well as mental, emotional, and spiritual concerns such as addiction, mental illness, abuse, and criminal behaviour (Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2011; Corrado et al., 2014; Pollock et al., 2016). This discrepancy can only be understood by considering the specific

determinants that impact Indigenous people (ISC, 2018). It is important to note that colonialism, including historical conditions and ongoing oppression, are among the factors that contribute to health inequities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada (NCCAH, 2013). For example, research demonstrates that residential schools continue to have long-lasting and intergenerational consequences, including poorer health of survivors as well as their children and grandchildren (Wilk, Maltby, & Cooke, 2017). Specifically, residential schools and other aspects of colonialism have caused higher rates of chronic disease, emotional distress, poverty, depression, suicidality, stress, and addiction among Indigenous people (Wilk et al., 2017).

Residential schools have also directly impacted Indigenous peoples' engagement in education. Educational engagement, in the form of *lifelong learning*, is yet another determinant of Indigenous peoples' health. Lifelong learning "encompasses formal education and traditional knowledge into one concept, providing knowledge as well as social support systems and self-esteem opportunities promoting healthy individuals and communities" (NCCAH, 2013, p. 17). Not engaging in the formal education portion of lifelong learning is connected to poor mental health, criminal activity, violence, unsafe sexual activity, and drug use (Kearney & Albano, 2004; Reid, 2005; Suss, Tinkelman, Freeman, & Friedman, 1996; Wang & Fredricks, 2014). Additionally, there can be long-term consequences of a lack of educational engagement that impact wellness, such as dropping out of school, unemployment, and low socio-economic status (Gilmore, 2010; Henry, Knight, & Thornberry, 2012; Wang & Fredricks, 2014). Although educational engagement and attainment is increasing, approximately 34.8% of Indigenous adults have not completed high school education, compared to 11.5% of the general population (First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2018). Again, such discrepancy can only be understood in the context of colonialism, as lower educational engagement of Indigenous people is strongly

linked to the long-term impact that historical policies, legislation, and residential schools have had on Indigenous people's physical and mental well-being (Wilk et al., 2017), as well as the continued imposition of assimilative Western Euro-settler curricula and pedagogies in conventional education (TRC, 2015a).

Schools are ultimately failing to meet the needs of Indigenous students (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). There are biases in school curricula that leave Indigenous students at a disadvantage because of their cultural values. For example, while many Indigenous students often value silence as a way of showing respect, they are misunderstood as being withdrawn, impacting how their teachers approach them (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). Further, Indigenous cultures often hold more value for collaboration than competition, again having implications for Indigenous students in the competitive environment of Western education systems (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008).

One means of addressing issues with the educational system is incorporating traditional knowledge into formal education to increase the relevance of curriculum and pedagogy to Indigenous students, in turn increasing educational engagement, and ultimately, wellbeing (Dion, 2009; NCCAH, 2013; Savage et al., 2011). Research has shown that meaningful change toward wellness may occur by drawing upon Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing in order to advance Indigenous education in a culturally appropriate way (Anuik & Gillies, 2012; Dion, 2009; Rakena, Airini, & Brown, 2016; Savage et al., 2011; Stock & Grover, 2013). To address educational engagement and the overall wellness of Indigenous people, it is essential to focus efforts on culturally-rooted interventions with Indigenous youth in the classroom (McIntosh, Mathews, Gietz, MacKay, & Pelser, 2011; McIntosh, Moniz, Craft, Golby, & Steinwand-Deschambeault, 2014). Research on this point is limited; however, culture has been identified as

a foundational component of wellness and a vital step in healing by Indigenous stakeholders (ISC, 2018), and such interventions are at the heart of the healing process for Indigenous youth (Jackson & Hodge, 2009).

By promoting Indigenous student wellness and identifying the inherent strengths of youth, the implementation of culturally-rooted interventions may have a critical, positive impact on Indigenous students' experiences in school, and may address trauma and other concerns related to wellness (Fellner, 2016; McMahon, Kenyon, & Carter, 2012; Waldram, 2008). Given the needs of the wider Indigenous community and the need for interventions to be culturally-rooted and target youth, research should focus on interventions that meet these needs. Interventions that utilize a strengths-based approach (Heinz, 2013; Lavie-Ajayi & Krumer-Nevo, 2013; Sanders & Munford, 2014) and focus on the use of Indigenous expressions of culture such as the arts (ISC, 2018) might appropriately meet these needs and thus warrant further exploration.

A Reflection on Community Needs

As mentioned in chapter one of this paper, Indigenous communities vary widely in strengths and needs. Thus, while considering existing research is important, it is critical to explore the specific needs of particular communities. In the process of identifying community needs in Kainai, Dr. Fellner and Amskapi Piikani artist Lauren Monroe Jr. collaborated with community members, including a Council of *Aawaahskataiksi* – Elders and knowledge holders – and leaders from KBE. Together, this collective determined that youth in Kainai could benefit from culturally-rooted interventions that focused on and contributed to the strengths and skills of the youth. The decision of the community guided the research, and community collaboration

defined each step of the research process. To further support the need for strengths-based approaches and arts-based interventions, I next share some of the literature on these.

A Focus on Strengths

A lot of the research that has explored the risk behaviours of youth has been focused on deficits and has framed these deficits as personal attributes of youth, thus characterizing at-risk youth as problems that needed to be solved (Case, 2006; Lavie-Ajayi & Krumer-Nevo, 2013; McMahon et al., 2012). Strengths-based approaches provide an alternative to this perspective, instead understanding youth who engage in risk behaviours in the context of marginalization and oppression (Lavie-Ajayi & Krumer-Nevo, 2013; McMahon et al., 2012), and viewing all youth as having potential for growth when faced with challenges (Sanders & Munford, 2014). Approaching research from a strengths-based perspective has proven to be valuable as it is supporting the development of a variety of resources that can be applied to help youth grow and move toward wellness (Sanders & Munford, 2014).

Adjusting educational paradigms to cultivate the strengths of Indigenous youth rather than fixating on their deficits is both empirically and culturally supported (Anuik & Gillies, 2012; Rakena et al., 2016; Zhao, 2016). Research has found that youth with more developmental assets or strengths engage in school more regularly (Sanderson, Hutchinson, & Grekul, 2013). Thus, a strengths-based approach that focuses on building such assets is at the core of increasing student engagement. Cultural engagement has been found to be a significant source of strength for Indigenous youth that warrants more focus in research (McMahon et al., 2012).

Positive Youth Development is a strengths-based guiding framework built from empirical evidence that purports five key principles to achieving wellness: (a) a focus on strengths of youth as opposed to deficits; (b) skill building; (c) a focus on wellness as opposed to illness;

(d) positive and healthy relationships; and (e) supportive environments (Heinz, 2013; Lavie-Ajayi & Krumer-Nevo, 2013; Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005; Sanders & Munford, 2014; Scales & Leffert, 2004). This framework supports the idea that rather than focusing on deficits, interventions and research should focus on strengths and wellness, so both the intervention and research process in this study were oriented in the principles of this framework.

Art as a Decolonizing Intervention

There has been research done that demonstrates the importance of cultural expression and engagement for Indigenous people. For example, McMahon, Kenyon, and Carter (2012) conducted a study in which 95 reservation-based Indigenous youth were surveyed to determine their strengths and challenges. They found that culture was a source of strength for Indigenous youth. Further, McKenzie and colleagues (2016) reviewed recent research related to addictions impacting Indigenous people and found a theme in the research suggesting that cultural engagement was a positive determinant of health that improved wellness. Contrary to broad statistics of Indigenous people in Canada, there are numerous Indigenous communities that have greater indicators of wellness than the general population, for example, some largely abstaining from alcohol or being virtually free of suicide (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Fortin et al., 2015). Wellness in these communities is associated with the degree to which communities engaged in community or cultural practices (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998). Duran (2006) contends that the success of cultural engagement in improving Indigenous wellness is due to its connection to healing the soul wound.

Culturally-based artistic expression and the process of creating may promote wellness and healing among Indigenous communities (ISC, 2018). Given that art is a significant aspect of culture for many Indigenous people, it is reasonable to conclude that engagement in art may be a

source of strength that could aid in healing the soul wound. Indigenous approaches to healing address physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health (Lavallee & Poole, 2009). Art engages youth in life skill-building, learning, emotional regulating, and spiritual healing, further supporting art as an intervention to improve wellness of Indigenous youth (Flicker et al., 2014; Rapp-Paglicci, Stewart, & Rowe, 2009; Victor et al., 2016). Because of its connection with culture and spirit, art-based programming is a decolonizing intervention that can be used to appropriately address all factors of wellness (Bombay et al., 2014; Duran, 2006).

Researchers have used strengths-based CBR approaches to research the experiences of Indigenous youth who engage in art interventions. For example, Flicker and colleagues (2014) used a community-based approach to explore a strengths-based art workshop with the purpose of educating Indigenous youth on human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) prevention. Study results indicated that incorporating art in education supported student wellness, engagement in learning, and the acquisition of knowledge. They found that youth reported enjoying the process and learning more because of it. Further, they found that art provided a method of dialogue that empowered youth's voices, another indicator that art interventions can be decolonizing (Jackson & Hodge, 2009; Sessions & Lightburn, 2006; Wilson, 2008).

In addition to improving the wellness of youth, researchers have found that connecting education to culture using holistic teaching pedagogies nourishes the learning spirit of students, resulting in improved educational engagement and learning, and thus increased academic success (Anuik & Gillies, 2012). Modifying the pedagogy in a classroom to incorporate Indigenous ways of coming to know supports youth in overcoming institutional obstacles, leading to an improved educational experience (Rakena et al., 2016). Traditionally, art has played a role in Indigenous

ways of learning (Lincoln, 2010; Victor et al., 2016), thus reinforcing art as an appropriate method for addressing the educational engagement of youth.

Given the research presented here, art-based school interventions have the potential to improve the wellness and educational engagement of Indigenous youth, meeting the needs of the Kainai community.

Conclusion

The current study is located in the social-historical context of Indigenous people in Canada, an awareness that is necessary when working with them (Duran, 2006). Given the history of trauma and the negative consequences of colonization that persist today, a need for de-colonization through research is clear. Thus, this project appropriately aims to incorporate methods for decolonization such as (a) being aware of self and other; (b) addressing epistemological hybridism; (c) centring Indigenous voices; (d) incorporating a community-based Indigenous paradigm; and (e) bringing the soul back into psychology (Duran, 2006; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). CBR has been shown to successfully incorporate decolonizing aims and is an appropriate approach to conducting research with Indigenous people (e.g., Ball & Janyst, 2008; Flicker et al., 2014; Lavallee & Poole, 2009; Victor et al., 2016). Per CBR, it is imperative that research meets the needs of the community (Halseth et al., 2016). By focusing this study on a community-led, culturally-based art workshop that focuses on the strengths of youth, the results are set up to meet the needs of the community, as they will include knowledge that is relevant to the community (Halseth et al., 2016; ISC, 2018; Sanders & Munford, 2014; Scales & Leffert, 2004).

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

In the review discussed in chapter two, I defined a need for interventions and research grounded in decolonizing approaches. In this chapter, I will describe how the current study explored meeting the needs of the community through implementing a decolonizing arts-based intervention studied via community-based decolonizing approaches to research. The purpose of this chapter is to clearly define the approach used.

To begin this chapter, I briefly outline an overview and rationale of the study design. This overview includes a breakdown of the art intervention that took place at the Tatsikiisapo'p Middle School as well as a reminder of the suitability of CBR for this study. Further, I explain how CBR supports the integration of an Indigenous paradigm as well as culturally-based research designs throughout the entire research process. Next, I discuss the implementation of the methodology – a CBR paradigm that integrates Indigenous approaches – in greater detail. Following this, I outline the design and specific procedures of the study. Finally, I share ethical considerations for this study.

Overview and Rationale of the Study Design

The current study took place through the University of Calgary, which is situated on the traditional territories of the Tsuu T’ina, Stoney Nakoda, and Blackfoot Nations, including the Kainai, Piikani, Siksika, and Amskapi Piikani Nations. Respecting the protocols of right relationship, Dr. Fellner along with Amskapi Piikani artist Lauren Monroe Jr. led the collaboration with members of the local Kainai Nation, specifically KBE faculty and administration, to support the implementation and evaluation of community-led interventions, including: 1) community-based approaches to wellness in the classroom, and 2) traditional and contemporary cultural and artistic engagement for students. The intervention at the focus of this

study involved a multimedia art workshop and an installation with Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) artists. Fifteen Indigenous artists, fourteen Blackfoot and one Cree/Métis, facilitated a series of art workshops with students from KBE. In these workshops, artists facilitated youth learning by exploring the importance of art-as-therapy, self-representation, art as a voice, traditional examples of art in culture, and contemporary Indigenous art politics. In this process, each artist supported the youths in creating their own art, focusing on the strengths-based approach of skill-building in a supportive environment (Sanders & Munford, 2014; Scales & Leffert, 2004). In the current study, I aimed to explore the experiences of the artists who facilitated this art workshop. The following questions guided this research:

(1) How does engagement in traditional and contemporary Niitsitapi culture and art benefit Niitsitapi students?

(2) How do Niitsitapi artists experience participation in traditional and contemporary Niitsitapi cultural and artistic engagement as a means to address student wellness and educational engagement?

(3) How can traditional and contemporary Niitsitapi cultural and artistic engagement be included in pedagogy and curriculum to better serve Niitsitapi students?

In this study, I aimed to contribute to the decolonization of research with Indigenous peoples, so a CBR approach was implemented (Halseth et al., 2016), as it appropriately supports the methods for decolonizing outlined by Smith (2012), Wilson (2008), Duran (2006), and Kovach (2009). I describe CBR in greater detail in the methodology section of this paper; however, in short, it is appropriate for research done with Indigenous communities because it is informed by and involves those communities throughout the research process, thus appropriately guiding research through the lens of the community (Halseth et al., 2016). I then applied

Indigenous methods of approaching research (Wilson, 2008), also explained in the methodology section of the paper. Dr. Fellner and Lauren Monroe Jr. designed this study in collaboration with the community prior to data collection or analysis. Thus, they came up with the research questions and some of the methods. I then collected data by incorporating Indigenous approaches that followed the principles of *responsibility*, *respect*, *reciprocity*, and *relevance* (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2016; Wilson, 2008). Specifically, I did this using *research conversations* (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009). Finally, for the analysis of the data, I drew upon the Indigenous method of *storywork* (Archibald, 2008). I describe the terms shared here in detail in the forthcoming methodology and design sections of this paper.

Methodology

Community-Based Research

Like other types of research, CBR begins with a literature review; however, the literature considered relevant and important differs (Halseth et al., 2016). Instead of grounding a study entirely in the context of empirical evidence that supports the usefulness or relevance of the study, CBR requires that a literature review include the historical context of the community (Halseth et al., 2016). By understanding this context, a researcher can "situate the research and the research relationship within that understanding of the community" (Halseth et al., p. 149) – she can better understand the impact of past events and the current needs of the community.

When conducting CBR with an Indigenous community, a researcher must engage in considerable self-reflection (Halseth et al., 2016). The requirement for self-reflection outlined in CBR aligns with methods for decolonizing: (a) being aware of self and other; (b) addressing epistemological hybridism; (c) centring Indigenous voices; (d) incorporating a community-based Indigenous paradigm; and (e) bringing the soul back into psychology (Archibald, 2008; Duran,

2006; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). A researcher should specifically reflect on: (a) their position in approaching research (Kovach, 2009); (b) Indigenous ways of knowing and epistemological hybridism (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008); and (c) the history of colonialism and its continued impact (Duran, 2006; Halseth et al., 2016; Kovach, 2009).

Along with a literature review rooted in historical context of the community, establishing contact is the first step required in CBR (Halseth et al., 2016). A researcher must determine appropriate key contacts and support people in the community she works with. How these contacts are developed can be flexible and is determined based on the community and the researcher's existing relationships with the community members. A researcher must also engage with the community they conduct research with (Grimwood, Doubleday, Ljubicic, Donaldson, & Blangy, 2012). Grimwood and colleagues (2012) outlined four methods for community engagement: crafting relationships, learning, immersion, and activism. Crafting relationships involves "opening up to, and creating, circumstances for relationships to emerge or to be formulated" (Grimwood et al., 2012, p. 220). Within those relationships, a researcher can learn by shifting from expert to learner and openly listening, thus balancing power relationships (Desbiens, 2010; Nakamura, 2010). Immersion refers to a researcher having experiential encounters with the community she seeks to learn from and work with, engaging with the specific ways of knowing of that community (Grimwood et al., 2012; Johnson, 2010). Finally, activism can involve actions in research that aim to balance power relationships, determine appropriate ownership of research, and advocate for social change (Grimwood et al., 2012; Johnson, 2010).

The community must be involved when choosing a research topic; in fact, they must be comfortable with and agree to any topics of study and can even guide the direction of the

research (Halseth et al., 2016). The community not only needs to be involved in choosing a research topic, but in the entire research process including design, execution, analysis, and dissemination of results (Castleden et al., 2012). Researchers such as Ball and Janyst (2008) purport that CBR that includes the community throughout the process yields benefits to the community. To do this, a researcher engages in a conversation with the community, beginning with the questions and thoughts of the community (Halseth et al., 2016). From there, the research design should be driven by community partners and should include an ongoing process of communication (Halseth et al., 2016). Community members should also be a part of the execution of a research project, as this can increase investment in and support for the results (Hickey et al., 2018).

Flexibility is required of the researcher in the process of designing a study (Desbiens, 2010), as "CBR design must be understood as more of a recursive process than a simple set of linear steps" (Grimwood et al., 2012, p. 113). Flexibility of methodology and design allows the research to be embedded in the community context (Halseth et al., 2016). For research done with an Indigenous community, CBR allows for the integration of Indigenous approaches to guide the design and method choices.

Integrating Indigenous Approaches to Research

Shawn Wilson (2008) outlined the elements of an Indigenous research paradigm. To accomplish this, he described an Indigenous *ontology*, *epistemology*, *axiology*, and *methodology*. Ontology is the answer to the question "what is the nature of 'reality'?" (Guba, 1990, p18). Epistemology answers "what is the nature of the relationship between the knower (the inquirer) and the known (or knowable)?" (Guba, 1990, p18). Axiology answers "what part of this reality is worth finding out more about?" (Wilson, 2008, p. 34). Finally, methodology answers "how

should the inquirer go about finding out knowledge?" (Guba, 1990, p18). According to Wilson (2008), an Indigenous ontology or nature of reality is that reality is subjective and is formed from the relationships a person has; reality only exists within relationships. Ideas are only understood within the relationships that formed them (Wilson, 2008). Wilson purports that ontology and epistemology are closely linked as they are both rooted in the concept that reality is formed by relationships. Further, he connects an Indigenous axiology with methodology as both are focused on accountability to relationships. Thus, an Indigenous axiology dictates that research worth doing should benefit and build relationships and an Indigenous methodology should maintain *relational accountability,* "fulfilling a role and obligations in the research relationship – that is, being accountable to your relations" (Wilson, 2008, p. 77). As a novice non-Indigenous researcher, I cannot approach my work from an Indigenous paradigm; however, a community-based approach requires that I take this way of knowing into account (Halseth et al., 2016). Therefore, by engaging in epistemological hybridism (Duran, 2006), or two-eyed seeing (Bartlett et al., 2012), I consider an Indigenous paradigm and then use Indigenous approaches to research by integrating key values and methods of Indigenous research.

Authors such as Shawn Wilson (2008), Cora Weber-Pillwax (2001), as well as Verna Kirkness and Ray Barnhardt (2016) have emphasized the need for incorporating key values into research with Indigenous communities. To conduct research in a way that cultivates relational accountability, Wilson (2008) suggested several procedures relevant to each step of the research process, from choosing what to study to disseminating results and beyond.

Key values in relational accountability. In following an Indigenous approach to research, it is necessary that research done with Indigenous communities focus on relational accountability and building positive relationships (Weber-Pillwax, 2001; Wilson, 2008).

Indigenous Research is "a means of raising our consciousness" (Wilson, 2008, p. 69), and doing this while maintaining healthy relationships through *respect*, *reciprocity*, *responsibility*, and *relevance* must be incorporated in the methodology (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2016; Weber-Pillwax, 2001).

Respect. Research with Indigenous communities requires the respect of cultural knowledge and Indigenous worldviews (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2016). Respect must be present in the way the researcher interacts with the participants, honouring their voices, and in the way she chooses the methods of her research (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2016; Weber-Pillwax, 2001). To be respectful, the methods used must allow the worldviews of the participants to be reflected clearly and to be valued as a reality (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2016).

Reciprocity. Reciprocity is the process of balancing power in researcher-community and researcher-participant relationships (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2016). In a typical academic setting, the researcher is the producer and the vendor of knowledge; however, in an Indigenous approach to research both parties in a relationship must be valued equally as active participants in the production of knowledge (Urion, 1999).

Responsibility. To be responsible in research with Indigenous people, it is important that Indigenous voices are at the centre of the research (Jackson & Hodge, 2009; Sessions & Lightburn, 2006; Wilson, 2008). It is the responsibility of the researcher to fulfill this obligation and to use the power and authority associated with gaining an education to raise the voices of their Indigenous participants (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2016; Weber-Pillwax, 2001).

Relevance. In a university research setting the idiom is typically that of a Western, literary perspective, which in many ways opposes that of an Indigenous, oral perspective (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2016). For research to be relevant, Indigenous ways of thinking and

knowing must be incorporated into academic institutions as legitimate ways of approaching research (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2016). Thus, research done with or by Indigenous people should be judged based on Indigenous standards rather than Western ones (Urion, 1999)

Relational accountability throughout the research process. To appropriately adhere to an Indigenous approach to research, relational accountability must be present throughout the research process (Wilson, 2008). Wilson (2008) outlined four points in the process when this could specifically be implemented: (1) when choosing what to study; (2) when gathering information or data; (3) when analyzing that data; and (4) when transferring what has been learned or disseminating results. Wilson asserted that deciding what should be studied should occur *with* the community. Further, the topic should focus on the strengths of the community, as connecting to strengths provides a bridge toward healing and growth, thereby strengthening the community (Sanders & Munford, 2014; Wilson, 2008). Next, Wilson (2008) discussed the nature of relationships in data collection. He referred to the researcher and participants as "co-learners" (p. 113) engaging in meaningful exchange, requiring the researcher to employ deep listening. In this way, the knowledge gathered in data collection comes from the relationship between the participant/storyteller and the researcher/listener/interpreter.

To analyze data, the researcher must use intuitive logic as opposed to a linear way of analyzing. Wilson (2008) contended that authenticity and credibility of what the researcher reports are fulfilled by having continuous feedback with the participants to check for accuracy and allow for participants to elaborate, ensuring their voices are presented fittingly in the results. The analysis is about the researcher and participants coming to a shared understanding through their relationship. Finally, Wilson acknowledged that there is difficulty in presenting non-linear logic in a linearly written document, stating that information may be lost if the relationships in

which it was formed are not clear. He encouraged researchers to acknowledge this by ensuring the information they share is first located in terms of the context of both the researcher and the participants or community and the relationship they hold together (Wilson, 2008).

Further, Wilson (2008) affirmed that a researcher must be accountable to both the community they work with and themselves. Wilson wrote: "You have to be true to yourself and put your own true voice in there, and those stories that speak to you. That is retaining your integrity; it's honouring the lessons you've learned through saying that they have become a part of who you are" (p. 123). This means that researchers are reporting their subjective interpretation of the stories told by their participants; the researcher cannot be separated from the research (Wilson, 2008). To be accountable to the community, participants and community stakeholders must approve what is shared and how to share it, but the researcher's voice is still present in the writing, and thus the researcher should share their interpretations as well as how the process impacted and changed them.

A Reflection on Methodology

This methodology guided decisions related to research design. By considering an Indigenous approach throughout the research process, I believe my methods helped me to build respectful relationships with the research topic and the research participants (Wilson, 2008). The design chosen helped me fulfill my role and obligations as a researcher, as the methods required that I relate respectfully to the participants and contribute to the relationships I had with the participants, the community, and the research topic (Wilson, 2008).

Design

Following an Indigenous approach in this CBR project, I centred the design of this study in meeting community needs in a culturally-appropriate way. Thus, the data collection and

analysis followed Indigenous research methods such as the use of research conversations and storywork. Additionally, prior to data collection CBR and Indigenous research dictate that I engage in extra steps in the research process: (1) self-reflection, and (2) community engagement and choosing a research topic with the community (Grimwood et al., 2012; Halseth et al., 2016).

Self-Reflection

Upon starting this research and throughout the process, I engaged in self-reflection. I share these reflections at different points throughout this paper, answering the questions listed in Halseth and colleagues' (2016) book in their section on doing research with Indigenous communities:

> Who [am I], why [am I] undertaking this research? How do [I] connect with it both personally and professionally? Who will gain benefit? How do [I] and [my] research fit into the legacies of colonial relationships that still affect Aboriginal communities and lives? (p. 167).

I introduced myself in the introduction of this paper, answering the question "who am I?" and elaborate now to make the answers to the remaining questions clear. I am a counselling psychology student completing my master's degree because it brings me closer to my goal of registering as a psychologist. I am undertaking this research for three reasons: (1) because it is a requirement in obtaining my degree, (2) because I believe it is ethically necessary to conduct research that can benefit marginalized groups in society, and (3) because I am passionate about improving the lives of youth to create a better future for them and for society as a whole. I have also worked directly with Indigenous youth, and have witnessed how conventional Euro Western interventions are inadequate and often contrary to youths' and communities' best interests. This

has motivated me to learn from communities how to better serve Indigenous youth, and to contribute to literature that disseminates this knowledge.

In considering the benefits of the research, I will benefit because it will allow me to obtain a master's degree and advance my personal and professional goals, including improving my clinical work with Indigenous youth. The artists who participated in research conversations may benefit from having a space in which they can voice their perspectives on the research topic, and have these perspectives disseminated. Kainai and other Indigenous communities may benefit from the framework that is produced as a result of this study and its integration with the results of similar studies, as the intention is to provide researchers, educators, and mental health practitioners with guidance in working with Indigenous youth and communities. It is my hope that by implementing a decolonizing intervention and decolonizing methods to research, this thesis will be a step in improving colonial relationships with Indigenous communities and will contribute to the process of reconciliation.

Community Engagement and Choosing a Research Topic

Relational accountability requires researchers to form relationships with the community and the participants with whom they conduct research (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2016; Weber-Pillwax, 2001; Wilson, 2008). These relationships must also be respectful and reciprocal (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2016; Weber-Pillwax, 2001; Wilson, 2008). Community engagement is as critical as the research and work done by the researchers supporting Indigenous communities. Indeed, Wilson (2008) argued that "the strength of your bonds or relationships with the community is an equally valued component of your work" (p. 81).

A reflection on engagement and choosing a research topic. I began engaging with the Kainai community in the Fall of 2017. The first community members I met were those enrolled in the Poo'miikapii: Niitsitapi Approaches to Wellness class taught by Dr. Fellner at the Red Crow Community College. Here I had the opportunity to listen to and engage in a discussion led by Amskapi Piikani artist and filmmaker Lauren Monroe Jr. about the portrayal of Indigenous people in popular media and the use of film and art as tools to channel and empower voice. This was the first time that I saw the reality of what it could be like for people to be bombarded by racism and oppression in media on a regular basis. I spent time engaging with the students in this classroom on a few more occasions throughout the year, building reciprocal relationships as I assisted with work that supported the class and learned from those I was assisting. Over the course of the year I attended ceremonies, continued to meet community members, served many cups of coffee to Elders, and supported community events including the art workshop focused on in this study as well as a film workshop and a capstone showcase for the Poo'miikapii students. My engagement with this community does not stop simply because my research is ending; those relationships do not disappear and will continue to be built.

This research was undertaken in direct collaboration with Elders, leaders, and community members, including the Council of Aawaahskataiksi and leaders from KBE. In conceptualizing and designing the current study, Dr. Fellner, the principal investigator, and Blackfoot artist Lauren Monroe Jr. worked specifically in direct consultation with Elder Calvin Williams (Elder and knowledge holder of the Kainai (Blood) Nation, representative for the Council of Aawaahskataiksi, Red Crow Community College, Standoff) and Tisha Wadsworth (knowledge holder and member of Kainai (Blood) Nation, Wellness Coordinator at KBE). Each of these individuals is an active part of the community involved in this research and hold various

respected positions within the community (Elders, leaders, representatives). Therefore, Elders and community members were involved throughout all phases of the research, including choosing a research topic. The current project was undertaken with and for the community.

Community context, the larger project. The study presented in this thesis is situated within a larger project. Dr. Fellner and community members Lauren Monroe Jr., Tisha Wadsworth, and Calvin Williams, collaborated to determine the present needs of the Kainai First Nation community and the interventions that could be implemented to meet these needs. Together, they determined that the integration of culture and art in pedagogy was a method of promoting wellness and educational engagement of Niitsitapi students that they wanted to implement and explore further. They outlined a project with three major components: (a) an art workshop with Niitsitapi artists, (b) a film workshop with Niitsitapi filmmakers, and (c) a Niitsitapi culture camp. The purpose was to implement interventions and activities that had the potential to benefit students and then evaluate those interventions and use findings to inform further classroom interventions and possible changes in curriculum and pedagogy. In each stage of the project, all people involved would be asked to participate in the research evaluation, including artists, leaders, teachers, and students. Due to limitations in time and scope, this thesis focuses specifically on the art workshop, and the perspectives of the artists who chose to participate.

Engaging in the art workshop. Along with Dr. Fellner and Lauren Monroe Jr., Tisha Wadsworth, wellness coordinator at KBE, and some of the educators at Tatsikiisapo'p Middle School took the lead in organizing and setting up the art workshop that is at the focus of this study. The event was facilitated over two days: March 19 and 20, 2018. Fifteen professional artists (fourteen Blackfoot and one Cree/Métis) shared their knowledge of art with approximately

120 students at Tatsikiisaapo'p Middle School. The first day was spent on art creation, and the second was comprised of a panel discussion led by some of the artists followed by a community lunch, with community members free to view the art created by students. A variety of art was offered, including: photography, acrylic painting, beading, drum making, ledger art, hip hop, mixed media art, and traditional craft work. Each youth chose one or two types of art to learn and then spent the first day creating with the support of the artists who were experts in those arts.

Data Collection

Recruitment. The larger project that this study sits under involves recruitment of all community members who were involved in the art intervention, including Elders, KBE staff, students, and artists. For this portion of the larger study, I invited the artists who facilitated the art intervention to voluntarily participate in research conversations. Five Niitsitapi artists chose to participate in research conversations with me for the purpose of this thesis.

Research conversations. A research conversation is a method of collecting information that is non-structured, which is congruent with Indigenous cultural protocols (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009). It differs from an interview in that it is "a combination of reflection, story, and dialogue" (Kovach, 2009, p. 51). Further, it "is characterized as an open-ended interview with opportunity for both sides to engage in talk rather than only one party doing most of the talking" (Archibald, 2008, p. 47).

Data collection involved audio-recorded research conversations with artists who supported the implementation of the art installation intervention. These conversations explored participants' impressions, experiences, and feedback in relation to the art workshop, as well as their perceived impact on Niitsitapi students, and recommendations moving forward. Research

conversations varied in durations from 25 to 85 minutes and occurred one-on-one with me in a location of the participant's choosing.

Gifts. I presented each of the participants with culturally appropriate gifts to acknowledge their contributions to this research. Each participant received tobacco – a ceremonial medicine – and a small gift, such as a scarf or coffee mug, to thank them and acknowledge their contributions as partners and in this research (Fellner, 2016; Kazina & Swayze, 2009).

Data Analysis

Indigenous storytelling is often seen as being synonymous with knowledge sharing (Christensen, 2012). Storywork is an Indigenous research method outlined by Sto:lo scholar Jo-ann Archibald (2008) that involves storytelling for educational purposes, such as the analysis of research conversations through storytelling. According to Archibald, in this form of analysis the traditional Indigenous practice of sharing what one has learned through storytelling is put into action. This is meant to be done with compassion and love for others in mind (Archibald, 2008). Unfortunately, there are limitations to sharing knowledge through writing, as much of the information that we get from non-verbal cues such as gestures, tone, rhythm, and personality are lost (Archibald, 2008; Deepika, 2015). Still, the purpose of using storywork is to combine the Indigenous oral tradition with the Western literary way of sharing what one has learned (Archibald, 2008).

Archibald (2008) asserted that the following Indigenous storywork principles are required to analyze data or understand stories:

> Patience and trust are essential for preparing to listen to stories. Listening involves more than just using the auditory sense. We must visualize the characters and their actions. We

> must let our emotions surface. As the Elders say, it is important to listen with 'three ears: two on the sides of our head and the one that is in our heart' (p. 8).

She supports the integration of seven specific principles when doing and understanding storywork: three of the four R's discussed earlier (respect, responsibility, and reciprocity) as well as *reverence*, *holism*, *interrelatedness*, and *synergy*. Reverence requires the researcher and the readers of the results to hold high regard for the participants and their stories (Archibald, 2008; Johnston, 1990). Holism refers to acknowledging the physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual context of Indigenous storywork (Archibald, 2008). Interrelatedness is the connection between a story and the listener and between the text and the reader (Archibald, 2008; Sarris, 1993). This principle requires you, the reader, to interact with the story and be actively engaged with the story with the understanding that the story is not self-contained or a complete objective picture (Sarris, 1993). Finally, synergy demands that there is balance and harmony between a story teller and listener and between the story and reader (Archibald, 2008).

The role of myself as the researcher in this study is two-fold: first, as a listener who actively experienced the stories of the participants, and second, as a storyteller who shares what I have learned (Archibald, 2008). Christensen (2012) stated:

> At its heart, research is storytelling. As a researcher, I listen to stories through interviews and focus groups, I reflect upon those stories and interpret them, and then I too become a storyteller as I share these stories, along with my own experiences and ideas, with different audiences.

After each initial interview in this study, notes were written to reflect on my intuition as the researcher (Archibald, 2008). I then listened to each of the recordings twice while thinking about the intended teachings of the participants (Archibald, 2008). I transcribed the digitally recorded

conversations verbatim so (a) they could be reviewed by the researcher for themes, and (b) they could be sent to research participants to review. I then analyzed transcripts and notes for themes and recommendations using storywork. Following analysis, project participants reviewed all findings and I asked permission for the use of direct quotes (Archibald, 2008), with results being revised as needed. Following revision of the results, I circulated a final draft among the participants for any remaining suggestions or revisions. Finally, I shared what I learned in the research process in chapters four and five.

Ethical Considerations

This research followed the ethical protocols for research involving Indigenous peoples of Canada outlined in chapter nine of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (Government of Canada, 2014).

Consent

Prior to research conversations, I invited potential participants to ask any questions and obtained written consent. I gave all participants the option to be referred to by their real name or by a pseudonym of their choosing. In this case, all the participants chose to be identified by their names rather than by pseudonyms. Giving participants the choice to use their real names keeps me accountable to my relationships with the participants; further, it helps acknowledge the role each participant played as a co-researcher in this process (Wilson, 2008).

I informed the participants that they could withdraw participation from the research at any time within two weeks of their individual research conversations with no consequences whatsoever. Upon withdrawal, transcripts and recordings would be deleted or destroyed and would not be used in data analysis, and thus would not be a part of the findings and dissemination of this research. None of the participants chose to withdraw at any point in time.

Ownership and Dissemination of Findings

Following data analysis, I invited study participants to review their own transcripts as well as all findings and asked them permission for the use of direct quotes (Archibald, 2008), with results being revised as needed. Following revisions of the results, I circulated a final draft among the participants for any remaining suggestions or revisions. This process of encircling (Wilson, 2008) is used to establish accountability and credibility of the findings. The research team will keep all the raw data; however, if the Council of Aawaahskataiksi requests the data for community use, the research team will collaborate with the council as to how the community can use the research findings such that participant identities are not compromised. Only individual participants will be able to obtain their own individual raw data. The Council and other community collaborators understand this, as this research was conducted in direct collaboration with community members, and they respect each other's confidentiality and are appreciative of the community-based process. The community will only receive a copy of de-identified results and the framework of analysis. Results will be presented to the advising Council of Aawaahskataiksi for feedback along with the results of other research projects prior to the development of a framework or publication of results. Participants will be invited to collaborate on any publications or presentations that use the results of this study.

Publications will be shared with KBE staff at a dissemination meeting that will be scheduled when all data from this study and the other phases of the larger project is collected and analyzed. The research team will use findings to create a framework for the implementation of culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogies based in local community-based approaches to wellness in education, which will then be shared with all staff and leadership at KBE. Upon approval of the Council of Aawaahskataiksi, the research team will disseminate findings of all

three phases of the research at national and international conferences, in addition to formal and informal community gatherings. Knowledge translation will occur through informing implementation of ongoing cultural interventions in the classroom, and through sharing community reports of research findings among community members and stakeholders of the Kainai Nation and the surrounding communities of the Tsuu T'ina, Stoney Nakoda, Piikani, Siksika, and Amskapi Piikani Nations. Findings will also be published in peer-reviewed journals and disseminated among academics and policy makers. All publications will also be shared with staff and leadership at KBE.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Understanding stories requires the use of intuition and subjective knowledge (Archibald, 2008), thus, I continue the style of sharing from a first-person perspective, as to do otherwise would be ingenuine. I begin this chapter by locating the findings in the context of my relationships with the participants. I first name the participants and then share how I came to know each of them and the nature of their involvement in the art installation that occurred March 19 and March 20, 2018. After introducing the participants, I share the themes that stood out to me as I listened in the research conversations I had with each participant.

Participants

Five Niitsitapi artists participated in research conversations. Though the artists were given an option to be identified using a pseudonym, they all chose to have the knowledge they shared connected with their names. Star Crop Eared Wolf, Theron Black, John Pepion, Lauren Monroe Jr., and Perry Day Chief each engaged in a one-on-one research conversation with me. I introduce each of the artists by sharing the bios they shared with me here.

Star Crop Eared Wolf

Star Crop Eared Wolf is a visual artist, curator, and a member of the Blood Tribe (Kainai), which is part of the Blackfoot Confederacy. Star uses many different mediums to produce her dynamic artwork such as photography, video, painting, drawing, sculpture, and beading. Star's artwork takes a critical view of the cultural, political, and social issues in the past and present-day society and focuses on the fusion between these two facets. Much of the work she has produced has been centered around issues regarding the environment, stereotypes of First Nations people, cultural and political injustices, and identity. In 2017 she graduated from the BFA Native Art Museum Studies/Art History program at the University of Lethbridge, Alberta.

Star was recently a featured artist at the Southern Alberta Art Gallery, where she continues to sell her beadwork and painted photo prints. Her future plans are to work on the repatriations of Blackfoot cultural artifacts in the Museums throughout the world.

Theron Black

Theron Black has a Bachelor's Degree in Addictions Counselling and Mental Health through the University of Lethbridge and is currently in his last year of finishing a Bachelors of Indigenous Social Work degree. Theron is a respected member of the Kainai First Nations (Blood Reserve) and an advocate for his people. Theron is passionate about speaking about issues faced by Aboriginal (Indigenous) people and supporting the change that needs to happen in southern Alberta. Theron supports working toward (a) having respectful relationships; (b) creating dialogue with mainstream society; (c) reconciliation, working at putting the TRC recommendations into action; and (d) building an inclusive community within Southern Alberta.

John Pepion

John Isaiah Pepion is an enrolled member of the Blackfeet Nation in northern Montana. While a freshman in high school at Two Eagle River High School in Pablo, Montana, Pepion was selected to visit the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He became inspired to follow in the footsteps of several family members who had attended IAIA and enrolled in the Oscar Howe Art Institute in South Dakota. In 2004 he received his Associate of Arts degree in Art Marketing from the United Tribes Technical College in Bismarck, North Dakota and started painting with watercolors in the Plains Indian ledger style in 2005. John went on to graduate from IAIA with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Museum Studies and began applying the Plains ledger style he developed with ink and color pencils to historically significant 1800's ledger paper. He begins each piece by illustrating ideas stemming from his personal life and

cultural history and incorporates the colorful designs of the Blackfeet into his artwork. Today John is a rising contemporary ledger artist whose powerful imagery represents aspects of culture that intrigue the viewer and often tell a story.

Lauren Monroe Jr.

Lauren Monroe Jr. is a member of the Amksapii Pikanii (Blackfeet) Nation in Montana. As a visual artist and filmmaker, Lauren is heavily influenced by the oral history and traditional life of the Blackfoot culture. Lauren finds that both art and film are avenues to keep the culture and history of the Blackfoot people going. He completed his Master of Fine Arts in screenwriting at the Institute of American Indian Arts. Lauren is an active participant in the culture and lives just outside of Browning, Montana.

Perry Day Chief

Perry Day Chief is a knowledge holder and respected Elder in the Kainai community. He chose to introduce himself to you, the reader:

> *Hi, I am Perry Day Chief and I was born in Cardston, Alberta. I have been here in southern Alberta most of my life. I went to school here and got most of the trades that I enjoy doing here in Alberta. I enjoy the great outdoors, walking, sightseeing, and taking pictures. I bought myself a camera and got into photography, which I taught myself. I also work with wood, metal, and leather, and whatever I can get my hands on. Leather is what I enjoy working with most. I went to British Columbia and received a certificate on saddle making, which wasn't hard for me because I already had experience working with leather. Other things I do include: riding horses (though it has been a while since I did that), hunting, fishing, cooking, painting, all the crafts that I do, singing at powwows, hand games, and ceremonies. I will teach anyone who wants to learn the things that I do.*

I especially enjoy working with young students. I had my first chance to do this at Kainai Junior High School (Tatsikiisapo'p Middle School) as a facilitator at the art workshop held March 19 and 20, 2018. I look forward to teaching more to anyone who wants to learn my experiences. In addition to teaching, I am working on starting my own little business doing what I enjoy doing – my crafts with leather, wood, and metal – and I am looking forward to working with my new little family. I recently had a chance to go on an overseas trip, and that's where I met my wife, Lorina, and our daughter, Claire. Once I get this business started, I will eventually get business cards – for now I just take orders as they come. In the future, I would also like to facilitate camps where I can share the knowledge I hold about other interests I have. I always tell others, "everyone has a hidden talent, and it will come out once you give yourself a chance by learning something new, despite what it is.

The Story(s)

Apart from Lauren Monroe Jr., I first met each of the participants the morning of the art installation, March 19, 2018. Over the next two days while the art installation workshop was taking place I got to know many of the artists and observed their work with the youth at Tatsikiisapo'p Middle School. I had met Lauren in November, 2017 in the Poo'miikapii: Niitsitapi Approaches to Wellness classroom at the Red Crow Community College when he attended as a guest lecturer sharing his knowledge about the history and impact of film on Indigenous peoples and I attended as a guest student to meet and engage with Kainai community members.

At the workshop, each of the artists shared their knowledge and skills with the youth participants. Star does visual art, focusing mainly on photography. She also does painting, bead

work, sculpture, and video. She shared her knowledge of photography with the youth at the workshop. Theron and Perry shared their knowledge of leather work with the youth together. Perry shared that in addition to leather work, he also works with metal, wood, painting, and photography. John does pictographic and ledger art, and he facilitated a group that focused on creating art on antique ledgers. Finally, Lauren facilitated a workshop in which he shared his knowledge of how to create mixed media acrylic paintings. In addition to painting, Lauren is a filmmaker, specifically, a screen writer and director.

I invited all the artists who took part in the art workshop to participate in this study. The five who consented to participate each engaged in a research conversation one-on-one with me, in which the focus was on the three research questions:

(1) How does engagement in traditional and contemporary Niitsitapi culture and art benefit Niitsitapi students?

(2) How do Niitsitapi artists experience participation in traditional and contemporary Niitsitapi cultural and artistic engagement as a means to address student wellness and educational engagement?

(3) How can traditional and contemporary Niitsitapi cultural and artistic engagement be included in pedagogy and curriculum to better serve Niitsitapi students?

Interview prompts were open and allowed the participants to share what they believed to be important, honouring their unique voices (Archibald, 2008). Following storywork protocols, in each conversation, I listened with both my ears and my heart (Archibald, 2008). This listening occurred in the moment during conversations, when I transcribed conversations, and during a replay of the recorded conversations. The findings I share with you here are based on my intuitive understanding of what participants shared with me, organized by the themes that stood

out to me as I listened. The organization of findings into themes may be considered my re-telling of the stories told to me in relation to the research questions. I chose to organize my understandings of artists' stories into themes because this is how I personally processed the knowledge they shared with me, and because themes are effective for disseminating findings. In the current section, the amount of interpretation I share is limited, as I felt that the artists' words adequately captured what needed to be said. The quotes I share are those that I understood as being the intended teaching of the participants. The themes I share are not separate entities, rather, they flow into and out of one another and do not exist in isolation. Congruent with an Indigenous approach, these themes represent my subjective understanding of what was important to share at this time; this understanding may change or grow upon further listening or conversations in the future, and may not be the same understanding that others may gather from the stories shared (Archibald, 2008).

Art *is* Culture

Something that was clearly affirmed in my conversations with the Niitsitapi artist participants was that art and culture were inseparable for Niitsitapi people. Indeed, art was spoken about as an expression of culture and a mode to cultural connection. Star said:

> *In native cultures traditionally, we don't have a word for art because art and life [are]… entwined together, so to remove it wouldn't make sense to native people.*

Further, John shared that art can be used to preserve and (re)connect with culture:

> *My art is about conservation, like preserving, the cultural preservation, preserving stories of past and now and personal experience, my personal experience and others' personal experience.*

Perry spoke about art as a means to reconnect with culture:

We could slowly bring back our culture in that way, teaching the kids how to do our culture.

Lauren discussed how because of art's connection with culture, it can be used for self-expression, for centring voice, and for healing:

We've always had art within our community, whether it was completely ceremonial or if it was more secular, historic. And, I've always looked in the past and see, well why, why did they have art, why was it always out there? They could have just worn plain whatever and it would have been fine, but they always decorated their objects, they always decorated their rifles, and their horses, you know… A part of it is definitely being able to create and self-expression. I don't know the correct terminology, but I know it's important – self-expression – saying 'I have a voice, this is my personality coming through' is hugely important to being Niitsitapi, a whole human being. To be completely whole, I think self-expression is very much a part of it… And that's what being Niitsitapi means is to be a complete human being. I think colonization, unfortunately has taken that away from us.

When speaking with Lauren, I could feel how immensely important it was for him as a Niitsitapi person to live his life as a complete human being, attuning to his physical, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual self. He mentioned how colonization had harmed Indigenous people and named art as a tool that could play a big role in the process of decolonizing and healing. To understand the other themes, the concept that art is culture and culture is art is paramount.

Healing (The Soul Wound)

In these conversations, the topic of healing came up in two contexts: cultural expression through art as healing and the physical action of art as healing. Star shared:

If we go back to … traditional sorts of knowledge of … our art practices, then that … adds spirituality, what we're lacking, right. So, I believe that when somebody is … depressed or they're lonely, or they're angry, it's all because of the way they're feeling … inside. And it's because they're not able to express themselves and they feel like they're all alone, so we bring back that spiritual aspect to it, right, and then how to use that in their lives. Then that's going to make the person, you know, feel like there's a purpose … When we're dealing with … Blackfoot, traditional art styles and stuff, all of that is so intertwined with spirituality … it's not just a craft, you know … it's more than that. It would be called art in the Western concept, but for us … it's like, well we just call it life. So, I think we all need that … everybody that lives in this whole reserve needs to go back to that … because traditionally we were very artistic people, everything that we did was a tremendous knowledge that we were taking, from knowing what sort of plants to choose, what sort of wood, rocks, what sort of animals, when to harvest them, when to not, it's just, knowledge from the land that makes us feel connected. And when we lose that connection, that's when we lose who we are as a people and we're just drifting around. There's nothing there that's bringing us back to our place. So, I think adding that whole concept into art for native people is really important. In order to have healthy, strong-minded people.

In this way, art is a spiritual process that heals by making a person a complete human being, as Lauren said. Theron put it very simply, stating "*our culture is our healing*." He continued:

Once we find that and find our culture and everything and start doing this, even if it's just dancing and singing in the shower or during a quiet drive, it's all healing … I think that,

once we ... embrace that instead of pushing it away, we can be able to live a long, longer life, we'll look younger and, we can be able to … be a happy person.

Further, he said:

That is what's healing is to know who you are, to know your background, to know your language, your heritage, and all of those things, and that is going to be so beneficial for everybody, not just for aboriginal people.

Something I personally resonated with is a comment made by John, as I had similar thoughts:

I feel that art is therapy and also heals ... I come from a past where I didn't know who I was, but culture pretty much saved me, and once I started learning my culture and ceremonies I … started knowing who I was as a Blackfoot person … A lot of people think our culture is lost, so I think art is a good way to re-engage with our culture as well.

Lauren shared a story from the day of the art workshop that supported that concept of art as being therapeutic:

The immediate wellness I had seen was immediate calmness, immediate fascination, and immediate confidence … in their ability. I mean … there were students that of course they said 'well I don't know how to paint' and I was like 'well that's fine you don't need to know how to paint … just do the best you can' … eventually they all calmed down and they all focused, laser-like focus on what they were creating. And I asked them, I was like, 'what are you creating, what does this mean to you,' and I think that is really the core of the wellness, is asking the students in that moment when they created something 'what does it mean to you and can you tell me a story about it,' really allowed them to open up in a way that they probably wouldn't ... because it took the focus off them as a person and put it on this object.

When speaking about healing with the research participants, I intuitively understood them to be speaking about healing the spirit or the soul wound, the aspect of self that had been injured due to colonization (Duran, 2006). What came next was understanding specifically how art was healing the soul wound, which is how the themes that follow came to be.

Empowering (Voice)

One benefit of this art workshop is that it seemed to benefit the students at Tatsikiisapo'p Middle School because it empowered student voices. Lauren spoke about art as a medium for expression of voice:

> *I guess as an artist, as an Indigenous artist, specifically a Blackfoot artist, when I create something it's always important to me individually as my own experience and telling that experience and really revealing what I'm trying to say even if I don't know what I'm saying at the moment.*

Further, he said:

> *It is just also to say 'hey we also are wonderful … human beings too, and we're trying to strive for that beauty,' and art for me is a perfect medium to do that.*

Lauren talked about his teaching style and how he believed allowing for creativity impacted the youth. He would ask "*what stands out to you, what would you like to create*" and said:

> *'This is your story, I have no say in it, I will help and guide you, but ultimately you tell me, you tell me what you want to say.' And I think that really helped them understand, in a way, to get whatever was inside, at that moment, whatever was affecting them at that point in their life, get it out and say it … and I think that's what really helped them.*

Star shared a story about her experience with the students that demonstrates how art can help empower voice:

I could see ... myself in them, you know, when I was in middle school I was so shy. Even just to have to say my name in front of people I would be getting like sweaty palms, feel like I'm going to faint, and that's how some of them were when I asked them, like 'go around and let's hear your name and … if you've ever worked with a camera or … what your experience has been.' And yea, some of them just … froze up, and I felt really bad for … making them go through that, but then again … that's the only way you can ... communicate with them is to put them in those spots and then after … they feel better … Like challenging, them I guess. So ... I guess when I started sharing … my experience of how … I told them I used to be really shy and then I started using the camera and all of a sudden, I was, you know, walking around the room taking pictures, I wasn't thinking about anything else but trying to get a good photo and, you know ... I come to life and I get my camera and ... all of a sudden, I can go right up to the front of a big stage and be photographing people and ... you know, a big event's going on and I'm just going all over. It ... gives me … that strength, you know, my camera is kind of like my weapon but also my protector I guess. So, I was just explaining them that ... you can use it to give you strength, right, you can use it in that way. And … some of them were getting pretty excited about it. When I did share that, I saw a big change in the attitudes that they had, all of a sudden, they were more ... the shy ones were more ... willing to participate in what we were talking about. And by the end, they were all running around with the cameras taking pictures of everything ... they were totally changed.

She later went on to share:

They were really trying to find their individual perspective of what they were trying to show... and when they would find something they would … come running … find me, and

[say] … 'look at what I got! how does that look?' … They were really excited about … being able to create something … they thought was unique to their vision, right. So, … I think they were … finding their artistic eye ... when they were doing that. It was pretty neat to see because most of them said they had never even used a camera before.

My interpretation of Star's story was that these youths were finding new ways to speak through art, and that "artistic eye" Star spoke about was synonymous with voice.

Overcoming (A Deficit Narrative)

The stories the artists told about using art to overcome the deficit narrative of internalized racism were powerful. It seemed that finding an empowered voice led to being able to overcome challenges and thus write a new story. In his story, John shared about how art played a role in his life and overcoming the barriers that were created by colonization:

Sometimes we're taught that things are lost, and things are changing and we can never go back to what we used to be. So, growing up from the residential schools and the boarding schools in the United States, my grandfather and grandmother were never really taught our culture or language and were kind of ashamed of it from the … residential schools and boarding schools, so there's a large portion of our people that believe that our ways are gone forever … So, I like to tell people that art has saved my life and brought me back home to … learn that culture and ceremony … In this period of time I feel that going through the Indigenous people, we're taking back what was taken from us and bringing it back to our communities.

He continued:

Sometimes youths on reserves, or in reservations – and I myself grew up feeling like nobody cared and nobody was around and without knowing our language and culture –

[are] … just lost and just turning to alcohol and drugs, but when you start learning about all of your community and culture you start learning who you are and you have something to turn to you have something to be proud of, you know. So that's what I mean by with art and with language and community engagement, a lot of Indigenous peoples are taking back what was taken from them, you know, our culture was taken from us, our language was taken from us, everything was taken, but now, like I said, we're taking it back. And that's how I realized how I could do it is though art and how I play my part and that's why I chose to do that about … 3 years ago. Because I wasn't always about working with youth or my community, but things change and its been really inspiring to see and do in other communities. Using art in our cultures to help heal and stop some of the crises that we are going through, but it's going to be a slow process, but I see it happening. And like I said what I see as happening is from the inside, believing in ourselves. Because a lot of people come into the reserves or reservations and assume that we're in poverty or we're alcoholics or this or that, and never realize what's going on, that we are actually helping ourselves from the inside.

Another story about overcoming deficit narratives that stood out to me was Lauren's when he was speaking about what so many youths living on reserves or reservations are going through:

Because a lot of these students come from … deficit narratives, their background[s] aren't ideal, you know, and I really want to give them the freedom to speak for themselves for once … whatever may come, allowing them to really even understand what they're trying to say, because a lot of the times as an artist you don't even know what you want to say, but when you've completed a work you're really going to be self-reflective … and I think that that's quite powerful, especially as … an Indigenous person,

as a Blackfoot … child … really trying to frame yourself in a contemporary setting, you know, and how you can … move forward from some things that we struggle with as Indigenous people.

He further explained the role art plays in helping youth overcome such narratives:

We should really look at how impactful it is to have story-telling and art, even if it's contemporary art, … really pushing that, saying, 'you have a voice just like anybody and you're just as important as everybody whose ever existed,' and allowing those students to really fill those shoes, because once you … make something I think it can translate subconsciously that you can make other things. And that doesn't just mean art, it means 'I can make my life.' You know, it really gives power … especially today when we have a deficit narrative saying, 'oh well … you have trauma in your family you can't really get beyond, so you have a disease you can't really get beyond.' For me I'm like, no, you can, you can get beyond those things. And art I think is such a small subtle way of showing people that you can do those things. There's no right or wrong, there's no mistakes.

Finally, Perry shared that art can be used to teach youth who come from a deficit narrative some positive values connected to culture. The way he spoke was hopeful, stemming from a belief that people in negative situations can change:

There's some, I wouldn't say bad, but just some kids that don't have very good teaching. You can still teach them, you can still teach them to be respectful, to work together.

In overcoming a deficit narrative, artists create new stories, examples of which are shared in the next theme: creating.

Creating (A New Story)

Art is a method of telling stories, and it can be used to tell a story of an alternative future, one in which the storyteller is released from the confines of a deficit narrative and has the freedom to move forward in whatever fashion they might choose. This was happening at the art workshop both on a metaphysical and a physical, literal level. When creating, many of the youth told stories of overcoming deficits such as drug abuse and isolation, their art representing a preferred future. Others quite literally were exposed to the possibility of a new story when they realized that art was now a path they could go down, that there were people who worked as artists or who used art in their day-to-day lives and thus this could be a reality. John pointed out that the youth "*couldn't believe … you could actually be an artist*" and Perry emphasized the importance for youth to "*try something new"* such as art. Star shared her own experience:

> *I went to the reserve schools and … the only art they really had was just drawing or painting, and so in school … I wasn't open to art and didn't really think I was an artist at all just because it wasn't something I was into. And … even the paintings they showed us wasn't … showing all of the kinds of styles you can do. So, it's really limited. So, when I went there (the art workshop) I was trying to bring everything I learned from the outside to them so that they can start to formulate their … own ideas, and put themselves in that position of being the creator.*

Theron focused on the concept that "*you can tell stories through art*." Theron added:

> *We have a beautiful reserve, we have beautiful people there, we have beautiful culture. We have all of this stuff and … I try to emphasize that. … Seeing us as … drunks and alcoholics and all this stuff, … that's hard for them to take. I think that a lot of us …*

don't drink and do drugs, and we're following our cultures, we're dancing, we're performing in front of them, we're doing art shows, we're doing dance performances.

Theron elaborated on the importance of facilitating art workshops in schools:

When you start bringing in this art form to the classroom setting and start trying to figure out where your heritage is from, where they came from, they're going to be in the world, they're going to change their ways, and they're not going to let the society dictate their … lives and the way they're running. They can be able to evolve to be kind people, to be loving, to be the basic human instinct of everything that we are. We're kind, loving, caring, all of those and compassionate … And if we can get that in when they're young ... and start working with that, we want those kinds of people to be our leaders, we want them to be in charge of making programs, … those are the ones that are going to change … the struggles for any kind of human or man-kind in their territory.

Lauren talked about how the power of voice can aid people and communities in overcoming deficit narratives to create their own positive stories:

I think once we access those traditional knowledges and acknowledge that … we have what it takes, then I think this can really help people … forgive themselves for the things they've done maybe in their life, forgive their family, their parents, or … generational trauma, and allow them to make a new ending … and make a new … life. I guess, kind of move on, in a good way, not forgetting, but just acknowledging and letting it go … Moving on creating a new life, a new future and stuff like that. Because, you know, being from Browning, in my community I think a lot of people [think] once you are something that's all you'll ever be, you can't re-story the story. And, I know Western culture, … unfortunately, like with racism and things like that, really … beat it into people that 'well

you're just going to be this, there's no use in trying anything else, you're always going to be this.' Myself as, as an artist and a creator, … in a way, I say no to this, its not true.

Star suggested using art to teach history to set the stage for creating a new future:

Teach the youth about our history, who we are. And maybe when they knew that they wouldn't be trying to act like, you know, gangsters, with all the crime, turning to drugs, because they're lost right now, but if they knew how powerful their ancestors were, how much they fought so that we could still be here, then I think they'd have a totally different outlook on life.

Coping (With Disharmony)

As communities work to empower their voices, overcome deficit narratives and write new stories for their futures, art can bring an additional benefit of coping with disharmony or imbalance throughout these processes. There are challenges faced by Indigenous and non-Indigenous people every day that art can help people cope with. John shared:

With art and culture, when you start working with youth it gives them a sense of belonging because they start finding out who they are, who their people are and … you can use art to release stress or anger or help feel better, especially with things going on in the households in our communities.

He continued:

It just makes you feel better. Especially, sometimes I do workshops with youth or adults that never ever do art or say they're not artists, they never want to leave the workshop or they get caught up colouring or drawing and they say it makes them feel so good and feel better.

Theron shared a personal story about how art has helped him cope with daily challenges:

> *I've been diagnosed with ADHD, hyperactive activity, and … sometimes I get … stressed out with everything …. I think that it really helps a person out to be grounded, to be focused, and to clean out … our minds, in our mentality and in our every-day struggles with anything. And when we start focusing on these kinds of art and on how complicated and complex some of them are … it's rewarding, and it calms you, … [it's] this stress-free thing that you do cause there's no outside world … when you get into a trance you just get into it.*

In speaking with Theron, I learned how the connection with spirituality through art was an underlying reason that it helped with coping day-to-day, because connection with spirituality adds balance and harmony to our lives. Theron shared:

> *This artwork that we do ... in a way it is spiritual because you're getting grounded and being … spiritual. ... When we're stressed out and everything like that we become these broke people … then we start looking really old and everything like that. … I told them that once you kind of find that culture of where you guys came from, you're going to find out what all that singing and dancing is for ... for what culture you're from. And once you get back to those ways ... for you and for us, its one of the strongest ways we can deal with things.*

Perry also shared his own experience with art as a way of coping with disharmony stating, "*It helps me relax … it keeps me out of trouble*." He elaborated:

> *When I get stressed out, this kind of helps me relax. And that's what I want to teach the … youth, if there's something bothering you, go talk to somebody. If you can find something to keep you busy, get into that. And this [art] is a perfect thing to do.*

Engaging (In Discovery)

When speaking with the artists, I heard how the youth who attended the art workshop focused, even those who seemed disinterested in the beginning. They became engaged throughout the day in the classroom. They engaged in the art of their choosing, and they engaged in the learning associated with it. On a surface level, the youth engaged when learning about new art forms. On a deeper level though, they were using art to engage in self-discovery and learning about their culture, their histories, and about themselves. Theron shared:

> *Once they started getting into it they were really into it, they were … were really painting and were really focusing... I think it kind of channels them a little bit.*

Lauren spoke about what took place in his classroom:

> *There's no mistakes, there are no mistakes, you can always either fix them or they are going to be part of your picture, and, ... once they heard that, I think that really allowed them to breathe, a like a sign of relief I guess, maybe subconsciously because they really kind of continued … once I said that its like, 'just do what you need to do,' they really settled down. My students were really very introspective … I really kind of let them say what they needed to say.*

In response to me asking him what he believed caused youth to be hesitant about engaging, he said:

> *I think it's just because of our Western education system where we tell you, [you] know, what to do and what to say, whatever, this is what you need to do.*

In my discussion with Star, she spoke about how using art to learn and allowing youth to use their own voice when learning increased meaningful engagement:

You're just reading somebody else's words and regurgitating them when you're just reading and writing. But when somebody stops and says, 'what do you think, what are you interested in?' it changes the whole idea of, "okay, well who am I, … what can I do, how am I going to trade this … idea?'

Learning (Alternatives to Lecture)

I asked the artists how they believed youth could learn from the integration of art and culture in the classroom. The first thing that was clear to me was that art allowed youth who didn't learn easily in a typical Western classroom environment to learn in a new way that excited them. Theron said:

You can just see their eyes glowing, and they're just sitting there and listening to everything you have to say. But yeah, these kids are... you can just tell that these kids are so, want knowledge, they want to learn everything.

The next thing that stood out was the practical skills youth can learn from art. John said:

Teaching respect … with art. … Respect as in listening and then following directions and just … helping them along the way to continue on what they want to be, if they want to draw, if they want to be anything else, because art is unlimited you know, it's everything.

What struck me most was how Star connected how art can increase engagement and thus improve learning in a classroom setting.

It could be as easy as just … in social studies they do all the history movements. All of those movements have art movements, they're all involved, intertwined with artists at the time of either doing the propaganda, making up the posters for them, … the artists in history are so entwined together, so why not teach it more at an artistic angle. You could show examples of the painters of the time who are showing all those uncivil unrests of

those people … instead of just saying 'oh there was a French revolution on this date,' well, show them some of the reality that was happening that the artists were showing in their work, right. And I think that would get them more … attentive to what was being shown. … They're showing this whole movement through history of people who are fighting against the injustices that were being done to them, right. Because that's basically what the artists … of that time were all doing, right. You have this whole buildup of art history going right along with history.

Additionally, Perry spoke in depth about how youth can learn from art and about art as an alternative teaching style that could appeal to youth with different learning styles:

The best way I learn is from watching. I can't read a book … If I buy something like this shelf, I won't look at the instructions, I'll just look at the picture and put it together … it's looking, seeing and doing.

He spoke specifically about how the youth learned at the art workshop:

They learned something that day, and I enjoyed teaching them. … For me it was a good opportunity to teach the youth something different ... so that's why I say it's good to have it during school hours. Because after school the majority won't show up … the majority won't have rides, and the majority will prefer to be with their friends after school rather than going back to school. So that was the good thing about having it during school hours.

Further, Perry discussed what he saw the youth learning through art:

Patience, that's one thing I know. And to work with their brains and come up with the designs. Something they probably didn't do before. It's different if you give a child a colouring book, the picture is already there ... but if you tell them to draw something and

then colour it, that's going to make them think. And that's what the craft that they did that day, it doesn't matter what craft they did, it made them think.

Enjoying (The Learning Process)

Simple enjoyment is something I believe gets glossed over too often when speaking about what gets youth involved in education. The artists spoke about how much they enjoyed facilitating and how much they saw the youth enjoyed learning at this art workshop. Enjoying the process of the intervention was clear. Lauren said, "*You know, it seemed to me they really enjoyed it*," and John said, "*I could tell that they were engaged, and they liked it a lot.*" Theron shared further:

I think all the kids enjoyed it and … that the kids, when they were finished their stuff and were displaying their stuff at the end, … they were so happy they were showing their parents and were showing what they did with the leather and all this.

Perry specifically spoke about the importance of youth enjoying what they do, and how art can support such enjoyment in school:

I've always tried to encourage the youth to do things that they enjoyed, doesn't matter what it is, something to help you relax and enjoy … I don't think they've ever done anything like that, or had the opportunity to do that. So … when I see them smiling at each other knowing they're visiting with their friends, I knew they were enjoying what they were doing so I knew that really had an effect.

He elaborated:

The thing is that I enjoyed the whole thing because the kids were busy. They enjoyed it. Even though I wasn't with the other ones (youth), but you know when you just meet them down the hallway, and they were talking about what they're doing, and you know they

enjoyed it, if they don't talk about it they didn't enjoy it. So, I know they enjoyed what they were doing at ... the workshop. Despite what they were doing, they still enjoyed it. That's why I like to encourage people to do something to help them relax.

Continuing (Integration of Art in the Classroom)

Moving forward toward a better future for Indigenous youth living on reserves such as those who attended the art workshop, the artists stressed the need for such workshops to continue. They provided suggestions for how such workshops could develop moving forward. Lauren suggested:

I think if I were to do it again maybe break it down to smaller groups possibly, just because it was a little easier to control I guess … because [in] such a large room … [when] there's so many people there, I think the intimacy ... is lost.

Theron spoke about expanding such interventions to non-Indigenous youth and non-reserve schools:

I think it's good when you have a mixed group of not just Aboriginal students, if you have it mixed, non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal, that's where you're going to get healing from everything. They're going to maybe display the hardship it is to be Aboriginal through art and then maybe … for the non-Aboriginal people they're going … to say, 'wow, I never thought of it that way.' … I strongly believe that they need to have the Aboriginal and the non-Aboriginal people, and that's another form of … addressing our issues. … When they're together and they're working and they can share stuff in a classroom together, they start building these bonds and relationships that we always … try to strive for, and I think that … relationship is the biggest, and understanding comes after you get relationships. And you find that understanding, then you find knowledge, and then you're

going to be... defining all of these things is so complex and everything that … art has to offer.

Perry also spoke about expanding workshops to include non-Indigenous youth and the importance of sharing the knowledge we learn from doing workshops like this:

I just hope they have more workshops for all the students, it doesn't matter where or what race, I think all schools should have them. I think … that it keeps their kids out of trouble. Because a lot of them will find they have talent they don't know about, that's going to improve their lives also. … So, I hope they have more … And with what you're doing with this interview, you're learning something from it, and then the people out there that read what you write up, they're going to learn from that … so it is very helpful.

Star spoke about her own experience and how this could inform future workshops:

It would have been great if maybe it was a few … days longer so that each kid could have got to go to each of them [art stations] and experience … all of what they had to offer. Because, like I said … for me, I don't just focus on one artistic medium, I get something from each of them that I do, right, each of them brings something else out in me and I use it for different purposes, right. … Photography brought me out of being shy, beading really made me learn patience, right, sitting there beading for hours, and when I get something done, you know that's a really proud moment of like 'wow, I've, I could have just gave up any time but I saw it through and now I have … this to show for it,' so, you know, it slowly teaches you as you're creating. Like painting, … again you're just like, 'wow, … I saw it in my head of how I wanted it to look and there it is in front of me,' so it's giving you that value. So, I know that all of those kids when they were making stuff they felt that. … That's just what you get when you're creating something, you get that

really proud moment of … 'I did that, that's really cool.' … That's what I know, that it's really important that we keep doing workshops like this, … it really broadened a lot of youth's horizons, right, and showed them that there's more to hobbies … You can build a career off of it, it's not just a hobby. … It can basically … save you. At time it does… You … can be having … the worst day ever, and then you go and you make something and you start to feel better, right, start to … feel like you have self-worth, right.

Finally, John shared his suggestions, specifically focusing on the benefit of bringing elders and artists into classrooms to share their knowledge:

I think it would be great to bring the elders and the youth together, because … we're losing that. So, it was pretty awesome to see the elders there that were actually part of the school and are there every day and helping the children, smudging and sharing stories, and I believe in my community if we had a place for elders and elders in our schools it would really help out.

Maybe one of the most important things said in these conversations was John's final statement: "*I just wanted to say one more thing. I think that we should ... do it again.*"

Tying the Stories Together

The way I came to understand the themes I shared above was by actively listening, reflecting on what stood out to me, and using my intuition to focus on what to share. I found the first theme, *art is culture,* helped me understand the rest of what the artists shared in the context of art and culture being synonymous. As the artists spoke, I recognized that the healing aspects of art were largely based on connection to culture. The next theme, *healing (the soul wound)* then could only be understood knowing that the healing that art allows happens within this connection to culture, and thus connection to spirit. These first two themes differ from the rest as they

provide the context of healing while the others provide more information about the process of healing. These stress the fact that art is in fact a healing process and it is that way because of its connection to culture for Indigenous people, specifically Niitsitapi people. The remaining themes were process-focused; they defined the specific ways art can be healing and is thus connected to wellness. In summary, art can be used to *empower* voice, *overcome* deficit narratives, *create* new stories, and *cope* with disharmony. Specifically, in a classroom environment art can also *engage* youth in discovery and learning, can provide an alternative to a lecture style of *learning*, and can increase *enjoyment* in the classroom experience. Finally, there was overwhelming support to *continue* the facilitation of art workshops such as this one and find more ways to integrate art into the Indigenous and non-Indigenous classroom. See *Figure 2* for a visual representation of these themes.

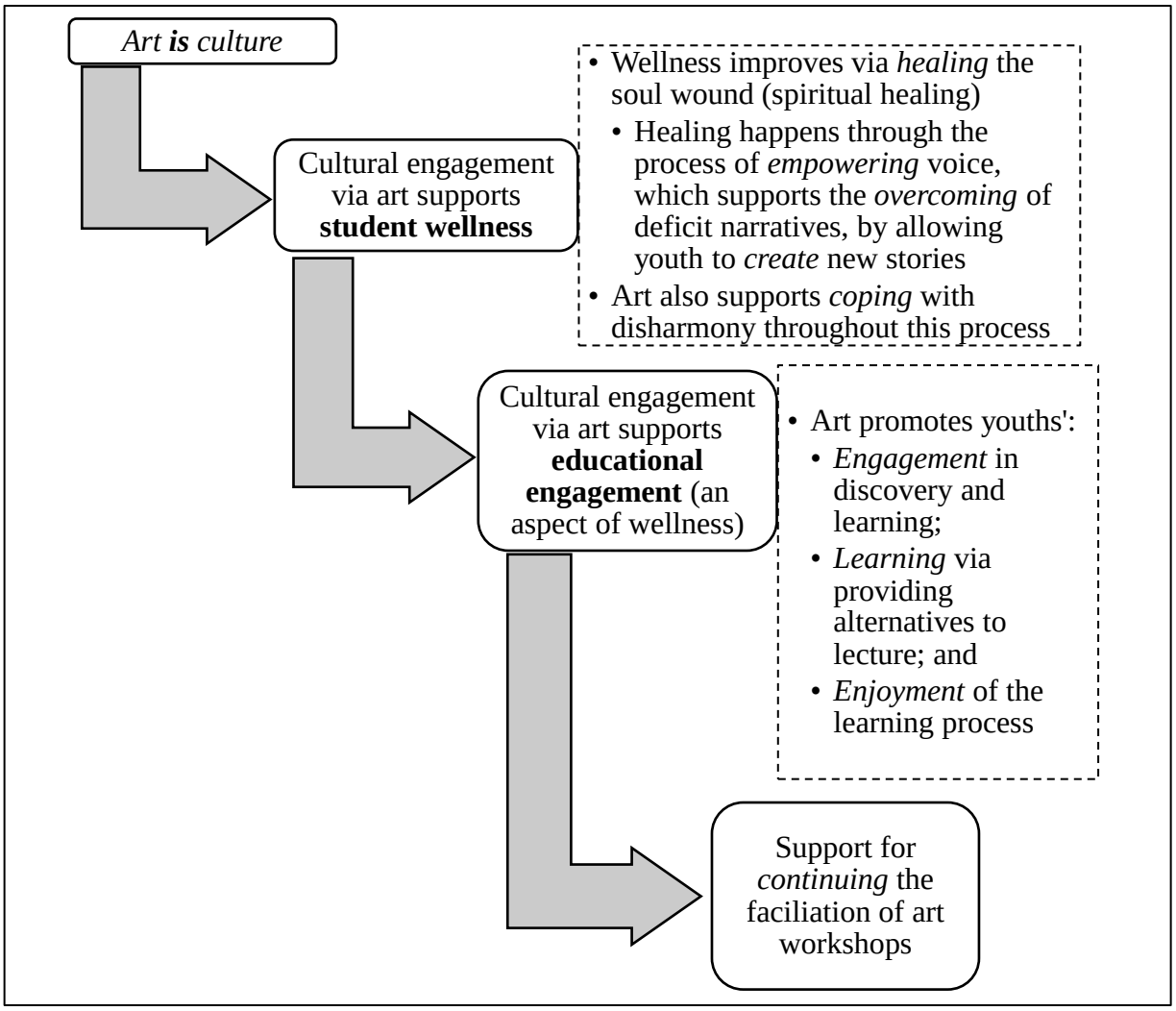

Figure 2. Flow of Themes.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I discuss the findings of this study. The purpose is to consider the results in the context of the literature and future directions for research. Shawn Wilson (2008) wrote "Indigenous research *is* a life changing ceremony," (p. 61) and having now been through this process I believe this to be true. First, I have acquired knowledge that will have a lasting effect on how I understand the experience of Indigenous people in Canada, and this has changed me on an intellectual level. I discuss this knowledge and its influence further in this chapter as I discuss the research questions. Second, I have changed on more personal cognitive, emotional, and spiritual levels. I discuss this in one final closing reflection at the end of this chapter.

Intellectual Change, Knowledge to be Shared

There was clear support from the artists who participated in this study that engagement in traditional and contemporary Niitsitapi culture and art may benefit Niitsitapi students. All ten themes identified demonstrate how the participating artists believed such engagement benefits students, with the first theme, *art is culture*, standing on its own and then others falling under one of two categories: promoting wellness or increasing educational engagement. The research conversations with participants provided a breadth of knowledge that illustrated how Niitsitapi artists experience participation in traditional and contemporary Niitsitapi cultural and artistic engagement as a means to address student wellness and educational engagement.

Five interconnected themes were identified in the research conversations that related to the practical application of art as a tool for student wellness: *healing (the soul wound), empowering (voice), overcoming (deficit narratives), creating (new stories),* and *coping (with disharmony).* Another three themes related to the utility of art for educational engagement were identified: *engaging (in discovery), learning (alternatives to lecture),* and *enjoying (the learning*

process). Finally, the theme of *continuing (the integration of art in the classroom)* highlights ways traditional and contemporary Niitsitapi cultural and artistic engagement can be included in pedagogy and curriculum to better serve Niitsitapi students.

These results can only be understood in the context of having Niitsitapi artists facilitating the workshop. Although the artists did not specifically state this in research conversations, it is very likely that the fact that each of them are successful professional artists from the same or similar communities as the youth had an impact on the students involved. This is particularly pertinent given the overarching theme that *art is culture*, which carries the implication that artists must have some lived experience with the culture and local traditional arts. As an observer of the workshop, I believe that youth benefited through having Niitsitapi role models who understood Niitsitapi culture and the social, cultural, historical, and economic contexts of the youth. Thus, I believe this study would have different findings if the facilitators had not been successful Niitsitapi artists from the local communities. Though the research questions were narrow in that they specifically focused on the Kainai community, the discussion broadens the conversation to include all Indigenous persons and communities because these results may be useful beyond Kainai due to the shared contexts and ways of knowing and being of many Indigenous peoples (King, 2003; TRC, 2015c).

Indigenous Student Wellness

Rather than fixating on deficits and risks, it is important to focus on Indigenous student wellness as a goal when addressing the needs of Indigenous communities (Sanders & Munford, 2014; Scales & Leffert, 2004; Wilson, 2008). A focus on strengths, wellness, community perspectives, and culturally-rooted interventions is essential in the healing process and creating meaningful change with Indigenous youth and communities (Jackson & Hodge, 2009; Lavie-

Ajayi & Krumer-Nevo, 2013; Sanders & Munford, 2014; Sessions & Lightburn, 2006; Scales & Leffert, 2004; Wilson, 2008). Healing goes beyond the physical and should incorporate the spiritual aspects of health for Indigenous people (Bombay et al., 2014; ISC, 2018; Lavallee & Poole, 2009). The findings of this study suggest that the integration of art workshops in the classroom can promote wellness and healthy coping with disharmony that affects the spirit. Such spiritual healing can address the soul wound and thus improve wellness in all other aspects of the self: physical, emotional, mental (Duran, 2006).

In addition, the process of engaging in decolonizing interventions can promote wellness in communities, as decolonizing targets the colonialism behind many community issues (ISC, 2018; Smith, 2012). The intervention of focus in the current study was a decolonizing process as it (a) empowered the voices of Indigenous youth; (b) focused on Indigenous expressions of culture, unconstrained by a Western worldview; and (c) acknowledged the soul in the healing process (Braun et al., 2014; Duran, 2006; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). It is possible to support the process of decolonization, thus contributing to student wellness, by bringing art workshops led by community artists, Elders, and knowledge holders into schools. Artists in this study further shared that empowering the voices of Indigenous students through art may restory (Fellner, in press) deficit narratives of internalized racism and systemic oppression, as Indigenous youth articulate their own stories unconstrained by a Western paradigm. Further, teaching art may be a way to provide youth with a method of coping with spiritual disharmony, an alternative to engaging in risk behaviours.

Educational Engagement

A typical formal education framework in North America is grounded in and biased to Western ways of being, doing, and knowing (Stock & Grover, 2013). This conventional style of

education disregards Indigenous ways of knowing and thus ostracizes Indigenous students, resulting in systemic oppression (Stock & Grover, 2013). The finding of this study suggest that art is one way to appropriately engage Indigenous students in education, as art is a significant part of Indigenous culture and thus way of forming knowledge.

The research conversations in this study highlight the participants' beliefs, based on their own experiences, in the importance of youth enjoying the activities they participate in. Harris (2011) suggested that it is the responsibility of educators to modify their curriculums in a way that caters to the interests of their students and appeals to their interests to increase enjoyment, and thus increase engagement. Given the discussions in this study, it is possible that the integration of art in the curriculum could adequately meet this need.

Toward A Framework to Serve Indigenous Students

Researchers have identified a need for the integration of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in education to disrupt the oppression that is perpetuated by Eurocentric education (Stock & Grover, 2013). Doing so in a way that focuses on the strengths of Indigenous students has shown to improve teaching and learning relationships, academic success, and emotional wellbeing (Savage et al., 2011). Using holistic teaching pedagogies nourishes the learning spirit of students (Anuik & Gillies, 2012). Based on the results of the research conversations in this study, the integration of traditional and contemporary cultural and artistic engagement should be considered in pedagogy to better serve Indigenous students, as it may promote student wellness and school engagement in a way that is decolonizing, strengths-based, and holistic. This can inform a framework for the implementation of culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy in various school subjects based in local community-based approaches to wellness in education.

Based on what the artists shared with me in research conversations, if art workshops like this are integrated into a framework of culturally-relevant pedagogy, including non-Indigenous youth should also be considered. While benefiting Indigenous youth was the focus of this study and remains an important priority considering social inequities, work also needs to be done toward healing the larger society due to the negative effects of colonialism on many communities and individuals beyond just Indigenous people (Duran, 2006; TRC, 2015c). All peoples are negatively impacted by colonization (Duran, 2006; TRC, 2015a; 2015c), and it has been demonstrated that "the practices that benefit Indigenous students also benefit non-Indigenous students" (Alberta Government, 2018, p. 74). Stock and Grover (2013) conducted a study exploring the implementation of Indigenous pedagogy to teach anti-oppressive values and awareness of oppression. The results supported the use of an Indigenous pedagogy for discussing colonialism and oppression to increase all students' critical reflection on the topic, decrease oppression and marginalization of Indigenous students in education, and produce students who are ready to actively engage in social change.

The ongoing oppression of Indigenous peoples perpetuates the soul wound (Arthur and Collins, 2010b; Carter, 2007; Duran, 2006; Hall, 1997 Speight, 2007; Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000), and in Canadian society right now Indigenous people, especially young Indigenous people, are more likely than their comparable non-Indigenous peers to be targeted in acts of violence and racism (Perreault, 2011). Therefore, although the healing of Indigenous communities must be led by those communities (Wilson, 2008), non-Indigenous people must also take responsibility for and play an appropriate role in decolonization and healing. Considering Stock and Grover's (2013) study and the results of the current study, it may be

beneficial to incorporate art as another way of engaging all students in learning about oppression and raising awareness.

Going forward with the development of a framework for culturally-relevant pedagogy, cultural art workshops such as the one focused on in this study should be considered. According to the participating artists in this study, important aspects that should not be forgotten in planning such a framework include: (a) involving community elders and artists to facilitate learning; (b) providing a variety of art types for youth to explore; and (c) allowing ample time for youth to engage and practice using their voices via art. Art may be integrated in pedagogy in other ways aside from workshops as well, as it can be incorporated when learning school subjects such as history. Art may provide students with a visual approach to learning and may support them in exploring information using their own voice rather than simply regurgitating the words of others.

Implications for Counselling

While this project explored the integration of art in an educational setting, one of the primary foci was the role of art in promoting youth wellness. Thus, this research may have practical implications for the field of counselling. Given these results, counsellors may consider how they can support their Niitsitapi or Indigenous clients by connecting them to art and culture. This may include making recommendations or referrals, or bringing in successful Niitsitapi or Indigenous artists to facilitate similar workshops with a therapeutic goal of wellness. This is congruent with previous research that supports more holistic approaches to therapy with Indigenous people (e.g., Fellner, 2016; Gone, 2008; McCormick 2009; Reeves & Stewart, 2014). Additionally, counsellors may engage in open discussions with their clients that bring art into the conversation, asking their clients what it means to them; if or how it fosters healing, coping, or the empowering of voice; and how they may want to integrate it into therapy. Further, if a

counsellor is in the position to do so, they may consider advocating for and with their clients who are Indigenous youth to have culturally relevant involved in their classrooms because of its implications for educational engagement and wellness.

Strengths and Limitations

The current study had many strengths, particularly in relation to its community-based nature. The art workshop intervention and accompanying research was conceptualized and implemented in direct consultation with KBE, and thus was responding to a need in a community-based way. As such, the intervention was likely beneficial to the youth and other community members involved. It also has direct and relevant implications for KBE and their students, as KBE may use the findings of this work to shift curriculum and pedagogy in ways that promote student wellness and educational engagement. Further, due to the way it was carried out, this study contributes to the growing body of research that demonstrates best-practice in research with Indigenous people, contributing to decolonizing literature in academia, and more specifically, in the field of psychology. An additional strength is offering my perspectives and experience as a non-Indigenous researcher aspiring to be an ally and drawing upon Indigenous approaches in a culturally sensitive manner.

Alongside these strengths, the current study also had some limitations. CBR, especially with Indigenous communities, requires researchers to spend significant amounts of time engaging with a community to build relationships with community stakeholders, Elders, leaders, community members, and study participants (Castleden et al., 2012). Unfortunately, due to systemic and practical constraints, this study was limited in terms of time. The span between meeting the artists, conducting research conversations, and writing up findings occurred over only four months. Though I was able to attend community events and ceremonies with Kainai

community members, I did not have the opportunity to build strong relationships with my participants prior to research conversations in this short time span. It would be beneficial in future research to spend more time building relationships with participants, as this helps build trust and understanding within the researcher-participant relationship, allowing participants to feel comfortable sharing more freely (Archibald, 2008).

Considering this limitation, I was not able to adhere to the principle of relational accountability (Wilson, 2008) as much as I would have liked, as the participants were not involved from the start of the research process and I was unable to build strong relationships with them prior to gathering data. As well, I was not personally involved in all steps that contribute to relational accountability given that I was not involved in choosing what to study or meeting with the community members who were a part of this collaborative process with my supervisor, Dr. Fellner. That said, the limitations in my relationships with community members and participants was buffered by Dr. Fellner's pre-existing relationships with each of them. Dr. Fellner has been working directly with the community and participants since 2016, and it is likely that her existing relational accountability and trust facilitated the research process.

Another factor impacted by time limitations was participant consultation. Although participants were consulted throughout the process of determining findings, there was little time, and thus opportunity, for discussing each participants' thoughts and suggestions in depth. Ideally, if research were to continue, it would be beneficial to keep research conversations ongoing, allowing knowledge to build in conversation back and forth between researcher and participant as they form a deeper shared understanding of the research findings (Archibald, 2008; Wilson, 2008).

Finally, while the voices of the artists who participated are important and certainly contribute valuable information regarding art as an intervention that facilitates student wellness and educational engagement, the conclusions drawn from their stories may or may not align with what educators or students might have to say. Thus, in considering the application of these findings for future interventions and more comprehensive frameworks for a wellness-focused pedagogy, it would be important to also consider the impressions and experiences of the students and teachers involved. Fortunately, the larger project that this thesis is a part of does take these additional perspectives into account.

Continuing Research

This research is one part of a larger project that aims to share knowledge that can be used to put together a cohesive framework for the implementation of culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy based in local community-based approaches to wellness in education. Moving forward, the students and teachers involved in the art workshop will be invited to participate in data collection in order to incorporate their perspectives. Further, it may be beneficial to obtain longitudinal data through research conversations with the artists, teachers, and students after more time has passed post-workshop or after another workshop has been facilitated. Additionally, outside of this art workshop, research should also explore the impact of other forms of traditional and contemporary cultural and artistic engagement and expression such as: (a) film-making; (b) ceremony; (c) traditional medicines; and (d) culture camps that integrate land-based learning (Monchalin et al., 2016; ISC, 2018).

The framework developed from this and continuing research should be viewed as a living document. As new knowledge is shared it can be integrated into the framework, and as the framework changes research should continue to explore how it can be improved upon and how it

can be used and adjusted in a variety of Indigenous communities. Ultimately, continuing this research with the aim of developing a framework will lead to improvements in the integration and delivery of community-based educational interventions within the existing school system to better serve Indigenous students.

Moving forward, it may be appropriate to consider using art as a method of inquiry for research related to art, such as this study (Bochner & Ellis, 2003). Bochner and Ellis (2003) explained that when understanding the impact and meaning of art "imagination was as important as rigor, meanings as important as facts, and the heart as important as the mind" (p. 506). Given this, conventional dialog-based inquiry may not be the most appropriate method of data collection and the use of participant art may be better suited to "teach, incite, inspire, or provoke" (Bochner & Ellis, 2003, p. 507).

Personal Reflection: Cognitive, Emotional, and Spiritual Change

Entering this research topic, I was uncertain of what to expect. I worried that I might be seen as an unwanted outsider, as someone unworthy of conducting research with Indigenous people. I was worried I would be rejected. I feared how each word I said could be perceived, considering social correctness each time before and after I spoke. This fear stemmed from the guilt I have felt for my own historical context as a white person of European descent, and for my own role in systemic oppression as a person who has thrived in and supported a Western approach to academia. Until this project, I had not given much thought to other ways of knowing or sharing information. So, as I entered this research topic, I was nervous.

Despite my nerves, I was open to new experiences and to new ideas. I was beginning to grasp the importance of challenging the assumptions made in the academic world and the ways of knowing I took for granted. Knowing I would be conducting research with the Kainai

community, I began to immerse myself in a new way of being and thinking. I read books and articles on Indigenous paradigms written by Indigenous people and I attended community events in Kainai. A pivotal moment in my journey through this research process occurred while engaging with the community. I was at an all-night smoke ceremony listening to a group of three elders speaking about the logistics of the ceremony before it had started. My nerves must have been showing on my face, because one of the elders waited until we were one-on-one and asked me if I was nervous. I responded honestly, and first he joked with me, but next he told me not to worry. He said with a smile on his face, "You're one of us now." In that moment, all my fears were lifted from my body and a wave of relief and new understanding swept over me. I now understood that my intentions were seen, and that my relationship with the Kainai community was growing stronger as I engaged in community events and ceremonies. Through the rest of that ceremony I felt connected to spirit, to the land, and to the people that surrounded me. This was one of many moments that challenged my thinking when I would get swept up by guilt. I realized that in my relationship with the community there was no place for guilt over the past, as the defensiveness it caused was a barrier to moving forward (Duran, 2006). Rather, I needed to acknowledge the past, and I needed to take responsibility by channelling this into hard work and motivation toward a better future (Duran, 2006). As I built relationships with the community I felt welcomed, hopeful, and motivated.

While I felt positively about my interactions and building relationships with the Kainai community, I was still experiencing an internal conflict in the formal writing process associated with completing a thesis. Here I was, a student of Western Euro-centric education trying to incorporate a different way of thinking into my research. I valued the Indigenous ways of thinking I had learned, and in fact, much of my own ways of thinking had shifted in this process.

Yet, I had to write an academic document, something I had only ever done from a singular Western perspective. As I wrote, it felt as though I was trying to ignore my first language while also trying to speak in a language that I was still learning. This left me apprehensive to write anything because I felt like anything I wrote would be *wrong*, nothing I could say would fully conform to my first language of Western academic writing, nor would it encompass everything in an Indigenous framework because I was still learning that language. I found myself reading instead of writing, trying to learn how to present information in a way that both the academic community and the Kainai and greater Indigenous community would agree was good. As I began the writing process I was left feeling overwhelmed and despairing because, from what I could tell, these worldviews conflicted.

After being stuck in my writing for what truly felt like an eternity, I circled back to where I had started learning about Indigenous research and I re-read one of the first books I had read on the topic: Shawn Wilson's (2008) *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. As often as I could, I did my reading of this book outside – in the mountains or on the Kainai reserve – as this seemed to provide me with more clarity and engaged my spirit while I read. I felt a strong connection with Wilson as I read. Wilson's book provided me with guidance for how to conduct research with Indigenous communities, but more than that it provided me with a new perspective on the presentation of knowledge in my thesis. When I actively engaged with this text, I found that Wilson shared many things that helped to ground me in this research. Importantly, he shared:

> All I am doing is sharing some of my relationships, revealing some of the connections that make up this theory. I must recognize that in the larger scale of things, the totality of all relationships I hold and am beginning to understand are only a minuscule part of the

> grand scheme of relationships that are out there. As a storyteller I can demonstrate this humility by acknowledging my shortcomings and admitting my own ignorance. I am not a perfect being or perfect researcher. For me to think that I am would be dangerous to us all. For me to force my ideas on anyone else is personally and culturally repulsive (p. 134).

Wilson presented this statement toward the end of his book, as a reminder of the role of a researcher in an Indigenous approach to research. Each time I would get swept up in the value judgements of my first language, such as objectivism, validity, right or wrong, or significance, I referred back to this statement to remind myself that my responsibility was to be accountable to my relationships with the community. Likewise, each time I would get overwhelmed trying to incorporate an Indigenous way of thinking into my research, I found comfort in Wilson's statement, remembering that what I share is only my subjective interpretation, and thus I should not claim it to be anyone else's perspective. While this thesis is mine and demonstrates my relationship with the knowledge shared in it, that knowledge is not all my own and belongs collectively to all of those who hold a relationship to it (Wilson, 2008): the five participants, the Kainai community, and all Indigenous peoples. As my writer's block lifted, I felt so appreciative to Wilson and to an Indigenous way of valuing subjective knowledge.

Just as Wilson said it would, this experience has changed me. I believe that what I have taken from this research will transfer into my skills as a therapist working not only with Indigenous clients, but with anyone who has experienced oppression. I hope that in reciprocity I can use this knowledge to give back to the Kainai community along with all Indigenous people in the form of providing culturally-appropriate care and advocacy that supports decolonization. At the end of this journey I am now circling back to my first reflection in the prologue of this

thesis as I am again feeling hopeful and proud. I believe that this research is the start of fulfilling the promises I made in that it is the beginning of me taking the opportunity to share knowledge with others who may not know what I know now. Further, I believe that by doing this research I am reaching my hand out to the Indigenous community by using some of my privilege to centre the voices of those who have been oppressed and less heard in society. Upon completing this thesis, I feel grateful for the opportunity and all that it taught me, and optimistic about what might follow.

Final Remarks

In the beginning of this paper, I brought up the need for reconciliation with Indigenous communities of Canada. This study aimed to contribute to reconciliation by focusing on the implementation of a decolonizing intervention studied via decolonizing research methods. The results highlight the potential benefits of school-based art interventions as they positively impact student wellness and educational engagement, outlining specific ways art can benefit Indigenous youth. Moving forward, this study in conjunction with other research based in decolonizing approaches to wellness and educational engagement can be used to form a framework for a pedagogy to better serve Indigenous students. As well, research should be extended to non-Indigenous youth and off-reserve communities, as colonization is not only an Indigenous problem. This research process contributed to my personal process of decolonizing, and my hope is that it can provide its readers with a step in that same direction.

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