

Decolonizing Calgary Catholic Schools: Perspectives of Upper Administrators

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By

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Abstract

School districts in Alberta are increasingly called to do the work of decolonization as a response to differential educational outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. In this thesis I explore the role of upper administrators in Calgary Catholic School District (CCSD) in advancing the work of decolonization in its district. The study is underpinned by the following research question: “What decolonizing initiatives are currently being developed and implemented within Calgary Catholic Schools for the benefit of Indigenous and other students?” The research explored the wise practices of CCSD in this work and how they mobilize these successes for the benefit of others, while also identifying areas for growth.

A large body of literature was reviewed to provide necessary background for the inquiry. This included research on colonial education and the Catholic church’s role in residential schools, the ongoing education debt resulting in inequitable outcomes for Indigenous students and recent innovations to decolonize schools including anti-oppressive and culturally sustaining approaches. Situated within the interpretivist paradigm, I conducted research examining CCSD’s decolonizing practices, utilizing an appreciative inquiry lens. Research questions were answered through qualitative data generated via semi-structured interviews. Wherever possible, Indigenous protocols and research methodologies were followed. Critical theory was applied as my theoretical framework with critical race theory being applied to educational contexts. Participants included eight senior administrators at CCSD and the data emerging from the interviews were analyzed and interpreted using a two-step coding method. Findings included both the presence of many promising decolonizing initiatives in place CCSD and ongoing structural neocolonial power dynamics that prevent greater levels of decolonization from happening.

Keywords: decolonization, Indigenous and Catholic education, appreciative inquiry, critical race theory, qualitative interpretivist research.

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My Blackfoot Na'a (mom), Wanda First Rider, literally took me by the hand on my first day as an Indigenous education consultant and has not let go of my hand since. She teaches me every day, not just about Blackfoot and Indigenous culture and spirituality, but also about persistence, courage, respect, perspective, and love. I have benefitted from her absolute trust in me and was honoured when she adopted me in ceremony years ago. In many ways, she is also my awo taan (shield) in this work and I am proud to be her daughter. I hope that I make both of my mothers proud.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In this chapter, I introduce the topic and the problem being researched. Then I introduce myself as a researcher, position myself in this work, and provide some background context. I present the research questions that underpin the inquiry and engage with issues of methodology and method. I will also be defining key terms employed in the research, discussing limitations and delimitations of the study, and addressing ethical considerations.

School districts in Alberta are increasingly called to do the work of decolonization as a response to differential educational outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. This thesis intends to explore the role of upper administrators in Calgary Catholic School District (CCSD) in advancing the work of decolonization in their district. As the researcher, I started this study in my fifth year as an Indigenous education consultant for teaching and learning at CCSD. In that role, I saw tremendous progress made at CCSD for Indigenous students and all students in the area of decolonization and this led me to pose the following research question: “What decolonizing initiatives are currently being developed and implemented within Calgary Catholic Schools for the benefit of Indigenous and other students?” The intention was to discover the wise practices of CCSD leadership in this work and mobilize these successes for the benefit of others, while also identifying areas for growth within CSSD.

Context

The imperative for schools to implement decolonizing practices to promote success for Indigenous students, and indeed all students, is not a new one. A raft of research papers and policy documents, for more than a half-century, have identified schools as neocolonial spaces and

advocated for a culturally responsive turn. The landmark Indian Control of Indian Education (ICIE) in 1972, the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), the 2007 release of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) Calls to Action in 2015, and the new Alberta Teacher and Leadership Quality Standards (TQS and LQS) in 2019 all advocate for the implementation of decolonizing practices in schools. The discovery of the 215 children's bodies at a residential school in Kamloops, BC at the end of May 2021 and at Cowessess First Nation in 2022 further highlights the need for and urgency of the call for all sectors, especially education, to do this work.

Education was, and sometimes still is, used as a tool for colonization to the detriment of students in general, and Indigenous students in particular. Government educational policy in Canada has not always had the best interest of Indigenous students in mind; but educational policies and practices are now rightfully being questioned and challenged and there are some promising practices and policies emerging. Education is powerful. It was a powerful colonizing tool, and it can be an equally powerful decolonizing tool. Honourable former-Senator Dr. Murray Sinclair famously said, "education is what got us into this mess and education will get us out of it" (as cited in Anderson, 2016, para 9).

When policy regarding the schooling of Indigenous students in Canada was first introduced in the late 1800s, it was extremely harmful as it was created with the intention of assimilation via Indian residential schools. Some argue that the foundations of the policy leading to Indigenous residential schools can be found in the Papal Bull titled *Inter Caetera* dating back to 1493 (Native Voices, para. 2). Colonial schooling of Indigenous students underpinned by Christian supremacist assumptions started hundreds of years ago with the Jesuit priests (TRC, 2015), but there was no official education policy regarding the education of Indigenous students until the Indian Act (R.S.C., 1985), legislated in 1876. In 1879, Prime Minister John A. MacDonald

commissioned Nicholas Flood Davin to investigate the possibility of utilizing the same type of industrial schools as the United States was using for the aggressive civilization of Indigenous children. In Davin's recommendation on the use of Indian residential schools he noted, "If anything is to be done with the Indian, we must catch him very young. The children must be kept constantly within the circle of civilized conditions" (Flood, 1879, p. 12). In 1920, the Indian Act (R.S.C., 1985) made attendance for Indigenous students mandatory in the Indian Residential School System. Schooling as a tool of assimilation went largely legislatively uncontested for another 50 years.

One of the first official efforts at decolonizing schools was the policy paper Indian Control of Indian Education (ICIE) written over 50 years ago in 1972. The National Indian Brotherhood worked to change policy around the schooling of Indigenous children. It created ICIE which they drafted as a counter to the 1969 *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy*, more commonly known as 'The White Paper.' The intention was to enable "Indigenous peoples to reclaim their educational responsibilities, to set a philosophy of education, and to implement it in their schools" (Anuik, 2013, p. 529). This policy was supported by the Canadian Government in 1973, as it was seen as a low-cost way to shift the responsibility of education to individual reserves (Paquette & Fallon, 2013). Over the five decades following the policy statement, the policy has come to be seen by some as a detriment because individual community schools had to shoulder the costs and responsibilities usually upheld by entire school districts. Predictably, it has also been severely underfunded (Paquette & Fallon, 2013). Nonetheless, it was a big step in the right direction regarding Indigenous schooling and decolonization. ICIE advocated for Indigenous autonomy regarding schooling and education, including mobilizing schools to revitalize Indigenous languages and cultures in addition to academics, and it was seen as successful by some.

United Nations Declaration for the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP)

More recently, evolution in decolonizing schooling policy has transpired on an international scale. In 2007, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly with only four votes against it - one from Canada. Canada later endorsed the policy in 2016. UNDRIP (United Nations General Assembly, 2007) is the result of nearly 25 years of collaboration between United Nations member states and Indigenous groups. The articles in the policy constitute the “minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the Indigenous peoples of the world” (United Nations General Assembly, 2007, p. 28). It contains policy written about protection of culture and protection from forced assimilation, but it also contains articles specifically about Indigenous schooling. Article 14 states:

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.
2. Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.
3. States shall, in conjunction with Indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for Indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language. (United Nations General Assembly, 2007, p. 13-14)

This declaration is clear. Indigenous people have rights when it comes to their schooling and attaining education in a manner that revitalizes their Indigenous cultures. It is disappointing that Canada took three additional years to sign on to the declaration and it is also disappointing that this has not been made into educational policy in every province and territory. An encouraging

sign is that in 2019 the Northwest Territories and British Columbia wrote parts of this policy into legislation in an effort to have it legally mandated (Government of BC, 2019). UNDRIP (United Nations General Assembly, 2007) sets a clear standard regarding the rights that are inherent to Indigenous people concerning their schooling in their ancestral territories and beyond and places certain obligations on the federal government.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission

At the federal level, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) is a strong example of recommendations regarding decolonizing practices. In 2008, the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, an agreement between the Government of Canada and approximately 86,000 residential school survivors, allocated 60 million dollars for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The commission travelled across Canada listening to the stories of residential school survivors. Afterward, the three commissioners, Chief Dr. Wilton Littlechild, Dr. Marie Wilson, and chair Honourable Justice Dr. Murray Sinclair composed 94 Calls to Action (TRC, 2015). Many pertain to efforts toward decolonization. The Calls to Action call for elimination of funding discrepancies between nation and non-nation schools, closing achievement gaps, including Indigenous voices in curriculum choices, developing culturally appropriate curriculum, protecting Indigenous students' rights to Indigenous language education, and for all students, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to build "capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect" (TRC, 2015, p. 7). More specific to this examination of decolonizing practices being undertaken in a Catholic school district, Call to Action #64 states

we call upon all levels of government that provide public funds to denominational schools to require such schools to provide an education on comparative religious studies, which

must include a segment on Aboriginal spiritual beliefs and practices developed in collaboration with Aboriginal Elders. (TRC, 2015, p. 7-8)

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was lauded by Indigenous groups around the world as ground-breaking and hopeful even as the process was beginning (Howlett, 2009). It was a combined effort between government and Indigenous people, funded by part of the class-action settlement Indian residential school survivors received for their suffering. The Calls are based on the testimony of over 6750 survivors. The language in the document is profound. To write 'Calls to Action' rather than decrees or orders is absolutely in line with the work of decolonization. An Indigenous way of being is to persuade people to do what is right for the group rather than simply unilaterally demand it. As explained by Wilson (2008), Indigenous cultures are relational, and "[n]othing could be without being in relationship, without its context. Our systems of knowledge are built by and around, and also form these relationships" (p. 77). This is further clarified by Castellano (2000) when she reasoned, "a fundamental premise of Aboriginal philosophies [is]-- that everything is related" (p. 262). The Calls to Action (TRC, 2015) regarding education made suggestions that are best for all learners.

Local Context

Unfortunately, the Calls to Action are not yet legally enforceable. Thus far, they are not legislated into law, though they do influence policies and practices in many educational organizations who cite them as the reason for the decolonizing work they are doing. At the provincial level, however, there is legislated policy regarding Indigenous education which leads to mandated decolonization. In 2019, Alberta Education legislated the Teaching, Leadership, and Superintendent Quality Standards (Alberta Government, 2019). These are professional standards that teachers, school leadership, and school superintendents are legally required to achieve; each group of educators are also obliged to report on their progress toward these goals to their

supervisors every year. This is a strong example of legally mandated, fully-implemented decolonization. Aspects of Indigenous Education are woven into many of the quality standards, with one standard, being solely about Indigenous knowledges, histories, and protocols (Alberta Government, 2019). This industry standard for professional competency mandates that educators be continually striving to meet these standards and documenting their efforts yearly in growth plans.

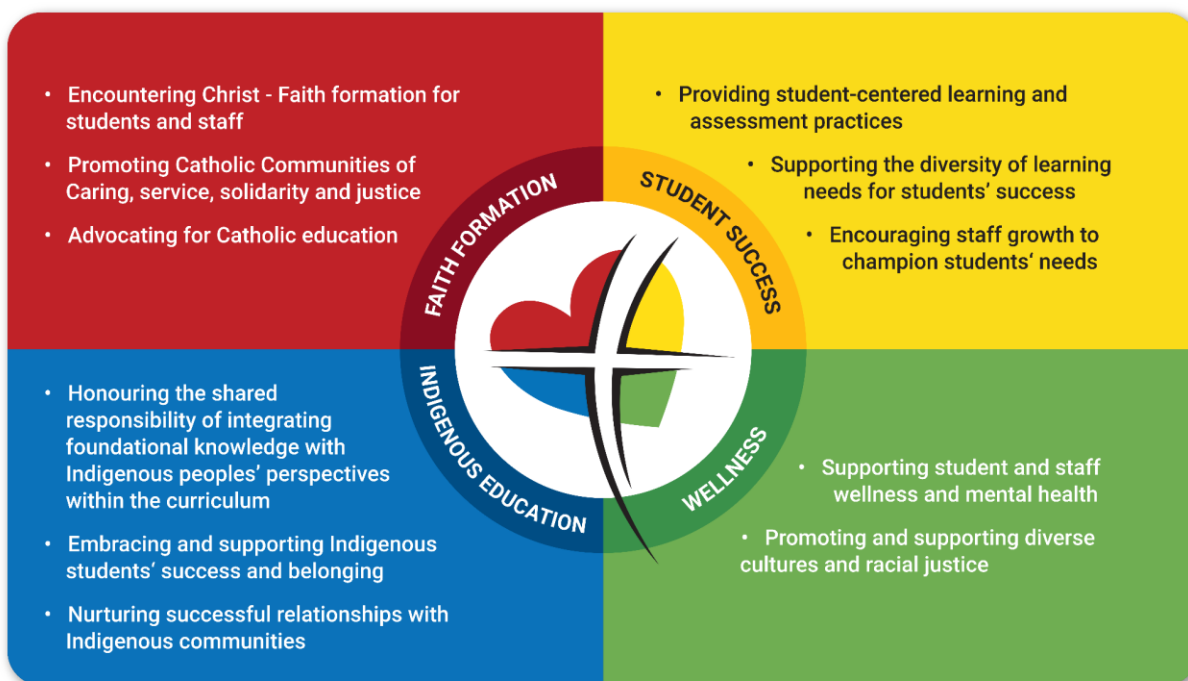
Provincial policies that are fully implemented and backed by legislation make goals of decolonization possible. Undoubtedly, they stand on the backs of those that came before them. The quality standards also create an urgency and need for Indigenous education, for Indigenous education consultants, and Indigenous teachers. A policy like this forces Alberta Education and its school districts to provide opportunities and funding for teachers, leaders, and superintendents to acquire this knowledge. It compels teachers to attend professional development in the areas of Indigenous cultures, history, pedagogies. Lastly, it demands that teachers incorporate this into their practice and their environments and holds them accountable via yearly professional growth documentation. Knowing provincial governments and their priorities change, policies of this nature and level of importance need to be in place at the district level so that no matter the pendulum swing of politics, decolonization will remain a priority.

At the local CCSD district level, there are no policies regarding decolonization. This does not mean that the school district does not have protocols, procedures, and processes designed and reported on to further decolonization, but it may mean that the board is doing so because of the provincial legislation and not their own policies, which would make such initiatives more tenuous. Calgary Catholic School District (CCSD) has mention of Indigenous Education under Policy 12 of the Chief Superintendent's Performance Assessment Guide. Leadership Practices,

Role Expectations “QI 11.5 ensures Indigenous Education for all students” (Board Policy Handbook, 2020, p. 109). Out of this policy, extensive protocols, processes, and procedures are in place regarding decolonization. CCSD has an entire Indigenous education department with a supervisor, consultants, Indigenous community liaisons, Indigenous wellness workers, and Indigenous teachers. CCSD made Indigenous education one of their four priorities and they strive to honour that whole-heartedly. See Figure 1.1 below.

Figure 1.1

Calgary Catholic School Districts Board of Trustees Priorities: 2020 - 2021



Calgary Catholic School District. *Board of Trustees Priorities: 2020-2021*. (Unpublished)

Nature of the Study

I conducted research to examine CCSD's decolonizing practices via a qualitative interpretivist paradigm utilizing an appreciative inquiry lens. Indigenous protocols and research methods were followed, where possible. This included pre-consultation as I formed my research

direction. I consulted many Indigenous educators, Elders, and scholars regarding my area of interest. Each consultation helped me shape the direction of my research. Critical theory was applied as my theoretical framework. Data were collected via two-hour, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with eight upper administrators at CCSD. Data were then analyzed and interpreted using a two-step coding method.

The main limitation of the study is that I am fully trusting of the interviewees to be truthful, knowledgeable, and forthright. The main delimitation is that all participants are part of upper administration and working within the CCSD. In this study, I was both an emic researcher as an employee in a leadership position at CCSD and an etic researcher because I am not a part of the upper administration of CCSD. Later in the study, I became more etic as I left the district to become a leader in another district. No students were interviewed and I am not in a supervisory role over any of the participants so there were few ethical concerns. The data regarding success rates of Indigenous students in CCSD is outstanding, so I do not feel my position as Indigenous Education consultant will be threatened by any of the findings.

Purpose of the Study

This research studied a school district that is making strides toward systemic decolonization of its schools and classrooms. The goal was to better understand the processes undertaken and how and why they have been effective. This study has the potential to mobilize the wise practices of CCSD to advance the efforts toward decolonization of other districts and schools. It could also identify areas and directions for future growth of decolonizing practices at CCSD.

Self-identified Indigenous students attending CCSD have an excellent high school graduation rate and a very low dropout rate. For the 2020-21 school year across the province of Alberta, 62% of self-identified Indigenous students graduated high school. The graduation rate of

self-identified Indigenous students in CCSD was 81.1%. The dropout rate of self-identified Indigenous students in the province of Alberta was 5%. At the CCSD, the dropout rate of self-identified Indigenous students was only 2.1% (Alberta Government, 2020). It may be tempting to simply celebrate that CCSD Indigenous students graduated at a 19% higher rate than Indigenous students across the province and dropped out at a much lower rate, but in addition to celebrating, time would be best spent deciphering why the success rates are greater and if that success can be increased and possibly recreated elsewhere. It is also worth noting that the graduation rate of all students in the province was 83.4%, meaning that there is still work to be done in decolonizing education until Indigenous student success is commensurate with all other students.

The lower high school graduation rates of Indigenous students as compared to all students is often referred to as an achievement gap. According to Orlowski and Cottrell (2019), a better term than an achievement gap, which puts the blame on the student, would be to think of it as an “educational debt” that is owed to Indigenous students because of the inferior and abusive nature of the education that Indigenous peoples received for more than a century. Further, the inferior and abusive education that Indigenous people received did not honour the agreements and promises made to Indigenous people of a Western education alongside a traditional education (Carr-Stewart, 2002) in the treaties, increasing the debt owed. This debt can be addressed in part via the decolonization of schools, which requires openness to disruption and willingness to invest resources.

A goal of CCSD is to continually improve Indigenous student graduation rates. It is hoped that an examination of the practices and procedures regarding decolonization in CCSD will reveal strategies that can be utilized by other school districts in order that other districts can implement these practices to increase the success rates of Indigenous students and all students as well. It is

also hoped that possible improvements can be suggested to the policies or practices of CCSD so that the Indigenous student success rates can rise even higher and be commensurate with the success rates of all students.

Situating Myself

As an Indigenous Education Consultant working in Alberta, this work was and still is, very meaningful to me both personally and professionally. I am the granddaughter of a residential school survivor. My paternal grandfather, or “Peperé” as we called him, said it would have been better to be dead than to have lived his childhood. I did not know at that time that he was a survivor; I found out after his death because he never spoke of it. It is a large part of my motivation in this work. My father’s family are from the Métis communities of Willowbunch, Lisieux, and St Victor in southern Saskatchewan and before that, from communities in Quebec that many Métis families originated from before coming to the prairies. He and his wife, my Mémère, lived the traditions, culture, and language of the Métis. My Mémère had relatives who were voyageurs and who lived in the Red River area of Manitoba. My father’s ancestors have been recorded on Turtle Island as far back as 400 years on all four branches of his family tree.

In addition, I have also been traditionally adopted into a Blackfoot family of the Kainai Nation in southern Alberta. My Blackfoot Na’a is named Pukaki, which translates to Little Woman. Her English name is Wanda First Rider and she has been teaching me Blackfoot ways of being and language for 7 years now. In December 2021, I also received a Blackfoot name in ceremony. My Blackfoot name is Niinamska Ohsoko; it translates to Thunder Pipe Path. The path of thunder is life. It is the symbol of renewal, growth, and overcoming challenges. The Blackfoot have a thunder pipe bundle that is opened each spring with the first thunder, and they prepare a spiritual path for it. I was told that the ‘Path’ in my name is also representative of the path I walk on the edge between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in this work. I am incredibly

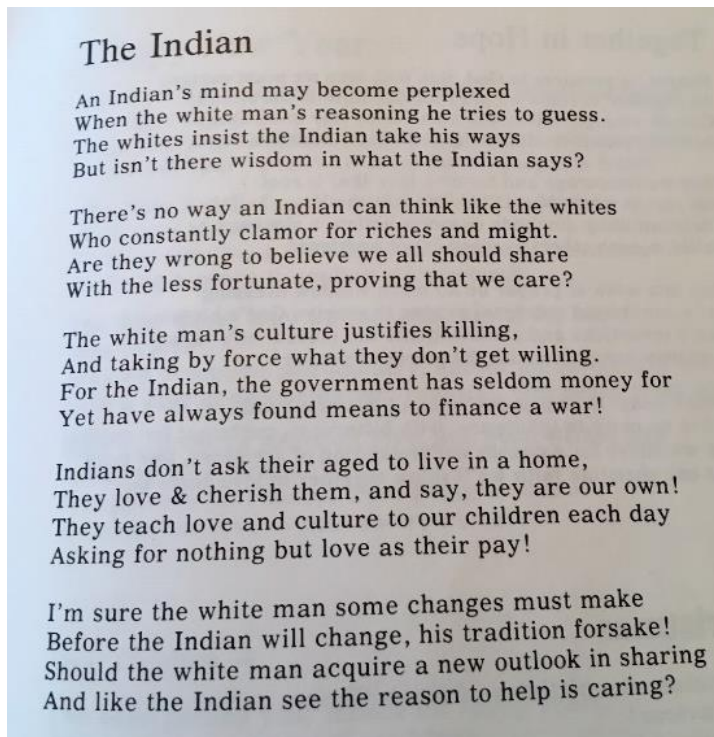
honoured to carry this name and understand the responsibilities that come with it. I was gifted this name by Elder Peter Weasel Moccasin who is a double bundle carrier and ceremonialist from the Kainai Nation. His Blackfoot name is Miinii Poh'ka, Berry Child.

Without getting too sentimental, my own earthly entry-point into this work was at four months old when Joanne, who appointed herself as my Cree-Métis kokum, used to rock me and sing Cree lullabies to me. I was colicky and my mother was pregnant with my brother who is 13 months younger than me. Joanne used to come down the road to help care for me. When I was young, many of my father's friends were First Nations people. My Houle extended family has Cree and Métis people. I remember, at about eight or ten years old, facing racial discrimination for the first time. I was called a 'f&cking whitey' at the swimming pool by a group of First Nations children. Confused by this, on the way home I asked my mom if I was White? Her answer was, "Well, it's kind of complicated." It remains so.

I am 100 percent white-passing. I remember my Mémère remarking how lucky I was 'because I have blue eyes and blonde hair and everyone will love me.' I did not understand the significance of that until I was much older and, unfortunately, she had already died. My mother is of Irish-Scottish settler descent. Ironically, she is the one who ensured her children were aware of, and proud of, their ancestral roots. This comes as less of a surprise when you look at my Irish maternal great-grandmother's poetry from 50-60 years ago, see Figure 2, and consider that for over 100 years my mother's ancestors tilled around the Indigenous sacred sites they found on their land near Marengo, Saskatchewan. They did not know what these sites meant or understand them at all, but they knew instinctively that they should be respected and left as found.

Figure 1.2

Poetry by Mayme (Mary) Anderson, great grandmother of researcher



There is no doubt that being White has advantages, but it also has a unique set of circumstances with regard to my role in this work. I am often given access to conversations that people who look Indigenous do not. People reveal their true thoughts about and resistance to this work to me before they realize who I am. I find myself in difficult situations where I am directly able to address false narratives and give alternate perspectives to people who did not intend to be having that type of conversation. It can be difficult as I must choose to take the path of having the difficult conversation, knowing the person I am talking to will be surprised that I feel as strongly as I do about their anti-Indigenous sentiment, and that they may even react with aggression toward me because they were taken off guard and did not expect to be called out on their ill-informed beliefs. I am aware of my power and privilege as a blonde-haired,

blue-eyed person and because of that undeserved privilege, I choose to have the difficult conversations. This also honours my Blackfoot name.

My leadership position directly pertained to Indigenous education and schooling. In my position, and still, I am asked regularly by educators from my own school district and from across the province and beyond for advice on how to effectively pursue the work of decolonization and Indigenization in an effort toward reconciliation. I always relay, to the best of my ability, what I have learned via Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, my own work experience, and anecdotal evidence from the work happening in CCSD. Anecdotal evidence has a place in this work, but my hope is that this research will bring a clearer understanding of the work taking place and a more research-based direction for the future of this work in CCSD and across Alberta.

As an Indigenous Education Consultant for Calgary Catholic School District (CCSD) for 5 years, the need for decolonization before Indigenization became obvious. When I first started in this work, it seemed that the best thing to do would be to Indigenize classrooms: bring Indigenous content, accurate, respectful resources, and authentic, knowledgeable Indigenous speakers to schools and classrooms. While these are effective strategies toward creating understanding of Indigenous culture and people, after spending some time in the role and, in my second year, hearing a presentation from Dr. Dustin Louie about the need for decolonization before Indigenization, my paradigm began to shift. Subsequently, reading the scholarship of Drs Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Margaret Kovach, Marie Battiste, Shawn Wilson, Verna St Denis, Paul Orlowski, Michael Cottrell, Dwayne Donald, Jennifer Tupper, Yvonne Poitras Pratt, Gregory Cajete, and many others regarding Indigenous education, I came to the realization that Indigenization was only a small piece of a much larger puzzle.

The limitations of Indigenizing classrooms are many, but the most important relate to the power imbalance of an 'add and stir' mentality (Battiste, 1998; Bauer-Dantoin & Ritch, 2005;

Cummins, 1989). Teachers' flexibility and availability of time and monetary resources are also a limitation. Some subject areas can be difficult and or complicated to Indigenize as well.

Decolonization can be implemented in absolutely any level and area of the educational process. According to Smith (2012), decolonization revitalizes ways of knowing and being prior to colonization, while challenging and disrupting assumptions of the colonial way of doing things and knowing things as being superior. I have come to realize that because of the effects of the dynamics of power and privilege in the world, decolonization can and should be done at every possible opportunity.

Disciplinary Contribution

This study is well-placed in the field of Educational Administration research. Educational Administration studies schools and their governance and leadership to improve practices for all students and staff. When trustees make policies and set directions for a school district, all practices and procedures that come out of those policies and directions are implemented, overseen, and assessed by educational administrators. This includes the implementation, supervision, development, and enforcement of procedures related to decolonization. The function of educational administration is key to the success of these efforts, as decolonization constitutes a challenge and opportunity for more traditional educational administration scholarship and practices.

Research Questions

At the conclusion of this study, it is my hope that the strengths of the work CCSD is doing in decolonization is adequately delineated, interpreted, and mobilized for the continued benefit of Indigenous students and all students in CCSD and for students of other school jurisdictions as well. Therefore, the primary research question is "what decolonizing initiatives are currently being developed and implemented within Calgary Catholic Schools for the benefit of Indigenous

and other students?” As it is understood that upper administrators develop and supervise the priorities and initiatives set out by school board trustees, the secondary research questions are:

1. What role do administrators play in developing and ensuring implementation of those initiatives? and
2. How might other school divisions benefit from knowledge of these practices?

Description of the Study

This research utilizes a qualitative interpretivist design and an appreciative inquiry approach. Interpretivist methods involve social theories and perspectives that perceive reality as socially constructed or made meaningful via actors' understandings of experiences. Interpretivist epistemologies thus suggest that knowledge of the world can be acquired by interpreting or understanding the meanings that humans attach to their actions. The meaning that participants attach to these decolonizing initiatives will be accessed by data that are qualitative in nature as they are the personal thoughts, actions, and opinions of individual participants regarding the decolonizing initiatives being developed and their benefit for Indigenous students and all students.

Interpretivism is well-suited to this research because it is a people-centered approach. It acknowledges that the researcher is part of the research environment and that they may impact the conceptions and perceptions of the participants. Interpretive methodologies centre their scientific explanations around the human actors, interpreting meaning from human practices and behaviour. Interpretive research analyses those practices and behaviours to disclose meaning because actions observed and analyzed generate observable outcomes. Research that utilizes interpretivist paradigms supports an interactive process between researchers and research participants. The research process then “focuses on the perspectives, feelings, and beliefs of the

participants” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 237). The study aligns ontologically with interpretivism because it enabled the research to explore the complexity, vibrancy, and intricacy participants expressed related to lived experiences while attempting “to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3).

As constructivists assume that knowledge is “socially constructed by people active in the research process and that researchers should attempt to understand the complex world of lived experiences from the point of view of those who live it” (Schwandt, 1998, p. 221), an interpretivist approach is congruent with the design of this study because it takes into account the meaning-making of all individual’s input into the process - both the researchers and the research participants. This research will be done utilizing qualitative data. Qualitative data research affords participants an opportunity to socially construct knowledge based on their lived experiences. It also provides researchers with a clearer understanding of the socially constructed truths dependent on the participants’ perspectives because they are able to interact with the participants (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

The information gathered was studied via a critical race theory lens. Critical race theory came out of critical theory. Critical theory is an “emancipatory research theory” (Louie, 2019, p. 183) in which theorists contend that there is a contradiction between the dominant view of society and the way society actually functions, and it is a foundational philosophy in social justice education (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Milner (2008) explained that “critical race theorists are concerned with disrupting, exposing, challenging, and changing racist policies that work to subordinate and disenfranchise certain groups of people and that attempt to maintain the status quo” (p. 333). This designates critical race theory as a suitable framework with which to analyze the data collected given that this study is regarding the implementation of Indigenous ways of

knowing and being to disrupt prevailing hierarchies and create more equitable outcomes. Under ideal circumstances, CRT offers the possibility to reveal and inquire into colonization within educational contexts and structures for Indigenous people (Writer, p. 1).

Indigenous protocols and methods were followed as possible throughout the research process. I discussed my research areas of interest with my Blackfoot mother and with Métis scholar Yvonne Poitras Pratt extensively before embarking, asking them where best my search would serve Indigenous learners and educators respectively. I also discussed many questions about the direction I would eventually choose with Indigenous educators and scholars as I narrowed down my research question. When choosing my research methodologies class, it was very important to me that I take the Indigenous research methodologies class. My advisor and I made several attempts at inviting Indigenous scholars to be a part of my committee, but we were unsuccessful. I established and nurtured relationships with all participants and ensured that 25% of my participants were Indigenous by inviting the upper administrators at CCSD who identify as Indigenous. I also gifted all participants for their contributions afterward and continue to grow those relationships despite moving school districts.

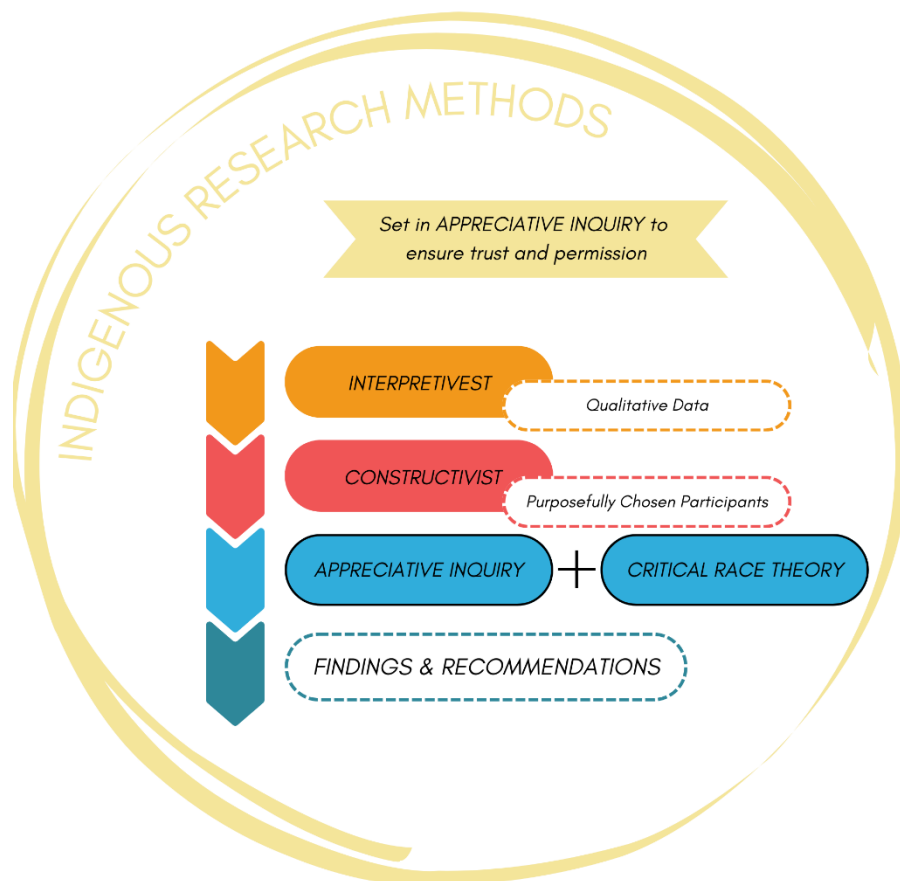
The participants represented themselves and voluntarily participated in the study. Data were collected via two-hour, semi structured, one-on-one interviews. Two audio recorders were used to record and store the responses. Data were analyzed and interpreted using two-cycle coding.

Doing the study via appreciative inquiry allowed me to look for the best and wisest practices of an organization and its employees to be highlighted, rather than faults or failures. Appreciative inquiry is “an approach to seeking what is right in an organization in order to create a better future for it” (Coghlan et al., 2003, p. 1.). This research aimed to investigate wise practices in CCSD regarding decolonization to improve upon these practices to better understand

the practices, why they are working, and possibly mobilize them in other districts for the betterment of Indigenous students and all students.

As there are a number of frameworks and lenses applied in this study, I created the following diagram to best explain the process and help clarify my explanation.

Figure 1.3 Research Conceptual Framework



There are boundaries on this research. The boundaries of this study are geographical: participants must be CCSD employees in senior administration located in Calgary, Alberta. A second boundary is time. Data were collected March to June 2022 during two-hour interviews. A third boundary is that the only data collected are from semi-structured interviews. Data collected during this study are qualitative, but quantitative data previously collected by Alberta Education are included as informative metrics. I was a researcher emic as an employee of CCSD

and etic because I was not in CCSD upper administration, then completely etic as I was no longer employed by CCSD for the analysis, recommendations, and conclusion portions of the study.

Delimitations of the study

There are several delimitations to this study. Delimitations include the method and the participants. All participants are in upper administration in CCSD. This study is limited to the data that the participants provided based on their level of knowledge and the questions that are posed. The participants were interviewed once for approximately two hours between March and June 2022. This research is delimited to the data that participants provided and pre-existing qualitative data collected and published by Alberta Education and CCSD.

Limitations of the Study

The main limitations in the study regard the participants. The number of actual potential participants was limited to 29. Eight participants were invited. I placed full trust in the participants chosen, on the notion that they are the best to provide the data sought and that they will provide accurate data in the interviews.

Exploring Key Terms and Concepts

For the purposes of this study, there are a few key terms that can have multiple meanings depending on context, geography, and subject-specific knowledge. The global term **Indigenous** is utilized to describe the occupants of this territory before colonial expansion and occupation. Currently, "Indigenous" is the preferred broad term, but it is preferable to use terminology that people themselves prefer in their contexts. **Aboriginal** is also a word used to describe Indigenous people. It is no longer the preferred term but can still be seen in scholarship and government and legal documentation. Additionally, the terms Indian and Native occur in this text, but only when citing a direct quote that contains either word or referring to a government document or an organization's title that contains either word.

The Indigenous people residing in Canada are recognized as three distinct groups, **First Nations, Métis, and Inuit**. **First Nations** people are the original occupants of this land. The **Métis** people are a culture and community that arose out of the union between First Nations and settler people. The **Inuit** are the original occupants of the northern territories of this land.

Colonization is the physical and ideological domination of peoples to separate them from their culture and resources, while creating both external and internalized assumptions of the superiority of the dominating group (Poitras Pratt et al., 2018).

Decolonization is the effort or work of challenging the dominance and assumed superiority of the colonizing group. It involves revitalizing the ways of being and knowing prior to colonization (Smith, 2012). Decolonization can be thought of as on a spectrum, some believe that it involves a complete readoption of all things Indigenous that were taken away via colonization, others believe that recognition of what was taken and challenging Eurocentrism wherever possible is decolonization, and many people lie at points in between. For the purposes of this research, decolonization is more than just learning about the past; decolonization involves addressing not just external examples of colonization, but also the complex ways in which individuals have internalized the oppression of colonization. It also must involve the colonizers recognizing and challenging their own sometimes subconscious presumptions of superiority.

Indigenization is bringing Indigenous culture, imagery, history, and people into schools to highlight and teach about the strengths of Indigenous people, history, and culture. Indigenization is a very good thing, but not a solution to the legacies of colonization.

Reconciliation is a very complicated and much debated word and concept in Canada. For the purposes of this study, reconciliation involves bringing together Indigenous and settler Canadians to repair relationships and come to shared understandings then work together to attempt to

overcome the many inequalities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people as well as addressing racism and prejudice (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 2021).

Teacher Quality Standards, Leadership Quality Standards and Superintendent Leadership Quality Standards are a set of professional standards that dictate the expectations and codes of conduct for educators at various levels in the Alberta education system.

Educational debt is the proposed preferred term to replace the traditional term and idea of an “educational gap” that has been used to describe the achievement differential between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in educational settings. Ladson-Billings (2006) argues that a focus on the achievement gap places the onus on oppressed groups. This incorrectly implies a cultural deficit on the part of oppressed groups rather than an institutional deficit that further privileges dominant groups. According to Orłowski and Cottrell (2019), “a strong case can be made that there is an educational debt to Indigenous peoples... resulting from well over a century of colonization” (p. 7).

Intercultural competence is when one can function effectively across cultures, can think and function appropriately, and can communicate and work with people from different cultural backgrounds” (Leung et al, 2014).

Racism is “a form of oppression in which one racial groups dominates another.” In Canada, Whites are the dominant group, therefore racism here is White racial and cultural prejudice and discrimination. This is supported both intentionally and unintentionally by organizations and institutions with power to the advantage of White people and disadvantage of peoples of Colour. (Hilliard, 1992; Sensoy and DiAngelo, 2021)

Ethics Considerations

Ethics approval documents were submitted to and reviewed by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board and to the Calgary Catholic School District's Research Ethics Application for this study.

Organization of the Thesis

Chapter 1 of this thesis serve to introduce the topic of study and briefly discusses all aspects of the research. Chapter two is titled "Literature Review" and include a review of literature regarding the subject area, past and current research and findings in the area of study. The third chapter is "Design and Methodology," and discusses the methods and methodology chosen for the research as well as the theories applied to the study. The fourth chapter titled "Relevant Data and Themes" and examines the district where the work is taking place, discusses the data collected and presents the themes with evidence. Chapter five is "Analysis of Data" and analyzes the data collected by theme through the lenses of Appreciative Inquiry and Critical Race Theory. The last chapter, Chapter six, is the "Conclusion" and summarizes the data, themes, analysis, and theories utilized. This chapter also talks about areas for future research and make recommendations based on the findings.

Summary of Chapter 1

School districts in Alberta are called to do the work of decolonization. This thesis explores the role of upper administrators in Calgary Catholic School District (CCSD) in advancing the work of decolonization in their district. Knowing that upper administration implements the practices and policies of the direction set by the trustees in a school district leadership structure, the research question is, "what decolonizing initiatives are currently being developed and implemented within Calgary Catholic Schools for the benefit of Indigenous and other students?"

It is hoped to discover the wise practices of CCSD in this work and mobilize these successes while also identifying areas for growth.

The chapter outlines the methodology and methods used for this research indicating that it is a study of Calgary Catholic's decolonization practices via a qualitative interpretivist approach, utilizing the competing and complementing lenses of appreciative inquiry and critical race theory. Also mentioned is that Indigenous research methods are followed in a limited fashion where possible. To address questions around the trustworthiness of this study, I will mention that appreciative inquiry was purposefully chosen for that reason as well. The study was looking for what was working well. The upper administrators were only asked questions about what they saw as successes and what they saw was working in their district. Then the questions asked about how those initiatives are decided upon and managed. The research did not set out to look for faults or failures, thus the participants could be comfortable speaking truthfully.

It is hoped that this research of the practices and procedures regarding decolonization in CCSD will reveal strategies that can be utilized by other school districts in order that other districts can implement these practices to increase the success rates of Indigenous students and all students as well. It is also hoped that possible improvements can be suggested to the policies or practices of CCSD so that the Indigenous student success rates can rise even higher and be at par with the success rates of all students.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

My goal in this thesis is to study a school district making strides toward systemic decolonization. The literature reviewed for this section includes scholarship regarding the decolonization of schools in local, national and international contexts. It must start in truth. Considering the purpose of the study, there are key literatures that impinge on the topic, thus an examination of the history of how education has been used as a tool for colonization is necessary. As this thesis is research being conducted in a Catholic school district, the history of the Catholic Church's involvement with education as a colonizing tool must be examined as well. As decolonization is undertaken to help Indigenous students and all students experience greater success at school, this chapter will also examine the notion of student success and how it is framed via the scholarship around the terminology of an 'achievement gap' that needs to be closed versus an 'educational debt' that needs to be rectified. The definition of and measures for determining whether students are successful will also be explored as the definitions and measures are often from a Western worldview. The chapter will then explore the theory and scholarship around the decolonization of schools. This is followed by an examination of historical and contemporary efforts toward decolonization in educational policy beginning at the international level with UNDRIP (United Nations General Assembly, 2007) and gradually working inward to the local policy developed by CCSD. This literature review aims to bring together scholarship on the history and motivations of using education as a colonizing tool by state and church.

The review also provides a discussion around the definition of success regarding decolonization, a better understanding of research, wise practices, and barriers to decolonization in education, an examination of the power imbalances involved in this work, and educational policies animating decolonization. This chapter concludes with an examination of the types of

professional development teachers need to feel confident to do the work of decolonization in their schools and classrooms. Though a significant body of scholarship exists in this field, there is a hunger for locally relevant research and for an understanding of the practical application of the research around decolonization, especially as applied within a Catholic school district. This study may aid in understanding decolonization in education and could help to advance the decolonization efforts of teachers and schools.

Colonization via Education

Written history, oral history and contemporary scholarship show that the education system was and continues to be one of the most effective tools of colonization (Cottrell, 2000; Smith, 2012; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015; Tupper, 2008). “The privileging of Eurocentric knowledge systems has been instrumentalized, legislated, and deployed by colonial governments as a mechanism for education, but more insidiously for the assimilation and domination of Indigenous peoples” (Poitras Pratt et al., 2018, p. 10). Most aspects of the current education system in Canada continue to be from one dominant worldview, that of the colonizer.

Colonial schooling of Indigenous students in Canada (what many Indigenous groups call “Turtle Island”) started hundreds of years ago with the Jesuit priests (TRC, 2015). From the start, colonizers saw education as a way to “bring the boon of true religion and superior civilization to the pagan and primitive Indians” (Cottrell, 2000, p. 56). For them, it was about bringing an outside worldview, religion, and cannon of knowledge that they felt was superior to the Indigenous people of the New World. European Christian missionaries, including Catholics from France, Ireland and Scotland, were the first to construct formal schools in western Canada, often in proximity to fur trading posts. As in eastern Canada earlier, education was seen as a tool not only for assimilation but also as a mechanism for religious conversion, as part of a wider

campaign to absorb Indigenous peoples into Euro-Canadian society (Carr-Stewart, 2002; Cottrell, 2000).

Everything about the early days of schooling Indigenous children by non-Indigenous educators was about colonization, forcibly assimilating children into a Western style of living. An example of this is provided by Littlejohn in *The Schooling of First Nation and Métis Children in Saskatchewan Schools to 1960* when she explains that around the time Canada became a country, the federal government saw schooling as “a vital part of the plan for the transition of First Nation children towards inevitable assimilation... First Nation children were to be taught... the skills of citizenship in the style of the British Canadian” (2006, p. 66). Formal education is a mechanism for influencing and shaping how people think and act. “Our education system also socializes us to our society. We learn cultural expectations and norms, which are reinforced by our teachers, our textbooks, and our classmates” (Little & McGivern, 2014, p. 494). If a student is from outside the dominant culture this will pose significant challenges.

There was no official education policy regarding the education of Indigenous students until the Indian Act (R.S.C., 1985), legislated in 1876. In 1879, Prime Minister John A. MacDonald commissioned Nicholas Flood Davin to investigate the possibility of utilizing the same type of industrial schools as the United States was using to civilize Indigenous children. When Flood returned, he recommended the use of Indian residential schools (Davin Report, 1879, p. 12). Efforts were made toward assimilating and colonizing Indigenous children via the residential school system starting in 1883 (TRC, 2015), but in 1920 the Indian Act (R.S.C., 1985) made attendance for Indigenous students mandatory in the Indian residential school (IRS) system. This greatly accelerated efforts toward colonizing Indigenous children.

First Nations people knew the value of a Western education, especially in the conditions of the late 19th century. The Treaty 7 leaders knew a Western education “would enable them not

only to survive the loss of their traditional lifestyle but also to participate fully in the new economy” (Elders, T.S. et al, 1996, p. xi). They recognized that it would help them prosper. With buffalo populations falling and their traditional way of life being threatened, First Nations and Métis people knew that they would need to learn the system of education of the newcomers (Carr-Stewart, 2002). This is made obvious by the fact that First Nations negotiated for education in numbered treaties 1-7. (Numbered treaties 8-11 were negotiated well after the Indian Act was legislated and the residential schooling system had already begun). The disconnect is that the First Nations people did not value a western education *over* their own traditional education. In the words of Morris (1991/1880), First Nations people knew a formal Western education “would enable First Nation communities to supplement traditional educational practices with Western teaching so they could ‘live and prosper and provide’” (p. 28), but First Nations people never intended to replace their existing systems of education with the colonizer’s system; they intended and negotiated in the treaties to learn the colonizer’s education alongside their own.

Indigenous people had their own systems of education that were highly valued and respected within their communities. According to Cajete (1994), for First Nations people “education is significant because it embodies a quest for self, individual and community survival, and wholeness in the context of a community and natural environment” (p. 33). From contact, Indigenous parents wanted their children to receive an education that would allow them to benefit from the “knowledge and technologies of the Euro-Canadian society. However, they... maintained a parallel desire to preserve their own ways of knowing, cultural traditions and heritage” (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007, p.7). For Indigenous students and their parents, education has never been an “either or” proposition, but a “yes and” agreement (CCL, 2007, p. 7). Indigenous people valued education and successfully negotiated for it in the treaties; sadly, that is not what happened.

As Carr-Stewart explains in *A Treaty Right to Education* (2002), when the numbered treaties were negotiated, the chiefs and headmen negotiated an “educational right complementary to their own Aboriginal teachings” (p. 138). That means that the First Nations people could continue their existing cultural educational system and, in addition, access the colonizer’s education system as well. They did not agree to give up their traditional system of education, only to receive the colonizers’ education alongside their traditional education. They were aware of the newcomers’ instructional practices and that they should supplement their traditional educational practices with the linguistic and literacy skills of the settlers (Carr-Stewart, 2002). Unfortunately, the treaties were not honoured and First Nations children were subsequently forced into “an educational system that sought to eliminate their traditional educational practices, languages, culture, and customs, something that had not been a part of the treaty negotiations” (Carr-Stewart, 2002, p. 138).

Cottrell and Orlowski (2014) noted that the

Numbered Treaties constituted the benign face of Canadian colonialism and arguably also represented attempts on the part of Aboriginal groups to achieve an accommodation with Euro-Canadian society by accessing formal schooling and other technologies of modernity. Much more malign were subsequent federal policies of dispossession, removal, and transformation through which Aboriginal autonomy was coercively appropriated. (p.259)

The Indian residential schooling system in Canada was entirely orchestrated by the government in accordance with the unilaterally imposed Indian Act as part of a larger strategy to eliminate Indigenous peoples as distinct cultures through total assimilation. This completely negated and dishonoured the agreed upon terms in the treaties. For instance, Treaty 1 states: “Her Majesty agrees to maintain a school on each reserve hereby made, whenever the Indians of

the reserve should desire it” (Morris, 1991/1880, p. 315). Schools were not provided on every reserve and education was not supplied only when First Nations people desired it. Children were taken sometimes hundreds of kilometers from their homes, kept in captivity for months or years on end, and were forced to learn the colonizer’s languages, customs, and religions (TRC, 2015). Promises made regarding education and schools that were agreed upon between sovereign nations in the treaties were not what was provided. Instead, the unilaterally created Indian Act legislation was followed. When considering the true intent, that the country and the Crown never intended to honour the promises made in the treaties, it is devastating that the Indian Act was created and legislated the year before Treaty 7 was signed.

In 1920, the Indian Act was amended to provide for a system of truant officers and penalties to compel school attendance of Indigenous children between 7 and 15 years old. Residential school was now mandatory with those who did not comply being punished. All aspects of education were from a Western worldview. Some of the first things that happened to children when they got to the schools is that their traditional clothes were taken, and their hair was cut in the fashion of the colonizer. Children were forced to speak the language of the colonizer and told that their cultural ways were deplorable (TRC, 2015). None of these things have to do with education, all have to do with assimilation.

According to Fontaine and Craft in *A Knock at the Door* (2015) and Milloy (2011) in *A National Crime*, the schools were poorly constructed, poorly equipped, and underfunded. The teachers were also paid less than their colleagues in neighboring schools. In another blow, the students were often made to labour in efforts that helped run the schools. “The residential schools attracted great criticism because of the half-day labor system [which] obliged the children to work in the fields, sew, clean, etc. for several hours each day, thereby greatly restricting classroom time” (McMurtry, 1985, p. 61). The educational goals of the schools were limited, and

usually reflected a low regard for the intellectual capabilities of Indigenous people (Regan, 2010). For the students, education and technical training were often sacrificed in favour of manual labour chores that proved to be cost-effective in keeping the schools running. Neglect was common, and the lack of supervision created situations very unsafe for children [TRC, 2015, pp. 3-4]. They were sometimes far from home, never receiving their own cultural education, and the students were not getting the agreed upon western education.

A concrete example of this lack of an actual western education being offered in residential schools was discussed in the House of Commons in 1946. They argued that,

while there are 130,000 Indians in the country, our education and training of these people take care of only about 16,000. Of this number enrolled, only 883 reach grade 7, 324 reach grade 8, and seventy-one reach grade 9. I notice in three of the provinces there are no grade 9 students. (House of Commons Debates, 1946, p. 5489)

Of the 16,000 children enrolled in residential schools in Canada in 1946, none had received above a grade nine education. Less than eight percent of the students then enrolled in the residential schooling system got to the seventh grade. The residential schools were not providing an education, but they were ruining communities, families, and cultures. The children were not only receiving a subpar western education; they were also being deprived of their own cultural education. As William Pinar (1993) illustrated, residential schools shifted and shaped worldviews. He stated “we are what we know. We are, however, also what we do not know. If what we know about ourselves—our history, our culture, our national identity—is deformed by absences, denials, and incompleteness, then our identity... is fragmented” (p. 61). He added that a fragmented identity causes a distorted and incomplete sense of self and the world. Battiste (2018) explained that the compulsory education of Indigenous children in Canada on Eurocentric

knowledge systems “interrupted their normative holistic education, generated cognitive imperialism, induced cultural genocide and intergenerational trauma, and negatively affected their overall success outcomes for themselves and their self-determining communities” (p. 1). What happened in these schools was not education and it did more harm than simply a lack of education. Another critical consequence of assimilative education, especially the government’s insistence on separating children from their families over many generations, was that the cohesion and social sustainability of Indigenous families and communities were compromised. This has created a “complex situation where a high level of dependency toward the state is combined with a profound distrust of that same state” among many Indigenous peoples (Brown, et al., 2015, p. 260). Residential schools fundamentally changed every person who attended them while failing to provide an education.

Carr-Stewart (2002) was adamant that the “Crown... did not fulfil its constitutional obligations and, from the outset, chose to provide limited educational services not as a treaty right, but as an assimilationist mechanism through its own criteria, the Indian Act” (p. 126). The First Nations people knew the value of education, negotiated for it in the treaties, and the Crown did not deliver on their promises. The mandatory schooling of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students in the Residential School System was not about education, but about colonization - changing students from who they were in their traditional cultures to members of the colonizer’s culture and economy. The Crown blatantly lied in the treaties and used the schools at best to assimilate young First Nations, Métis and Inuit children and at worst to attempt a cultural genocide. Residential schools were more than just a device of social construction and control. They were part of the process of nation building (RCAP, 1996). That nation did not see worth in the cultures or knowledge systems that were already here.

One of the reasons ongoing decolonizing work is so important is that colonialization via education is not only historical but can also take place in the present. Tupper (2008) explained that curriculum and how teachers choose to mobilize curricular documents implicate them “in the tacit and overt reproduction of dominant cultural norms” (p. 567). Mainstream education continues to be an extension of colonization because it continues to promote the dominant society’s narrative and privilege its ways of knowing (Tupper, 2008). According to Orlowski and Cottrell (2019), “well-intentioned teachers can still play into the dynamics of systemic racism and inadvertently work toward maintaining White hegemony and Indigenous oppression” (p. 12).

There is a larger argument to be made that the schools were more about destroying culture completely than assimilation (Amir, 2018; MacDonald & Hudson, 2012; Woolford & Gacek, 2016). Indigenous peoples have long contended that colonial educational institutions were effectively vehicles of “cultural genocide” (Macdonald & Hudson, 2012, p. 429), and Canadian authorities have in recent times conceded that residential schools were to blame for brutalizing children physically, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, culturally, and sexually (TRC, 2015). These acts were perpetrated on children. The system did not actually provide an adequate education so that Indigenous people could be successful once assimilated. However, for the purposes of this research, I will keep the scope of the Residential School System to that of a system set up to colonize Indigenous people. It was necessary for this literature review to illustrate how education has historically been used as an instrument of colonization against Indigenous peoples even though this study will be looking for ways in which education is working to undo that colonization.

The Catholic Church Involvement in Education as Colonization

The Catholic Church has a long and storied history of global expansion and an impressive legacy of converting people to Catholicism. At one time, the story of the conversion of

Indigenous people was presented as a “glorious chapter in the global expansion of the Catholic Church” (Cottrell, 2000, p. 56). It is thought by some that the foundations of the policy leading to Indigenous residential schools can be found in a Papal Bull titled *Inter Caetera* from 1493. Pope Alexander VI decreed “and we make, appoint, and depute you and your said heirs and successors lords of them with full and free power, authority, and jurisdiction of every kind” (Pope Alexander VI, 1493). This was seen as authorization of Spain and Portugal to colonize the Americas and its Indigenous people as subjects. Something rarely mentioned is that the authorization decreed in the Papal Bull of 1493 was rescinded in the Papal Bull of 1537, *Sublimus Dei*, by Pope Paul III. This second Papal Bull said that Indigenous peoples should “by no means be deprived of their liberty or the possession of their property, even though they be outside the faith of Jesus Christ; and that they may and should, freely and legitimately, enjoy their liberty and the possession of their property; nor should they be in any way enslaved” (Papal Encyclicals, *Sublimus Dei*, para 3). *Sublimus Dei* also said that anyone enslaving or hurting Indigenous peoples were following “the enemy of the human race” (Papal Encyclicals, *Sublimus Dei*, para. 3). Unfortunately, no one heeded this second directive.

Colonial religious schooling of Indigenous students started hundreds of years ago with the Jesuit priests (Choquette, 1995; Miller, 2010; TRC, 2015). Choquette (1995) described the Oblate missionaries as the next wave of evangelizing Catholic missionaries after the Jesuits. In his piece titled *The Oblate Assault on the Canadian North West*, Choquette utilized a militaristic metaphor when discussing the Catholic Church and its Oblate missionaries’ roles with Indigenous people in western Canada. He describes the Oblates as an “expanding regiment of Catholic conquerors intent on winning Canada’s North West for Catholicism” (p. 1). He expands on the training each Oblate received before leaving their formal schooling and says that respect for other cultures was not included in the training of a nineteenth century Oblate missionary. These

missionaries did not set out to adapt the church to Indigenous cultures “they set out to convert any and all to the Roman Catholic way, the only true way, for outside the church there was no salvation” (p.16). Although Choquette does say that most missionaries led honest, generous, and honourable lives, he emphasizes their determination to obliterate traditional Indigenous culture and spirituality.

When policy regarding the schooling of Indigenous students was first introduced in Canada, it was extremely harmful and was created with the intention of assimilation via Indian residential schools [IRS] (TRC, 2015). The government employed churches to fulfill these intentions. In the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final Report (2015) written about the effects of the IRS, Sol Sanderson asked: "What were the objectives of these empire policies? Assimilation, integration, civilization, Christianization, and liquidation" (p. 191). Cottrell and Orłowski (2013) suggested that “postcolonial historiography locates in these institutions the roots of many contemporary educational challenges in Saskatchewan,” (p. 10) especially the persistent divide between Indigenous peoples and state-sponsored formal educational institutions (Battiste, 2005; Cottrell et al., 2012; Stonechild, 2005).

Many churches facilitated residential schools but, according to the Residential School Survivors Society, it is estimated that up to 70% of residential schools were run by the Catholic Church (Dangerfield, 2021). All of the other churches implicated in this horrible history apologized years ago, some have made efforts at reparations for their wrongs (Bush, 2015). Until the summer of 2022, the Catholic Church was the only church yet to apologize as a collective (Miller, 2010) and make reparations on the territory which the atrocities took place. It is, understandably, for these reasons that the Catholic Church has received far more criticism than the other churches involved in residential schools in Canada. In June 2021, after the discovery of the 215 bodies at Kamloops, the calls against the Catholic Church were clear. Dangerfield (2021, para. 8), reported in a

statement by Michal Coren, an Anglican priest in Ontario “virtually every church was involved ... but they have issued formal apologies and taken ownership of what they did... The Roman Catholic Church in Canada has made statements, but the archbishop and cardinals can’t do anything without Rome giving permission” (Dangerfield, 2021, para. 8). Finally, in the summer of 2022, Pope Francis visited Canada and made formal apologies across the country. While all seem glad of the Pope’s visit, some, including TRC Chair, former Senator Dr. Murray Sinclair, deemed the apology incomplete, saying “despite the historic apology, the Holy Father’s statement has left a deep hole in the acknowledgment of the full role of the church in the residential school system by placing blame on individual members of the church” (Morin, 2022, para 16) This study follows how the CCSD, a Catholic school board, is taking up the work of decolonization and helping make right relations for the role of the Catholic church and Catholic schools in the processes of colonization and the abuses of the past.

Educational Debt Rather Than Achievement Gap

This chapter establishes that Canadian schools were used as tools of colonization and that the Catholic church played a large role in that process. It establishes that colonizing schools do not respect Indigenous knowledge systems and that schools depriving Indigenous students of their culture and ways of knowing fundamentally damage the students’ self-concepts and perceptions of the world. It explored how Indigenous people knew the value of a Western education and sought to negotiate to receive a Western education but one was never delivered. It should be obvious, then, that when this same colonial education system is deciding whether an Indigenous student is ‘successful’ or not, any perceived lack of success is not an ‘achievement gap.’ Rather, what is happening is that an educational debt to Indigenous people has been accrued (Papillon & Cosentino, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Orlowski & Cottrell, 2019).

Cottrell and Orlowski (2013), Orlowski and Cottrell (2019) and Ladson-Billings (2006) highlighted the power imbalance and inaccuracy of the term 'achievement gap' when referring to the educational success of Indigenous versus non-Indigenous students. A focus on the achievement gap assigns the onus where it does not belong because it suggests a cultural deficit on the part of the oppressed groups rather than an institutional deficit that further privileges dominant groups (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Both Orlowski and Cottrell (2019) and Ladson-Billings (2006) put forward that rather than focusing on an achievement gap, educators should shift their thinking to the idea of an educational debt having been accumulated by Indigenous students. The term 'educational debt' more accurately reflects the reality of how any discrepancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous student success must be understood as a legacy of decades of colonization which shortchanged Indigenous learners. Reframing gaps in achievement as an educational debt then suggests that educational systems need to remedy unjust systemic educational practices that unfairly burden certain populations (Louie & Gereluk, 2021).

The Canadian Council for Learning (CCL), in *Redefining How Success is Measured in First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Learning* (CCL, 2007), explains that "most research on Aboriginal learning is oriented toward the educational deficits of Aboriginal people, overlooks positive learning outcomes and does not account for the unique political, social and economic realities of First Nations, Inuit and Métis" (p. 2). The terminology of an achievement gap denotes a pre-conceived deficit narrative. It suggests that the discrepancy can be explained by something that Indigenous people are not doing or are doing incorrectly. The evidence is clear that although "some may employ cultural deficit discourses to explain the discrepancy, colonialism is the fundamental explanation for inequitable outcomes" (Orlowski & Cottrell, 2019, p. 7).

When the treaties were negotiated by two sovereign nations, schools were agreed upon for Indigenous children on or near their nations, when they desired it, alongside their traditional

cultural education (Carr-Stewart, 2002). Then, the Indian Act (R.S.C., 1985) was unilaterally legislated by the Canadian government, and it legalized something very different that saw the kidnapping of young Indigenous children and the forced attendance at residential schools, often far from home, where these children grew up under horrific conditions. What happened to the children in residential schools is shocking, and it is well documented that more labour was extracted from these Indigenous students than education was imbued (TRC, 2015). Residential schools were underfunded (Paquette & Fallon, 2013; TRC, 2015) and, later, on-reserve schools were also underfunded by 25-30% compared to provincially-run schools (Louie & Gereluk, 2021; Orłowski & Cottrell, 2019). All of this is evidence that seeing any discrepancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in educational achievement as an historical educational debt is warranted (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Cottrell and Orłowski, 2013; Orłowski & Cottrell, 2019).

A Decolonized Definition of Educational Success

It is rare to have consensus in any area of public policy, but it is virtually unanimously accepted that improving educational outcomes is absolutely critical to the future of Indigenous learners, their families, communities, and broader Canadian society as a whole (Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2007). Defining educational success by the colonial standard of graduation rates “overemphasizes the educational outcomes and achievement gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, with less emphasis being focused on historical and institutional injustices” (Louie & Gereluk, 2021, p. 54). To decolonize education toward a better education system for all, it would follow that the definition of success in education be examined and that the terminology and labels applied to success or failure in the education system also be held accountable to more than one worldview.

Self-determination in education would give Indigenous people the authority to create curriculum and set standards to accomplish their own education goals (RCAP, 1996). The

education system is not yet at the point of Indigenous people having complete autonomy over their own education, so ideally compromises in the existing system should be made. The education system must be aware of the measures it has in place to define success (Louie & Gereluk, 2021). The CCL advised that “measuring learning deficits do not account for social, economic and political factors, do not monitor progress across the full spectrum of lifelong learning, do not reflect the holistic nature of First Nations, Inuit and Métis learning, and do not reflect the importance of experiential learning” (CCL, 2007, p. 8). These types of measurements are not authentic for Indigenous students because they negate much of how a successful education would have been conceptualized in traditional Indigenous communities (Claypool & Preston, 2014).

Words are powerful. Labelling something as an achievement gap rather than a difference in achievement or discrepancy in achievement starts a story of lack for both the colonizer and the colonized. “Research viewed through a deficit lens tends to encourage the development of policy and programs that respond to a deficit instead of supporting the positive successes that lead to improved learning outcomes” (CCL, 2007, p. 8). A deficit lens creates both externalized dominance and internalized oppression. Externalized dominance creates in the dominant group the idea that they are superior to the minoritized group. Internalized oppression results from the repeated messaging, both overt and unintentional, that the non-dominant group is deserving of their lower position. The oppressed group starts to internalize this false story of their inferiority as truth (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). The combination of externalized dominance and internalized oppression produces a dangerous situation for society because it creates a self-fulfilling prophecy on both sides. No one wins because society as a whole benefits when Indigenous students experience success in education (Saskatchewan Joint Task Force, 2013; Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2007).

Success in colonial schools is often measured by gauging the high school graduation percentages or the dropout numbers (Orlowski & Cottrell, 2019), but that fails to take into consideration the Indigenous wholistic model of learning or the value of experiential learning. The Indigenous worldview of learning values not just numbers on paper or ascendancy through grade numbers. Key attributes to successful, high-quality learning in Indigenous communities include learning that is holistic and lifelong, experiential in nature and rooted in Indigenous languages and cultures. For Indigenous learners, “the learning colour palette is incomplete without some consideration of importance of experiential learning via interaction with Elders, other members of the community, and the land” (Tunison, 2007, p. 7). This experiential learning rooted in nature is often done outside, on the land. Wildcat, et al. (2014) asserted that because colonization is about divesting Indigenous peoples from land, decolonization must involve forms of education that reconnect Indigenous peoples to land, social relations, knowledges, and languages that arise from the land. Ideally, for Indigenous communities, learning should be a blend of both Indigenous and Western knowledges (CCL, 2007). The definition of success in learning needs to be sensitive to culture.

The measurement of success in education also needs to be sensitive to the context of its learners. Often, the measurement of success in schools fails to consider the contextual experiences of individual learners or be sensitive to “the multitude of barriers Aboriginal learners face” (CCL, 2007, p. 8). Things like poverty and access to a high school in their own communities without having to move away from their homes and support networks affects a student’s likelihood of completing high school greatly (CCL, 2007). The most common colonial measurements of educational success, high school graduation rates and dropout rates, fail to measure how many barriers must often be overcome to achieve said success. Graduation rates and dropout rates are only one indicator of success for Indigenous students. The current

conditions of learning environments and barriers that students must overcome to graduate high school must also be considered. These could provide alternate short-term and long-term measurements of student success that consider agency and well-being as markers of achievement as well (Louie & Gereluk, 2021).

So how should success in decolonizing education be defined and what should it look like? Models and measurement of success for Indigenous students, and indeed for all students, should reflect a holistic approach to lifelong learning. The models must map the relationships between learning processes and knowledge. The models must be culturally relevant. The models must communicate clearly and be easily interpreted. The models must have the capacity to measure First Nations, Inuit and Métis learning progress over time, and, if possible, to monitor their progress relative to one another and to non-Aboriginal communities (CCL, 2007, p. 17). This requires a variety of indicators and tools for measuring success, beyond standardized tests or measures. Some believe that standardizing testing removes bias in assessment, but according to Poitras Pratt et al. (2018) standardizing assessment does not eliminate subjectivity, bias, or the fact that dominant cultural systems are pervasive in schools. Standardized tests have their uses, they seem to be able to determine aptitude and future ability, but they are definitely “weaker at being able to correctly indicate how much a specific student has learned” (Poulsen & Hewson, 2014, para 32). One type and system of assessment does not fit all students or determine all students’ success.

The colonial education system needs to recognize that there are a variety of learners, types of learning, and ways to demonstrate that learning (Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education, 2005). There are also many different learning environments, some of which contain barriers to learning. Decades, even centuries, of the marginalization of Indigenous peoples needs to be recognized by the dominant society. This marginalization has manifested in

unequal learning environments and situations. Different tools and methods of measurement are needed if the education system wants to work toward reversing the effects of decades of marginalization and poverty (CCL, 2007). Louie and Gereluk (2021) added that “instead of simply pushing students through the system, we must ask whether we have transformed schools into places of value, healing, and flourishing for Indigenous learners” (p. 53).

Decolonizing Schools - Incorporating Local Values and Worldviews

The voices of the survivors of Indian residential schools are being heard and, recently, thousands of unmarked graves have been discovered on the grounds of American and Canadian residential schools. At last count, the number of children’s bodies recovered was over 7000; the final count will be much higher. These revelations have made the atrocities that were and continue to be propagated against the First peoples of this territory by the colonial education system difficult to deny (Daigle, 2019; TRC, 2015). These discoveries have renewed and increased the importance of decolonizing practices in schools and classrooms.

According to Battiste (2012a, 2012b), decolonizing education involves a “two-pronged process” of deconstructing and reconstructing the education system. The current educational system is heavily influenced by Northern European values and the Judeo-Christian religious philosophies (Cottrell et al., 2012). The colonial system has many wonderful aspects, but when it is presented excluding local values and worldviews, it is problematic. The current system prioritizes colonial knowledge and utilizes primarily colonial styles of teaching and assessment. Deconstruction of that system involves probing colonization and colonial strategies still used by settlers to justify exploitation of Indigenous lands and resources via things like the treaties, the Indian Act, and teaching primarily European histories in schools. All result in the absence of or misrepresentation of Indigenous people and history in the current system (Battiste 2012a, 2012b,

Madden, 2014). The current system needs to be deconstructed and then reconstructed using building blocks that include Indigenous subject matter, processes, and values.

Grumet (1981) described curriculum as “the collective story we tell our children about our past, our present, and our future” (p. 115). The story told in Canadian schools has been, aside from initiatives like Treaty Teaching in the Classroom in Saskatchewan mandated in 2007, often told from only the Western perspective. It is important to pay attention to the story officially sanctioned through mandated curriculum (Tupper, 2011; Tupper & Cappelo, 2008). Indigenous people describe education as a “lifelong, holistic process that begins while a child is still in the womb and continues so long as a person draws breath, encompassing all those learnings that we need to live long and well on Mother Earth” (Castellano et al., 2000, p. 1). When education is thought of in this way, it is hard to quantify using Western curriculum or assessment methods. The system must embrace these epistemologies and ontologies systemically, not just on the fringes, as an exception, or in optional courses (Furniss, 1999). Embracing both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous educational epistemologies and reimagining a system that implements learning and assessment respective of both would be ideal; education systems need to recognize that both systems have merit.

Reconstruction of educational systems in a decolonized manner “centres Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies in working towards localized education” (Madden, 2014, p. 60). Effective pedagogy is relevant to its learners. Research has shown that when learning integrates both Western and Indigenous knowledge and value systems, Indigenous students’ attendance and engagement in learning increases, counteracting the previous negative effects of only presenting Western knowledge and value systems. Integrating both epistemologies and ontologies will increase participation of Indigenous students, which increases educational success (CCL, 2007; Lorenz, 2013; Louie & Gereluk, 2021; Papp & Cottrell, 2021).

Decolonization must not be confused with other social justice efforts in schools; it is unique. In the Council of Catholic School Superintendents of Alberta's document titled *The Excellent Catholic Teacher* (2022), "A Catholic Teacher's Pedagogical Style" is defined by a list of qualities. One says the style "embraces all students within an inclusive environment" (p. 8). This is intended as an ideal for Catholic teachers to strive toward and, indeed, in most cases it is such. Ironically, and especially pertinent to this study, it could unintentionally point Catholic teachers in the wrong direction when it comes to decolonizing work. Tuck and Yang (2012) warned that "as long as decolonization remains punctuated by metaphor," (p. 35) the direction and answers will remain unclear to settlers. Decolonization cannot become a metaphor for those other efforts as it is not a term that can be substituted for "other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 1). Decolonization is specific to revaluing, reclaiming, and foregrounding Indigenous voices and epistemologies (Swadener & Mutua, 2008; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wildcat et al., 2014). Other social justice initiatives are important, but decolonization is about repatriating Indigenous land and life (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wildcat et al., 2014).

Even though decolonization is about revitalizing Indigenous languages, cultures, and sovereignty, it will benefit all students, as Tupper (2008) explained:

the presence of only dominant ways of knowing and only dominant history produces students who are less able to think about the complexities of the world they inhabit, less able to integrate those experiences into a growing "making sense" of that world. To pretend that students do not experience racism, or to create curricula that obfuscates these experiences, is to yet again privilege the vantage point of the dominant (white) students who do not experience racial discrimination, and who can remain unaware of the privilege they carry. (p. 576)

Feeling safe, warm, and nourished also benefits all students. A hungry, scared, or cold student cannot learn. The most basic understanding of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943) illustrates this truth. It is not a surprise that Maslow spent weeks with the Blackfoot of southern Alberta before writing *A Theory of Human Motivation* (1943) where he wrote about the basic needs of human survival trumping the need for self-actualization. This literature review would be remiss if it did not mention the importance of assuring all students have their basic needs met in the classroom. It is a decolonizing measure because it levels the playing field for all students. Battiste (2012c) highlighted how "Aboriginal peoples face persistent barriers that far exceed those facing non-Aboriginal Canadians" (p. 138) and Wotherspoon and Schissel (1998b) discussed how barriers like poverty and abuse profoundly affect students' emotional as well as physical well-being, indicating "the likelihood [that] they will achieve their amazingly high educational aspirations is based, in part, on experiences outside school" (p. 12). It then follows that schools need to equalize educational experiences for students as much as possible inside schools. In the same way residential schools created social inequalities, success in schools now has significant consequences for the success of Indigenous people (Wotherspoon & Shissel 1998a). Donald (2012), in *Indigenous Métissage: a decolonizing research sensibility* elaborated on the irony of power imbalances in decolonizing work, saying that "the contradictions at the centre of this relationship must be acknowledged and deconstructed before meaningful movement towards decolonizing can occur" (p. 547). All students need to have equal access to the necessities of life in order to have an equal opportunity to learn. That is a decolonizing act, and it benefits everyone.

Decolonization creates students who are better able to think critically and can more clearly understand and appreciate the diversity of the world they live in. Classrooms and schools are made up of diverse student populations with diverse customs and histories; decolonization of

education will give students a way to honour and respect each other's differences.

Decolonization necessarily precedes the work of Indigenization (Poitras Pratt et al., 2018). In

Chapter 4, concrete examples of decolonization in CCSD will be discussed.

Indigenizing Schools is Not Enough - Power Imbalances must be Addressed

In 2017, Gebhardt cautioned educators to “rethink the integration of Indigenous culture in schools as a singular pathway to student success” (p. 10). Gillies (2019) echoed this and speaks to moving beyond Indigenization, saying “reclaiming and prioritizing Indigenous knowledge in schools in the Canadian Prairies is fundamental to decolonization. So, too, is dismantling barriers to knowledge and opportunities constructed as non-Indigenous or Western” (p. 81).

Indigenizing schools, or bringing in Indigenous cultural artifacts, history, authors, and speakers, has been seen as a solution to the problem of the erasure of Indigenous cultures, history, and language from society that began with the cultural genocide perpetrated in Indian residential schools. This erasure continued in the form of modern curriculum nearly devoid of Indigenous history, culture, or worldviews (Tupper, 2008).

Indigenization, as an aspect of culturally-inclusive education, promotes an ‘add and stir’ mentality (Battiste, 1998; Bauer-Dantoin & Ritch, 2005; Cummins, 1989). The Ontario Ministry of Education (2009) defines culturally inclusive education as “education that is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students... diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected” (p. 4). This poses a danger to decolonization of dilution and problematic conflation. Culturally inclusive education does not eliminate stereotypes or facilitate understanding between settlers and Indigenous peoples. Battiste (1998) advised that cultural inclusion can be reductionist. Designating a pan-Indigenous identity to Indigenous people via simplistic objects such as teepees, totem poles, tomahawks, “beads, buffalo and bannock” (p. 22)

can trivialize the richness of diverse Indigenous cultures and down-play the role that education has played in the marginalization of Indigenous people and culture. Culturally inclusive education threatens to incorporate Indigenous peoples symbolically rather than treating them as equals in mainstream education (Lorenz, 2013). This 'add-and-stir' educational model (Cummins, 1989) does not allow students to "reconcile their position in society or find the awareness or means to overcome the root problems of their oppression" (Battiste, 1998, p. 21) unless what is considered mainstream knowledge is reconsidered. Culturally inclusive education is a limiting educational framework that does not facilitate decolonizing education because it distracts from the real issues of recognition and redress of Indigenous rights (Lorenz, 2013; St Denis, 2011).

As First Nations scholar St Denis (2007) suggested, "cultural revitalization is only part of the solution, and ironically, as a solution, it also contributes to the other problem as cultural revitalization places the burden of change on Indigenous peoples, yet again" (p. 1080). Bringing Indigenous culture, history, and people into schools is not enough, on its own, to solve the effects of ongoing colonization in schools. It also places further burden on the victims of this systemic elimination, Indigenous people. According to St Denis (2007), "proceeding without addressing the impact of racism in education on Indigenous peoples is no longer acceptable" (p. 1081). Indigenization itself is not bad, but it does not address the historical wrongs of colonization or challenge the existing hegemony in education. St. Denis (2007) stresses that both non-Indigenous and Indigenous teachers and school leaders must learn about racism and how the belief in White superiority affects all members of society. She went on to say that placing all hope for disrupting educational oppression on introducing the positives of Indigenous culture is misguided. She reiterates that everyone can benefit from anti-racist education. Poitras Pratt, et al. (2018) are in agreement, adding that "it is problematic when educators and educational leadership are asked to acquire foundational knowledge alone, without considering their own

positionality and responsibility in this work” (p. 18). Educators must understand their power and privilege in order to understand how they affect learning and students.

Indigenization via a multicultural education approach is attractive. It feels good and it is not as daunting a task as decolonization or acknowledging one’s personal implication in the dynamics of power and privilege in education. However, multicultural education alone will not address the ongoing impacts of racism or colonization and does not work toward creating a just society. St. Denis (2011) explained that “multiculturalism helps to erase, diminish, trivialize, and deflect from acknowledging Aboriginal rights” (p. 309). It allows teachers to feel good about helping students celebrate cultural diversity rather than addressing the injustices of the past. An approach to decolonization via multiculturalism will “prevent anti-colonial analysis” (St Denis, 2011, p. 308) as it distracts from the issues of Indigenous rights and the history of colonization.

In place of Indigenization or multicultural education, anti-racist education is often promoted. Anti-racist education has its criticisms, though, chiefly that it has a history of excluding Indigenous peoples (Lauren & Dua, 2011). Lawrence and Dua (2011) pointed out that people of colour, no matter how they got to Canada—as descendants of slaves, migrant labourers, refugees or immigrants—now reside on land that was stolen from Indigenous peoples and enjoy privileges that some Indigenous peoples do not, due to the unlawful removal of Indigenous rights to the land. Where anti-racist education holds promise is that it is an “action-oriented strategy for institutional, systematic change to address racism and the interlocking systems of social oppression” (Dei, 1996, p. 25). Anti-racist education teaches that race and social difference create unfair relationships of power and equity (Dei, 1996). Lorenz (2013) concluded that introducing anti-racist education in the classroom and in teacher practice may help to shed light on the power dynamics that exist in the education system making it possible to examine and hopefully change them.

Power dynamics must be addressed because “without looking at how they are personally implicated in the colonial project, non-Indigenous educators may be narrowly focused on helping ‘those’ poor people thereby adopting a savior stance which can be disempowering” (Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2019, pp. 11-12). According to Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) an educator’s positionality includes factors such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability-status which inform their perspectives and reactions. To transform entire systems, these systems need to recognize their own responsibility to Indigenous peoples and articulate their responsibilities in the transformation (Pidgeon, 2016).

A large body of research recommends the implementation of what is referred to as culturally responsive educational practices in schools (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Bishop et al., 2010; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Cherubini, 2014; Cottrell & Orlowski, 2014; Kanu, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b, 2014; Orlowski & Cottrell, 2019; Papp, 2016, 2020; Papp & Cottrell, 2020; Paris & Alim, 2014; Pelletier et al., 2013). Culturally responsive education brings aspects of multicultural education and anti-racist education together. Those who propose culturally-sustaining practices follow the “cultural discontinuity hypothesis” (Friedel, 2010, p. 5), which suggests that when culturally-based differences related to communication, interaction, and learning styles among Indigenous children are acknowledged by Western schools, more equitable educational outcomes for Indigenous learners can be achieved. By recognizing that schools are cultural sites and revealing shortcomings in schools and curricula, culturally-responsive education invites educators to embrace “Indigenous people’s worldviews, social structures and pedagogy as a legitimate foundation upon which to construct new meanings or knowledge alongside Western traditions and ways of knowing” (Bouvier & Karlenzig, 2006, p. 17). Culturally-responsive pedagogy, as defined by Gay (2002), is

using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively... based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the students' lived experiences and frames of reference, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly by Indigenous students. (p. 106)

Culturally-responsive pedagogy requires teachers to be aware of their students' community and family cultures and able to integrate this knowledge in pedagogical implications and interactions with their students. Effective interactions between teachers and students enable learners to make meaningful connections between learning activities and their lives outside the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Papp, 2016, 2020). These relationships also provide teachers with vantage points to gain an understanding of what their students already know and what they care about. Culturally-responsive, relationship-rich classrooms co-create knowledge via power-sharing as learners have a voice, raise questions, engage in critical reflection, and take responsibility for their own and others' learning (Bishop et al., 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Papp, 2016, 2020). When a teacher expects the best from their students, the students can feel that authentic caring and respond to the effective instructional approaches offered by that teacher that enable them to learn and grow (Papp, 2016; Valenzuela, 1999). Gay (2010) termed this ideal state "culturally responsive care" (p. 48), and describes it as a blend of concern, compassion, commitment, responsibility, and action by teachers on behalf of minority students.

Recently, Ladson-Billings (2014), McCarty and Lee, (2014), Paris (2012), Paris and Alim (2014), and Santamaría and Santamaría (2016) and Papp and Cottrell (2020) called for an expansion and extension of culturally-responsive approaches, calling them now *culturally-sustaining practices* (CSP), which are described as having the "explicit goal [of] supporting multilingualism and multi-culturalism in practice and perspective for students and teachers"

(Paris, 2012, p. 95). Papp and Cottrell (2020) suggested that CSP pushes schools further than being simply responsive or relevant to the cultural experiences of minoritized youth. CSP “seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (p. 95). CSP equalizes schooling by placing “social justice and equity at the forefront of practice” (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2016, p. 4), while “supporting both traditional and evolving ways of cultural connectedness for contemporary youth” (McCarty & Lee, 2014, p. 95).

Bringing Indigenous culture, artifacts, history, and people into schools is a good thing, but it is only one piece of the decolonizing puzzle. It can distract from the more unpleasant realities of the effects of colonizing practices and policies still playing out in schools daily. If educators become aware of, understand, and acknowledge their place in the structures of the colonial context, they will be better prepared to take action in an informed way. Educators must do the work to “unsettle colonial structures, systems, and dynamics in educational contexts” (Poitras Pratt et al, 2018, p. 1). As Gallays (2020) pointed out, “it is impossible to remove racism from society if it cannot be seen by those in power” (p. 31) and those who create educational policies are definitely in power. Educators need educational policies to help them on this journey.

Educational Policies Aid Decolonizing Efforts

Policies shape the educational environment. The story of educational policy regarding Indigenous students and decolonization is a long one, filled with thievery and loss, but also with hope for the future. All aspects of colonial education are governed by policies. Policies play an important role in the process of improving educational outcomes and solidifying them as permanent priorities. Much goes into policy creation and implementation but, once implemented, a policy drives change as it governs the direction, climate, and funding allocation of an organization. There have been several policies written over the last 30 years that have been

helpful in educational efforts toward decolonization. It is important to know this history so that each can be leveraged into the future because, ultimately, policies dictate what teachers do in classrooms.

Policy is subject to a hierarchical system: international policy supersedes national, which supersedes provincial, which supersedes local. This literature review shares a brief history of policies regarding the schooling of Indigenous students and the implementation of decolonizing practices. Examining how such policies have evolved is an important part of the context of this story. Policies support and define the priorities of an organization, so much is being said about the schooling of Indigenous students and Indigenous education in the province of Alberta by the existing policies. K-12 education has made huge advances in recent years regarding processes, procedures, and protocols for Indigenous schooling and Indigenous education, but truly little has changed in the area of implemented, mandated policy, especially at the national and global levels. Encouragingly, some wonderful progress has been made at the provincial level in Alberta.

History being as it is, there may be some skepticism felt by Indigenous people regarding formal Eurocentric schooling policy. King (2012) wrote in *The Inconvenient Indian*, “for an individual, one of the definitions of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again in the same way and expecting different results. For a government, such behaviour is called ... policy” (p. 95). Fortunately, there have been some positive changes in policy regarding the schooling of Indigenous students and Indigenous Education.

Setting Policy Precedence

The work of trying to decolonize schools is not new. It was mentioned earlier in this thesis that from 1920, when IRS were officially made mandatory via the Indian Act, policy regarding Indigenous students’ schooling and decolonization went largely uncontested for 50 years. Then, in 1972, the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) worked together in an effort to

change policy around the schooling of Indigenous children, including the imperative for decolonizing schools. The policy created was called Indian Control of Indian Education (ICIE) and was drafted as a counter to the 1969 Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy (Minister of Indian Affairs, 1969), more commonly known as ‘The White Paper.’ The intention of ICIE was to enable “Indigenous peoples to reclaim their educational responsibilities, to set a philosophy of education, and to implement it in their schools” (Anuik, 2013, p. 529). This policy was supported by the Canadian Government in 1973, as it was seen as a “low cost devolution from its oversight over schools” (Anuik, 2013, p. 529). Over the last five decades ICIE has come to be seen by some as a detriment because individual community schools had to shoulder the costs and responsibilities usually upheld by entire school districts. Predictably, it has also been severely underfunded (Paquette & Fallon, 2010). Nonetheless, it was a big step in the right direction regarding Indigenous schooling and decolonization because ICIE advocated for Indigenous autonomy regarding schooling and education.

Though the Canadian government supported the ICIE (1972) policy, it did not change its mode of administering education federally under the Indian Act. Also, notably, the promise made by the Crown in the treaties of Indigenous students’ right to a proper, formal education while simultaneously accessing an education to “maintain their own linguistic and cultural identity, remained elusive” (Carr-Stewart, 2002, p. 139). Unfortunately, ICIE saw First Nation-controlled schools having more autonomy, but still having to deliver a colonizing curriculum and receiving no additional funding to implement their own decolonizing cultural education. Still, ICIE set a precedent for policy regarding decolonization of schools moving forward.

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP)

More recently, very substantial evolution in Indigenous schooling policy has transpired on an international scale. In 2007, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous

People (United Nations General Assembly, 2007) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly with only four votes against it - discouragingly, one from Canada. Canada later endorsed the policy in 2010. UNDRIP (United Nations General Assembly, 2007) is the result of nearly 25 years of collaboration between United Nations member states and Indigenous groups. The articles in the policy constitute the “minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the Indigenous peoples of the world” (United Nations General Assembly, 2007, p. 28). It contains policy written about protection of culture and protection from forced assimilation, but it also contains articles specifically relating to Indigenous schooling. Article 14 states:

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.
2. Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.
3. States shall, in conjunction with Indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for Indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language. (United Nations General Assembly, 2007, p. 13-14)

This declaration is clear. Indigenous people should have rights when it comes to their schooling and decolonizing their education by including the knowledges and languages of their own cultures. They also should have the right to education at all levels of the Western education system, free of discrimination. This education should not have to be on their home territories; it should be provided regardless of where they live. These are the specifics that the UN decided were the ‘minimum’ for all Indigenous students. The UNDRIP articles regarding decolonizing education are clear and simple.

The disheartening disconnect is that UNDRIP has not been implemented or made law. As will become clear over the next few examples, there is great policy written and 'adopted' by many nations regarding decolonization of education, but if not legally mandated these policies are rarely put into place. While that is disappointing, as of 2019, the Northwest Territories and British Columbia have written parts of UNDRIP policy into legislation to have it legally mandated. The provincial government passed the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, commonly called the 'Declaration Act' (Government of BC, 2019) into law in November 2019. The Declaration Act establishes UNDRIP as British Columbia's framework for approaching reconciliation, as called for by the TRC's Calls to Action. Encouragingly, Indigenous partners were engaged in collaboration and consultation with the government to develop and create a plan for implementation of this historic legislation. The government of British Columbia says the Declaration Act aims to create a path forward to respecting the human rights of Indigenous peoples, introducing better transparency and predictability in the work they do with Indigenous people (Government of BC, 2019). Whether these noble goals are achieved remains to be seen, but this seems hopeful for future decolonizing policy in education in British Columbia and the Northwest Territories.

UNDRIP sets an international example of an accessible, clear, minimum standard regarding the rights that should be inherent to Indigenous people regarding the decolonization of schools. Its articles make clear that Indigenous languages, culture, traditions, and practices are important and should be given equal importance in schools everywhere, not just schools located on ancestral territory to those languages and customs. Access to decolonized education should be universal.

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples

Federally, Canada has been involved in two significant efforts toward creating decolonizing policies in education. The first of these efforts was the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (RCAP) which presented its recommendations in 1996 (Canada, 1996). RCAP brought to light groundbreaking truths regarding the relationship between Indigenous people in Canada and the government of Canada, the Crown, and Canadian society as a whole. Some of these truths came in the form of stories from the survivors of residential school. This was the first time these devastating stories were spoken publicly. These stories are the ugly truth about the effects of colonized education. Alongside and stemming from these damning truths, the commission offered a clearly delineated path, in the form of recommendations, toward a better educational future.

According to Castellano (2000), RCAP (Canada, 1996) was prompted by armed civil unrest regarding territorial disputes at Oka, Quebec. Canada is thought of as a peaceful, peacekeeping nation and was appalled that the world could see internal disputes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people devolve to armed violence in this country. In 1996, RCAP documented how the level and type of education provided for First Nations students over the past century failed to provide equitable educational opportunities and consequently failed to foster economic prospects for First Nations people (Canada, 1996).

RCAP (Canada, 1996) made 44 recommendations in the Education chapter of Volume 3. They emphasize high quality, appropriate, early childhood education guided by community and parental consultation and choice. For elementary and secondary schooling, both on and off reserve, the emphasis was on Indigenous people needing to be involved in developing culturally appropriate curriculum, ensuring that more Indigenous people become teachers, and conserving and revitalizing Indigenous languages. The recommendations also stress that cultural education

needs to be present in formal classroom settings and in informal settings; the spiritual, ethical, and intuitive scopes of learning need to be acknowledged, the Indigenous experience of education needs to be studied, and education and learning needs to be a source of healing from racism, abuse, and trauma for Indigenous people. Further, the recommendations call for academic skills support and development, access to sport and outdoor education, provision of education for leadership skills development, and youth exchanges for learning Indigenous nation-to-nation and internationally (RCAP, 1996).

Even though the recommendations coming out of RCAP show that a decolonized education of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is essential to achieving goals in every sector for moving forward toward reconciliation, these recommendations have not achieved a high priority either in federal government response or in public lobbying by representative Indigenous organizations. Since the closing of the commission, it has been “left to citizens of good will to hold governments to their public commitments to a partnership with Aboriginal peoples based on mutual respect and recognition, responsibility and sharing” (Castellano, 2000, p. 275). Despite the fact that 5 years of work and nearly 60 million dollars went into RCAP, and no formal legally mandated policies came out of it, RCAP set an important precedent for the next large-scale commission into Canada’s history with Indigenous people, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that started in 2007.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) is the most recent federal attempt at making recommendations for decolonizing schools. In 2006, the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, an agreement between the Government of Canada and approximately 86,000 residential school survivors, allocated 60 million dollars for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The commission travelled across Canada listening to the stories

of residential school survivors. After hearing these stories, the three commissioners, Dr. Wilton Littlechild, Dr. Marie Wilson, and chair Dr. Murray Sinclair composed 94 Calls to Action. Many pertain to decolonizing education.

The Calls to Action that most apply to decolonizing K-12 education reference the government developing culturally appropriate curriculum, refuting concepts of Eurocentric superiority, and developing age-appropriate curriculum and resources for teaching about IRS and Indigenous history and culture. They also called on schools to be accountable to ensuring commensurate educational and employment success rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and equal funding of First Nation-controlled and provincially-controlled schools. The commission called for the inclusion of Indigenous consultation on drafting legislation regarding protecting Indigenous languages, parental involvement similar to that of parents in public school systems, parental participation in education, and respecting and honouring treaty relationships. The TRC asked for the education system to maintain their commitment to Indigenous educational issues and build all students' capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect. Also addressed is the need to identify teacher professional development needs with regard to the same intercultural understandings needed for their students. A Call to Action that is especially pertinent to this study is number 64.

We call upon all levels of government that provide public funds to denominational schools to require such schools to provide an education on comparative religious studies, which must include a segment on Aboriginal spiritual beliefs and practices developed in collaboration with Aboriginal Elders. (TRC, 7-8)

This call is specific to denominational schools and calls on them to provide an education on comparative religious studies alongside their own required religious studies classes. This comparative study should include respectful recognition of Indigenous spiritual beliefs and

practices and it should be developed in collaboration with Indigenous Elders (TRC, 2015). CCSD has included these teachings in their grade eleven Religion curriculum and CCSD also has a District Elder who advises the district on their practices.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a combined effort between government and Indigenous people, funded in part by the class-action settlement IRS survivors received for the anguish they experienced. The 94 Calls to Action are based on the testimony of over 6750 survivors. The language in the document is profound, as well. To write 'Calls to Action' rather than decrees or orders is absolutely in line with the Indigenous way of being and thus the work of decolonization. A Call to Action compels people to do what is right for the group rather than simply unilaterally demanding it. As explained by Wilson (2008), Indigenous cultures are relational "nothing could be without being in relationship, without its context. Our systems of knowledge are built by and around and also form these relationships" (p. 77). This is further clarified by Castellano (2000) when she said, "a fundamental premise of Aboriginal philosophies [is] that everything is related" (p. 262). Both Wilson and Castellano are expressing the Indigenous epistemological belief that everything and everyone is related. The Calls to Action (TRC, 2015) regarding decolonizing education make suggestions that are best for all learners and the act of calling us all to do what is best for each other is a decolonizing act.

Unfortunately, a commission is only one of the steps in the creation of policy and does not guarantee implementation; the Calls to Action are not legally enforceable. Hearteningly, they do influence behaviours and goals in some educational organizations.

Teacher, Leader, and Superintendent Quality Standards in Alberta

After reading about so many decolonizing policies that are not legal or enforceable, it is reassuring to look at provincial educational policy in Alberta which has legislated policy to implement decolonization in education. The Government of Alberta, via Alberta Education, has

legislated the Teacher, Leadership, and Superintendent Quality Standards (Alberta Government, 2019). These are professional standards that teachers, school leadership, and school superintendents are legally required to meet; each group of educators are also obliged to report on their progress toward these goals to their supervisors every year. The Leadership Quality Standards (LQS) and Superintendent Leadership Quality Standards (SLQS) also stipulate that support is given to teachers pursuing the Teacher Quality Standards (TQS). This means that resources and time must be allocated to the business of decolonizing schools in Alberta. The TQS, LQS, and SLQS bolster decolonizing efforts in Alberta (Alberta Government, 2019).

The TQS, LQS, and SLQS are by far the strongest examples of fully-implemented, legally mandated decolonization in education. Aspects of decolonization are woven into many of the quality standards, with one standard, number five, being solely about Indigenous knowledges and students. Having a common industry standard for professional competency that teachers, educational leadership, and superintendents must legally be striving to meet ensures steps are taken to decolonize education. It also ensures that resources are being allocated to meeting these professional standards. Educational professionals are responsible for acquiring this knowledge and these skills and must report on their progress annually in professional growth plans. As an example of this, Teaching Quality Standard number five refers to “applying Foundational Knowledge about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, a teacher develops and applies foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit for the benefit of all students” (Alberta Government, 2019).

Achievement of this competency is demonstrated by indicators such as:

- a) understanding the historical, social, economic, and political implications of:
 - treaties and agreements with First Nations;
 - legislation and agreements negotiated with Métis; and

- residential schools and their legacy;
- b) supporting student achievement by engaging in collaborative, whole school approaches to capacity building in First Nations, Métis and Inuit education;
- c) using the programs of study to provide opportunities for all students to develop a knowledge and understanding of, and respect for, the histories, cultures, **languages**, contributions, perspectives, experiences and contemporary contexts of First Nations, Métis and Inuit; and
- d) supporting the learning experiences of all students by using resources that accurately reflect and demonstrate the strength and diversity of First Nations, Métis and Inuit.

(Alberta Government, 2019, p.6)

Policies that are fully implemented and backed by legislation that has been passed into law, make change possible. The TQS, LQS, and SLQS create an urgency and need for school districts to fund positions that support Indigenous Education, like Indigenous education consultants and Indigenous teachers. Policy like this forces Alberta Education and its school districts to provide funding for teachers, leaders, and superintendents to acquire this knowledge. The TQS, LQS, and SLQS compel educators to attend professional development in the areas of Indigenous cultures, history, and pedagogies. The Quality Standards makes it a legal requirement for teachers to gain this knowledge and put it into practice in their classrooms. Educators at all three levels are held accountable to the TQS, LQS, and SLQS via yearly professional growth documentation.

Knowing this policy exists and is legally mandated by the provincial government as part of the employment of educators at all levels in the K- 12 educational system in Alberta, one would expect these same decolonizing expectations to be in the policies of local school districts.

Provincial governments and their priorities change. To keep policies of this nature and

importance in place no matter the pendulum swing of politics, local policies supporting this provincial policy would be very reassuring.

Local CCSD Policy

The importance that the Alberta Government has given Indigenous education by creating an entire Teacher, Leadership, and Superintendent Quality Standard dedicated solely to Indigenous foundational knowledge and decolonizing education and making it law sets an expectation and example for policy creation at the local school district level. Upon investigation, Calgary Catholic School District (CCSD) has no policy regarding Indigenous Education. Policy 12 of the Chief Superintendent's Performance Assessment Guide under Leadership Practices, Role Expectations says, "Q1 11.5 Ensures First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education for all Students" (Board Policy Handbook, 2020, p. 109). This means that the Chief Superintendent is expected to ensure all students have an understanding of Indigenous history and culture, but does not stipulate explicitly that they facilitate decolonization. As CCSD has Indigenous Education as one of their four board priorities, it is surprising that they do not have a single policy regarding Indigenous education and only one quality indicator by which the Chief Superintendent is evaluated.

CCSD having no policy regarding Indigenous education seems a disconnect between policy and the day-to-day operation of the schools. As Indigenous Education is one of their four priorities, CCSD has extensive protocols, processes, and procedures regarding decolonization. See Appendix C. A quick glance at their website and one can see that they have an entire department of Indigenous Education with a supervisor, consultants, Indigenous community liaisons, Indigenous teachers, Indigenous Wellness Workers and cultural liaisons. Currently, Calgary Catholic School honours their commitment to the success of Indigenous students and Indigenous education. One must keep in mind, though, that the political landscape of a province changes, as

does the leadership of a school district. What is seen as important and supported can change. School district policies are not as frequently changed. If Indigenous schooling and Indigenous education requirements are not written into the policy of local organizations, they have a dangerous impermanence. Issues can then be interpreted as having a lack of importance, prominence, and focus. As well, when government changes, so can the provincial policies, the TQS, LQS, and SLQS that now hold the mandated space for these initiatives.

Decolonizing Education Requires Teacher and Leader Professional Development

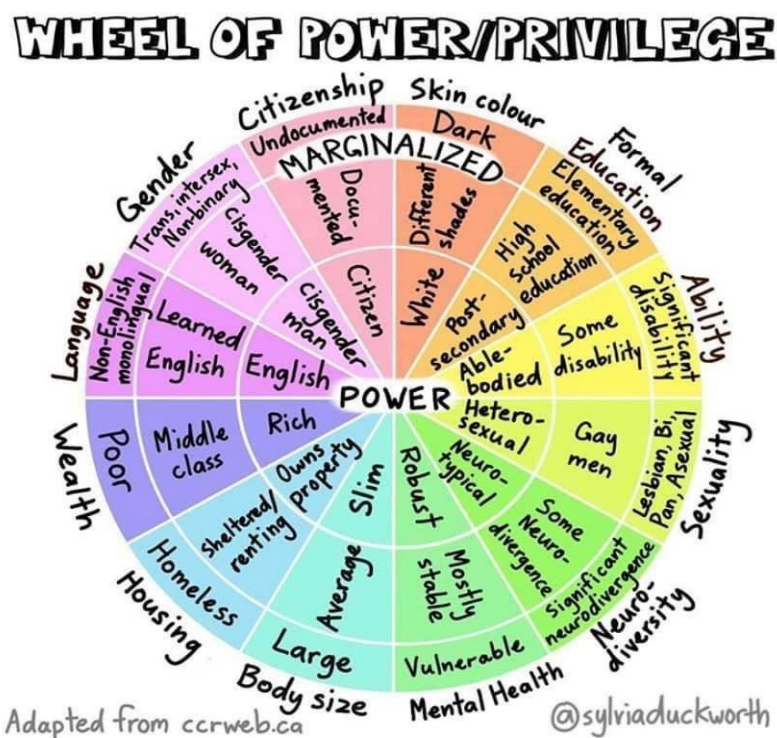
In Alberta, the TQS, LQS, and SLQS mandate that all certificated school staff must be moving in the direction of decolonization and their supervisors must support that effort. There are many steps in doing that and an important one of those steps for CCSD is educating staff. Staff need foundational knowledge of Indigenous people, history, and culture. They also need to understand what decolonization in school systems and classrooms can encompass. For that, they need professional development. The best places for gaining foundational knowledge about Indigenous people are the people themselves (Battiste, 2000; Smith, 2012). There are always opportunities available to learn about Indigenous people, from Indigenous people, but they take time, preparation, commitment, and respectful relationships.

Educational leaders are more apt to take up initiatives if they have a clear framework to follow (Pont et al., 2018). The reality is that district leadership and staff may be intimidated by or resistant to decolonization because “there is a long and bumbled history of non-Indigenous people making moves to alleviate the impacts of colonization” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 3). No one wants to lead something they are not confident in. Therefore, a key place to start the journey toward decolonization in schools is for staff to identify how colonization has impacted themselves, and by doing so, position, and implicate, themselves in the work (Ermine, 2007; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2019).

In order to situate oneself in the work of decolonization, one must be aware of one's own place in the dynamics of the colonial agenda (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Educational leaders must acknowledge where they are located regarding intersectionality, power, and privilege "without looking at how they are personally implicated in the colonial project, non-Indigenous educators may be narrowly focused on helping 'those' poor people thereby adopting a savior stance which can be disempowering" (Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2019, pp. 11-12). According to Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) a person's positionality includes factors such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability-status which inform their perspectives and reactions.

Figure 2.1

The Wheel of Power and Privilege



Examining the Wheel of Power and Privilege in Figure 3 and determining one's place in the dynamics of colonized power and privilege will help educators situate themselves in this work before beginning. As Pidgeon (2016) noted, "Non-Aboriginal peoples must take responsibility and

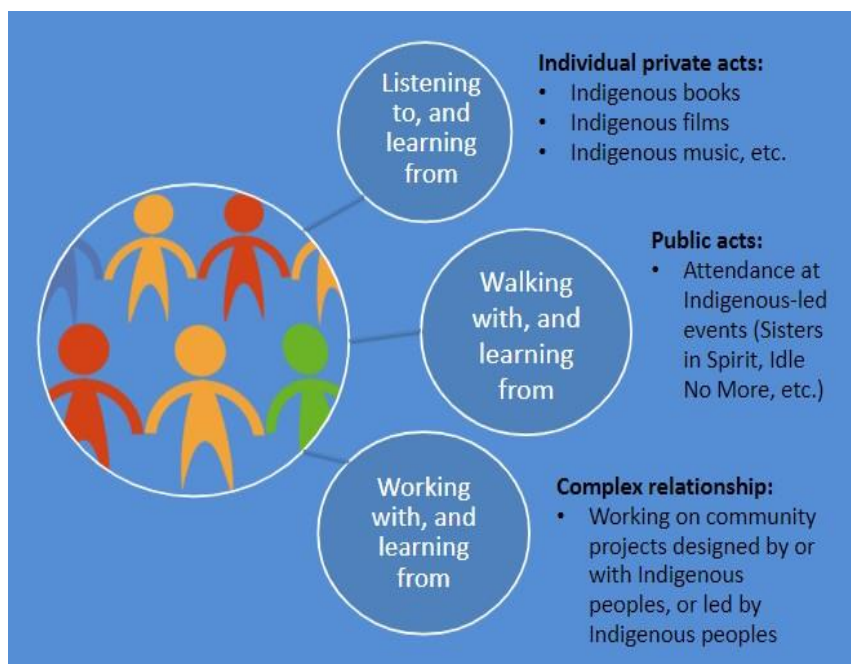
be part of their own decolonizing process and move towards reconciliation” (p. 88). Ideally, this can translate into systemic change; to transform entire systems, these systems need to recognize their own responsibility to Indigenous peoples and articulate their responsibilities in the transformation (Pidgeon, 2016).

As leaders foster change (Fullan, 2014) and play integral roles in setting the culture of their school (Deal & Peterson, 2016), it would follow that leaders need to do the work of learning about their place in decolonization and model that work in their own practice so that they have more confidence and competence to lead it with their school staff (Papp and Cottrell, 2020). This reality reinforces that the TRC Calls to Action regarding education are much more likely to be implemented successfully if their implementation is supported by leadership. Schools must engage in this work in ethical and authentic ways (Osmond Johnson, 2020; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2019) and do the work to “unsettle colonial structures, systems, and dynamics in educational contexts” (Poitras Pratt et al., 2018, p. 1). That requires school leaders to be as fully informed as possible when beginning the process of leading their staff in decolonizing work. This begins with leaders situating themselves in the work in order to understand where their responsibilities lie (Ermine, 2007; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2019; Papp and Cottrell, 2020).

After a leader becomes aware of, understands, and acknowledges their place in the structures of the colonial context, they are more prepared to take action in an informed way. Poitras Pratt and Danyluk’s (2019) *Exploring Reconciliatory Pedagogy and its Possibilities through Educator-led Praxis* gives educators clear direction on how to pursue decolonization. They suggest a three-step process to gain the knowledge and experience required to feel confident and competent enough in beginning one’s own decolonizing journey as illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 2.2

Approaches to Reconciliation Model, Drs Yvonne Poitras and Patricia Danyluk



(Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2019)

The first step in an educator’s journey toward decolonization can be private actions of listening to and learning from Indigenous people (Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2019). This can be reading and viewing news from Indigenous sources. Reading fiction and non-fiction literature written by Indigenous authors and listening to music created by Indigenous artists are also important in gaining knowledge and perspective. In this listening and learning step, learners need to keep in mind that no one example of Indigenous writing or art represents all Indigenous people. Listening to, reading, and viewing a variety of sources is important and will emphasize the differences among, and diversity of, the many Indigenous people of the nation now called Canada.

The second step suggested by Poitras Pratt and Danyluk (2019) is more public and involves “walking with and learning from Indigenous peoples” (p. 8). Attending Indigenous events

such as pow wows, round dances, craft sales, and vigils or marches will give one a sense of the richness of Indigenous cultures and the diversity of Indigenous people. Going to learn at Indigenous cultural heritage sites may be helpful as well. It is important to embark on this step with an open mind and with humility. Educators 'walking with' Indigenous people while witnessing the culture and actions exhibited will create an understanding of the truth of Indigenous peoples' realities and lived experiences. This may catalyze a coming to know of the educators' own responsibility in creating change (pp. 8-9). This second step will help initiate personal connections in the Indigenous community which are vital to progress in decolonization.

The relationships educators build while walking with Indigenous people will help with the third step suggested by Poitras Pratt and Danyluk (2019), that of working with or on community projects designed and led with or by Indigenous people. Participating in meaningful work with Indigenous people will give educators an intimate understanding of its importance. Educators will likely also encounter real-world systemic barriers to change, resistance, and reluctance, from a first-person perspective. They may be surprised by who stands in the way of this work and who is unwilling to work with them. This creates a very personal experience and generates empathy. It will make for lifelong learning (Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2019, pp. 9-10). After educators learn what they can by attending and participating, they may feel the confidence and competence needed to start the work of decolonizing schools.

After an educator has started their own work in the process of decolonizing themselves, they can start the work of leading a shift in their school. A new, decolonized way for educational leaders to think about what needs to happen in a school can be shaped by this explanation from Indigenous scholar Gregory Cajete (1999), "there is no word for education, or science, or art in most indigenous languages. 'Coming to know' is the best translation for education in most Native traditions . . . [and] is a process that happens in many ways" (p. 78). This foundational shift in the

paradigm of what education is and how it happens will change a school's culture and climate. Educators can then examine how they define education and challenge themselves to see and validate more than one worldview. If educators implicate themselves in the perspectives and labours of Indigenous people, they may be more effective at leading decolonizing work.

Until recently, and even still in some places, the only worldview presented and valued in Canadian schools has been that of the colonizer (Tupper, 2008; Tuck Yang, 2012). Indigenous knowledge, systems, protocols, and cultures are severely underrepresented in current colonizer education systems (Battiste, 2013; Smith, 2012). Educators asking whose story, voice, or version is missing and why it is missing is another foundational act of decolonizing schools.

For educators to effectively do the work of decolonization they must seek out professional development and gain life experiences that help them recognize how relations of unequal social power are constantly being negotiated at the individual and structural levels (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). They must also understand their own positions within these power dynamics (Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2019; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). It is important that educators think critically about knowledge and how it is defined and given value and importance (CCL, 2007; Papp & Cottrell, 2021). Finally, they must act on all of the above in service of a more just society. If an educator gets to know their place in decolonization, learns from, walks with, and works with the Indigenous people of their territory, it will challenge their perceptions and ideas of what education is and how it should look and happen (Cajete, 1999; Daigle 2019; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2019; TRC, 2015; Tuck & Yang, 2012; United Nations General Assembly, 2007).

There are a couple areas of caution for which educators must learn to be watchful when doing this work. Educators must come from a place of humility and authenticity when doing the work of decolonizing a school. Educators must reject any curriculum that perpetuates only Eurocentric values (Battiste, 2013; Smith, 2012, TRC, 2015, TQS, 2019) and repudiate concepts

that perpetuate ideas of European sovereignty or White supremacy (TRC, 2015). Educators must also refuse to support anything in their school that reflects a “fragmented and distorted picture of Indigenous peoples” (Battiste, 2013, p. 186). Honouring these directives will create an environment where decolonization can happen.

In doing the work of decolonization, educators must be careful they are not trying to “relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 10). Daigle (2019) warned educators not to rush to reconcile or be tempted to create a grand spectacle of their reconciliation efforts. According to Daigle, a grand show of reconciliation can unintentionally secure, legitimate, and effectively reproduce white supremacy and settler futurity in Canada by creating a feeling of absolution in those attending large, elaborate reconciliation events. The scale of the production may actually erase the feeling of responsibility that non-Indigenous people feel toward doing this work by appearing to solve some of the struggles (Daigle, 2019).

This work must be more than performative. It must be undertaken with an authentic, sustained intention to work toward reconciliation. An example of this was highlighted by Daigle (2019). In April of 2018, a grand spectacle was held to great acclaim at the University of British Columbia (UBC). They hosted the grand opening for The Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre (IRSHDC). The event appeared to be a huge success. Then, five months later, the UBC school newspaper, the *Ubyyssey*, reported that “the university had lost residential school records, and that the IRSHDC was understaffed, underfunded, and remained unable to formally open to the public” (Chase, 2018, as cited in Daigle, 2019). It appeared there were still lessons to be learned when then director of the IRSHDC, Mary Turpel-Lafond, very directly stated that the IRSHDC should never have been touted as a success so early on, but rather should be viewed as an important, serious space that will make a lasting impact and pointed out that it needs to be supported both financially and via infrastructure in kind (Chase, 2018 as cited in Daigle, 2019).

The IRSHDC example supports Poitras Pratt and Danyluk's (2019) caution not to feel like an "instant expert" on the basis of limited experience or participation (p. 12). Educators ought to be wary of the desire to check a box rather than taking into consideration all context in a given situation and spending the time needed to authentically do the work.

If educators take this advice to heart, they will be better equipped to lead their schools toward decolonization. A final word of advice would be to employ Blackfoot scholar Littlebear's principles of constant flux and renewal from his *Jagged Worldviews Colliding* (2000). He suggested that people and their ideas must be cyclical and in constant renewal, like the seasons of the land. Educators must always revisit what they know, as well as their lesson plans and school and classroom events and materials, with their new insights and experiences. That way what happens in schools is always informed with the newest understandings of the world and how it works.

Summary of the Literature Review

In this literature review I set out to explore the role the education system played and still plays in the colonization of Turtle Island and, more specifically, the role the Catholic Church had in that process. To determine the way to measure the success of decolonizing efforts, this chapter also looked at the paradigm of incommensurate achievement rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners and the language used and perspective taken regarding that achievement. Then it examined the theory around educational decolonization. This chapter also concluded that Indigenization alone cannot reverse the effects of colonization because power dynamics between cultures must be examined for true decolonization to be possible. The various strategies for decolonizing education were examined, from multicultural education to culturally-sustaining education. Then, because policy ultimately drives what happens in classrooms, this literature review examined policy regarding Indigenous education - historically and in scope from

international policy to the local CCSD policies. Next, a roadmap was established for all teachers and educational leadership to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to do the work of decolonization. In Chapter Three, the theoretical and practical aspects of the research will be discussed.

Chapter 3 Design and Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter I outline the research design, methodology and method for the study. I am a neophyte researcher and learning a great deal about research methods, methodologies, and theories as part of this inquiry, in anticipation of pursuing doctoral studies in the future. Chapter Three starts by re-stating the research question and sub-questions. Moving forward, I explain the conceptual framework and lenses that I chose to frame the study. Then, I will discuss the chosen methodology. After that, I will briefly discuss participant selection and recruitment, the data sources and collection, and how the data will be analyzed. I will conclude by discussing the logistics and ethics for this research.

Research Question

At the conclusion of this study, it is my hope that the strengths of the work CCSD is doing in decolonization is adequately delineated, interpreted, and mobilized for the continued benefit of Indigenous students and all students in CCSD and for students of other school jurisdictions as well. Therefore, the primary research question is “what decolonizing initiatives are currently being developed and implemented within Calgary Catholic Schools for the benefit of Indigenous and other students?” As it is understood that upper administrators develop and supervise the priorities and initiatives set out by school board trustees, the secondary research questions are:

1. What role do administrators play in developing and ensuring implementation of those initiatives? and
2. How might other school divisions benefit from knowledge of these practices?

I utilized qualitative methods because some aspects of the human experience cannot be understood through reductionist measures (Angen, 2018). The research was informed by an interpretivist paradigm because interpretivism recognizes that there is no absolute reality in the

world, and that our beliefs are relative to time, situation, and place (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009). Interpretivist epistemologies suggest that knowledge of the world can be acquired by interpreting or understanding the meanings that humans attach to their actions (Angen, 2018). The meaning that participants attach to these decolonizing initiatives were accessed via data that are qualitative in nature through the personal thoughts, actions, and opinions of individual participants. In this study, CCSD upper administrators were interviewed regarding the decolonizing initiatives being developed and practiced and their benefit for Indigenous students and all students.

Conceptual Framework

Situated within the interpretivist paradigm, I conducted research into CCSD's decolonizing practices, utilizing an appreciative inquiry lens. Research questions were answered through qualitative data generated via semi-structured interviews. Indigenous protocols and research methodologies were followed where possible. As the research was not done in an Indigenous community or specifically with or on Indigenous people or practices, the Indigenous research methodologies followed were primarily those of relationship building and maintenance, gifting for the sharing of knowledge, and the work being done fairly, respectfully, and for the good of Indigenous education. Critical theory was applied as my theoretical framework with critical race theory enhancing the study and applied critical race theory to educational contexts with regard to Indigenous education. Participants include eight upper administrators at CCSD and the data emerging from the interviews were analyzed and interpreted using a two-step coding method.

The qualitative interpretive design also allowed for people to draw meaning from the text based on the worldview of the researcher (Jha, 2018) which is one of the reasons I situated myself so specifically in Chapter One. Interpretivism is well-suited to this research because it is a people-centered approach. It acknowledges that the researcher is part of the research

environment and how that may impact the conceptions and perceptions of the other (Angen, 2018). Knowing that I was an employee of this school district and that I personally facilitated some of the initiatives, one can deduce that I am hopeful of their impact both present and future. That has influence on my knowledge of the initiatives and their development. This insider status within the organization bias my presentation of the initiatives, though I think mostly for the better as I have a more in-depth understanding of the processes and their development. To mitigate this bias, I relied heavily on participant input with regard to valuing the initiatives and their contribution to decolonization in the district. It is also my belief that being the granddaughter of a Catholic residential school survivor will help me have a more balanced understanding of and perspective on the drawbacks of Catholic education. My grandfather is representative of the complicated nature of this work as he remained a devout Catholic until he died at the age of 96. He was negatively affected by his time in Catholic residential school, but he chose to remain Catholic despite his experiences. I hope that my unique perspective may contribute to a more balanced view of the initiatives and their relative success from both the side of hopeful implementation and the side of historical truth.

The fact that I resigned from CCSD and started employment with another school board before the analysis portion of this thesis also enabled me to have a more balanced view of this research. This method was also chosen because doing “effective interpretive research requires that we do something meaningful that furthers our understanding and stimulates us to more informed and, hopefully, more humane thought and action” (Angen, 2018, p. 392). The work of decolonization is truly meaningful, and this research may stimulate educational systems to more informed and humane thoughts and actions that may benefit all students and staff.

Interpretive methodologies centre scientific explanations around human actors, interpreting meaning from human practices and behaviour (Schwandt, 1998). Interpretive

research analyses those practices and behaviours to disclose meaning because actions observed and analyzed generate observable outcomes. Research conducted utilizing interpretive paradigms supports an interactive process between researchers and research participants (Nguyen & Thanh, 2015). The research process then “focuses on the perspectives, feelings, and beliefs of the participants” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 237). The study aligns ontologically with interpretivism because it enables the research to explore the complexity, vibrancy, and intricacy participants express related to lived experiences while attempting “to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3).

Constructivism is a complementary lens to the interpretive paradigm. Interpretivist methods involve social theories and perspectives that perceive reality as socially constructed or made meaningful via actors' understandings of experiences. Constructivism contends that “knowledge does not exist independent of the learner, knowledge is constructed” (Vrasidas, 2000, p. 7). Humans construct their own realities and much of that construction is via relations to and interactions with other human beings and social structures (Angen, 2018). Key individuals, in the case of this research, upper administrators of CCSD, were asked to provide their insights on decolonizing processes that they initiate and disseminate through relationships with people who are above and below them in the district.

The aim of interpretive constructivist studies is to identify “how people interpret and make meaning of some object, event, action, perception, etc.” (Glesne, 2011, p. 8). If human beings construct their own sense of truth, then the best way to understand that truth is to engage with individuals and get an idea of the meaning they attach to actions, policies, practices, interactions, and so on, through engagement. The reality of how decolonization is being fostered by the decisions and actions of upper administration in CCSD can be constructed via the thoughts

and actions of upper administration at CCSD. A constructivist assumption is that knowledge is “socially constructed by people active in the research process and that researchers should attempt to understand the complex world of lived experiences from the point of view of those who live it” (Schwandt, 1998, p. 221). A constructivist approach is congruent with the design of this study because it takes into account the meaning-making of all individuals who provide input into the process, both the researcher and the research participants. As this research is conducted on one school board, it provides the researcher with a clearer understanding of the socially constructed truths from the participants’ perspectives as I was able to interact with the participants (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Critical Theory

The study is also informed by a critical theory lens. Critical theory is an “emancipatory research theory” (Louie, 2019) conceived in Germany in the 1930s. Critical theorists contend that there is a contradiction between the dominant view of society and the way society actually functions, and it is a foundational philosophy in social justice education (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Critical theory’s focus on power imbalances within society “assists in identifying structural factors that lead to racial and colonial injustices” (Gillies, 2018, p. 13). This makes it a suitable framework for this research, given that decolonization involves the implementation of other worldviews in the often single-worldview, hierarchical process of colonized education. Critical theory, like decolonizing initiatives within schools, is designed to disrupt prevailing hierarchies to create more equitable outcomes (Doucet, 2019).

Critical theory does not have a universally agreed upon approach (Horkheimer, 2002) or definition but it “penetrates the world of things to show the underlying relations between persons” (p. xiii). This research took critical theory one step further and viewed the research and data analysis processes through a critical race theory (CRT) framework. CRT helped align and

apply an investigative lens to educational contexts with regard to power dynamics in Indigenous education and Indigenous contexts; it is a framework for explaining current race inequities and imagining future opportunities.

While critical race theory originally emerged in the field of legal studies, it offers “great potential to improve educational studies” (Crosland Nebeker, 1998, p. 26). A CRT approach was effective in the research with CCSD because of the colonial dynamics that were studied especially as critical race theory sees school curriculum as continually reinforcing racialization through “distortions, omissions, and stereotypes” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 18). School districts do not choose their curriculum, but they can control the methods used to facilitate that curriculum and the environments where students encounter the curriculum. Employing critical race theory allowed me to accurately interpret the resultant descriptions and actions of the decolonizing initiatives in CCSD.

CRT has six main tenets. The first is that racism is endemic and it requires that the researcher be “honest about the subordinate position of people of colour” (Gillies, 2018, p. 14). This tenet is important in this research because it is imperative that every aspect is examined while keeping in mind that racism is everywhere all the time, even in the most well-meaning actions and people.

The second tenet of CRT is skepticism of liberalism. This requires that the application of CRT critiques meritocracy, colour-blindness, race neutrality and postracialism. These must be critiqued and rejected because liberalism suggests that individuals can overcome adversity via free will, by working hard and making right decisions. Being skeptical of liberalism is also important to CRT because many people characterize White dominance as overt and hostile acts like racial slurs and hate crimes. Racism is not always so obvious and liberalism, which focusses more on individualism and commonalities in place of differences, can create an environment for

less obvious racism such as assuming people can overcome racism through hard work, masking and maintaining the structures that uphold White supremacy (Gillies, 2018).

CRT also affirms the valuing of racially oppressed peoples' epistemologies in its third tenet. An epistemology is a "system of knowing" (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 257). An example of this would be valuing Indigenous peoples' experiential knowledge as equal to western cultures' literature. This is important because CRT maintains that racism is best identified by those who experience it, as those who perpetrate it and benefit from it are often unaware of it (Freeman, 1995, p. 29). This tenet is especially helpful as the research is being done with participants who are part of the upper administration of a school district who value Western education and, of whom, 75% are White thus less able to accurately identify racism in their organization.

The fourth tenet is the rejection of ahistorical analyses. CRT demands that research "situate present-day racism within a historical context because racism only has meaning when understood through analysis of the history and the use of the race and racism within specific geographic and cultural contexts" (Gillies, 2018, p. 17). Western education, and specifically Catholic education in the Canadian west, has a long and storied historical involvement of racism toward Indigenous people which was carefully examine in the literature review. Thus this tenet applies strongly within this research as the historical context of racism and assimilation by the Catholic church informs the examination of decolonization in a school district which carries that history.

The fifth tenet is racial justice. CRT holds the hopeful and optimistic belief that through the continual recognition of and challenging of racial injustice, our society can become more racially just (Bell, 1992; Dalton, 1995; Lazos Vargas, 2003). This may be the most important tenet of CRT with regard to decolonization work within a Catholic school district. The history as it is is horrific, but when examples are recognized regarding how efforts are being made to move toward

reconciliation in organizations like this, the most hopeful of us can see the possibility of change for the better.

The final tenet of CRT is that it must be interdisciplinary. This is necessary because it allows CRT scholars to more effectively respect the rights of various distinct groups of people in a variety of contexts (Calmore, 1995; Delgado Bernal, 2002). Each of these tenets support the analysis of research through a CRT lens.

Milner (2008) explained that “critical race theorists are concerned with disrupting, exposing, challenging, and changing racist policies that work to subordinate and disenfranchise certain groups of people and that attempt to maintain the status quo” (p. 333). Applying CRT when analyzing the data gathered in this study was ideal for the study of decolonization. Under ideal circumstances, CRT offers the possibility to reveal and inquire into colonization within educational contexts and structures for Indigenous people (Writer, p. 1).

CRT aligns with the interpretive and constructivist methodologies as “for the critical race theorist, social reality is constructed by the formulation and the exchange of stories about individual situations (Ladson Billings, 2021, p. 27). It should also be effective in analyzing data from the predominantly non-Indigenous upper administrators of CCSD given that most oppression does not feel like oppression to the perpetrator (Lawrence, 1987). CRT scholars are “concerned with transforming teachers and schools in ways that respect the needs and rights of all children and youth who deserve and require a rigorous and meaningful quality education” (Gillies, 2018, p. 35).

So often, colonizing forces oppress the voice of those they control. The ‘voice’ component of critical race theory provides a way to communicate the experiences and realities of the oppressed (Ladson-Billings, 2021). The primary focus of critical race theory is to disrupt inequalities and promote equality for the benefit of all. If critical race theory can help this study

identify colonizing forces within CCSD and also procedures that are helping decolonization to flourish, it will benefit everyone involved in this study and all students and staff of CCSD.

Indigenous Protocols

As often as possible, Indigenous protocols and methods were followed. Blackfoot protocols of gifting participants for their contributions were observed as well as the relational aspects of Indigenous research such as making personal, verbal contact with participants alongside written contact and continuing established relationships after the research is over. Regarding accountability to community, Wilson (2008) contended that, “relational accountability requires me to form reciprocal and respectful relationships within the communities where I am conducting research” (p. 40). I spoke at length with both my Blackfoot mother and Métis scholar Yvonne Poitras Pratt while deciding upon this direction of study. I also spoke with many Indigenous educators and scholars over the years preceding this study to gain an understanding of where they thought the research would best serve the Indigenous education community and students. I honoured their opinions and thanked them for their contributions to my journey. It was extremely important to me that I have an Indigenous scholar on my committee from the outset, but several invitations were unsuccessful. I spoke to Indigenous scholars from other institutions about my concerns of not having Indigenous representation on my committee and they all advised me to explain my efforts and concerns openly and honestly if examined about Indigenous representation. I am thankful that an Indigenous faculty member was subsequently added to my committee and that an Indigenous expert was secured as External Examiner for my final defense.

From an Indigenous paradigm, I am responsible for gathering reliable information, analyzing it for colonial power influence, and doing my best to leverage the maximum positive outcomes of all findings toward decolonizing education. Wilson (2001) also indicated that

“research has to do something beneficial in this world” (p. 175), in the sense that Indigenous research and research methodologies must have a meaningful purpose. It is my hope that this research will be beneficial to all who read it, but most importantly that it may contribute to Indigenous students have a greater sense of belonging in schools and ever increasing levels of educational success. Indigenous scholar Dr. Manulani Meyer spoke of the Maori word for research, ‘rangahau.’ Rangahau translates to “seeking” or “the questing breath of life” (Dr. Manulani Meyer, Hawaiian, lives in Hilo, Hawaii, personal communication, Feb 9, 2021). This research has a meaningful purpose and seeks to improve education for Indigenous students and all students.

Appreciative Inquiry

I also analyzed the data gathered via Appreciative Inquiry (AI). That necessitated acknowledging the inherent tension and conflict between Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Appreciative Inquiry. This tension and conflict results from where each framework is focused in an organization. AI focuses on the very best aspects of an organization (Cooperrider et al., 2003) and CRT focuses on systemic oppressions and marginalization. However, both are committed to change and each seek to improve organizations. Both theories also share social constructionist epistemologies that champion examining peoples’ stories experiences within an organization. I could find no research like this done in a Catholic school district, and it was important to me that this research exist. With that in mind, as well, I knew trust needed to be established and estimated that by situating this research in the AI realm, the organization would feel safe to be the first Catholic district to submit to research of this nature. I also knew that the research being on an aspect of social justice, it needed to have a balancing factor to authenticate the findings and recommendations, thus CRT was a perfect match to the AI lens. My former position within

CCSD allowed me to see that there is still systemic oppression occurring, but I can also appreciate the many efforts being made to decolonize at all levels of CCSD.

There exists very little research of this kind because of the tensions present. Utilizing an AI lens allowed for the best and wisest practices of the organization and its employees to be highlighted, alongside CRT's examination of possible omissions or failures. As the research question is "what decolonizing initiatives are currently being developed and implemented within Calgary Catholic Schools for the benefit of Indigenous and other students?" AI was a necessary lens because I was trying to delineate what was working at CCSD regarding decolonization. AI is "an approach to seeking what is right in an organization in order to create a better future for it" (Coghlan et al., 2003, p. 1.). As I was looking for the benefits of CCSDs initiatives for Indigenous students and all students, AI was a helpful tool to highlight what initiatives were helping the organization in their efforts. According to Cooperrider et al. (2003), AI is an exciting way to embrace organizational change and the basic premise of AI is that

Every organization has something that works right—things that give it life when it is most alive, effective, successful, and connected in healthy ways to its stakeholders and communities. AI begins by identifying what is positive and connecting to it in ways that heighten energy, vision, and action for change. (p. xv)

AI systematically and deliberately appreciates everything of value in an organization and then uses the positive analysis to ponder and plan the future potential and possibilities (Cooperrider et al., XXVII). Attempting the work of decolonization in a system that is inherently colonizing is fraught with contention. Examining it using AI, looking for what is working well, is a valuable starting point. It has limitations, but it makes this research possible because people have more confidence and comfort in moving toward the future when they can identify strengths to

take with them while striving to do better. AI examines the best parts of what they are already doing (Shuayb, 2009).

Originally, under Cooperider and Whitney (2005), AI used a four phase analysis called the 4-D method (Discover, Dream, Design, Destiny), but more recently Preskill and Catsambas (2006) have replaced the 4 Ds with Is: they employ the Inquire, Imagine, Innovate, and Implement model. The inquiring phase is for discovering the best of what is happening. This instills in participants a confidence that some things are going well and that they will be able to carry those best parts of their processes forward, honing them to improve them. The second phase is the imagining phase, where participants can examine the best parts of what they are doing and expand on those, imagining what is possible for the organization. The third phase is innovation. It is thinking about how these imaginings can be made possible setting new directions and aligning their work with their newfound vision. The final phase is implementation, deciding who will do what and when. It is important to note that all four phases need not be actioned for the methodology to be applied.

AI acknowledges that in every context there is something working and the logical thing to do is to start with what is flourishing and grow from there. CCSD has several initiatives regarding decolonization currently in existence. Looking at those initiatives via AI allowed for analysis of what is working and how best to expand on what is working. AI focuses not only on what is working when an organization is at its best, but it also explores what can be done to further improve the performance of the organization in the future (Coghlan et al., 2003).

In summary, the utilization of AI creates a safe environment for CCSD to give permission for the study. It also allows for the thesis question to be answered because when looking for initiatives that are aiding an organization in an area of growth, one needs to examine the most generative aspects. The secondary research questions regard the role that upper administrators

play in this and how other school districts may benefit. These secondary questions require both an AI perspective and a critical perspective to examine them more deeply. Thus CT and CRT are employed to more closely examine the upper administrators' perspectives, understandings of the initiative, and how they operationalize their roles. Utilized in this study, CRT enables a researcher to identify ongoing structural inequities, marginalizations, and oppressions. CRT allows this research and CCSD to identify initiatives that may be beneficial itself and for other school districts. As in everything I do, I try to include Indigenous perspectives and model decolonizing interactions. CRT, by its nature, allows Indigenous perspectives. It captures the voices of those who are not successful and those who do not have power. I strived to include Indigenous voices and research methodologies as best I was able.

Participants

As highlighted by Creswell (2014), researchers have the responsibility of identifying purposefully selected individuals to be respondents in research. All respondents participating in this research were carefully chosen. The researcher selected eight upper administrators to participate in the study. In total, CCSD has 29 upper administrators. There are five superintendents in CCSD with one of them being the Chief Superintendent and there are six area directors. The researcher chose the eight upper administrators she felt best suited to answer the questions. As there were few candidates to choose from, maintaining anonymity is difficult, but every precaution has been taken to protect the identity of the participants. Another reason for the choice of the eight particular upper administrators from the field of 29 is because many of these upper administrators have more active roles in the creation of and dissemination of decolonizing practices in CCSD. Both of the upper administrators who identify as Indigenous were also purposefully included as their perspectives were deemed valuable. In order to protect the

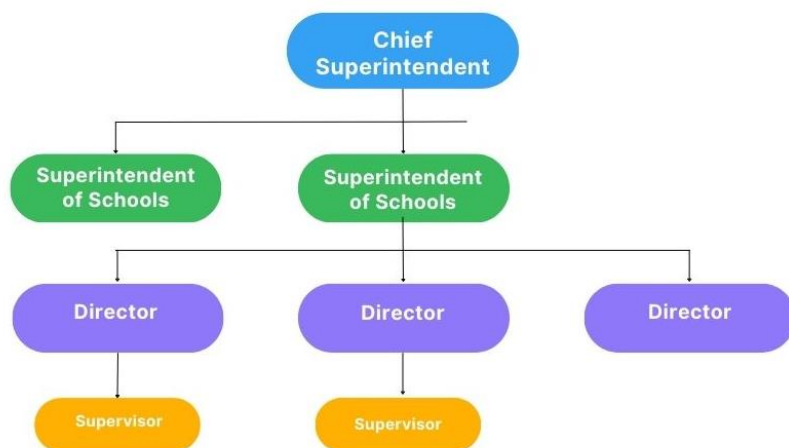
identities of all upper administrators, pseudonyms are assigned to them when mentioned in the study.

To increase trust it is important to design questions that are clearly understood by participants so that they know what is being asked of them (Creswell, 2013). It is the job of the interviewer to ensure that participants feel safe and calm and that is aided by understanding the questions. Participants for the study were recruited formally via a letter of invitation for their participation sent in an email, see Appendix B. That letter included the interview questions, (see Appendix A) to encourage participants to feel an increased sense of safety and be more able to prepare for the interview. It is important that participants agree to be part of the research based on a solid understanding of the study. Each participant was asked the same questions to increase the reliability of the information gathered. I did my best to ask effective questions that got to the root of the participants' understandings, motivations, and purpose for decisions and actions.

Recruitment took place in March 2022, with initial recruitment requests sent via email. To be eligible, participants had to be employees of CCSD and members of the upper administrative team. All participation was voluntary, and each participant was assured of their anonymity to the best of my ability. The nature of the study dictates a relatively small sample size of the upper administrators in CCSD. This makes it more likely they could be identified. For that reason, participants were told that they can choose to not respond to particular questions or exit the interview at any time without any resistance. Participants were asked whether they would prefer the interview to be over Microsoft Teams or in-person, because of the constraints and risks posed by COVID-19. A diagram of the upper administrative structure of CCSD follows is depicted in Figure 5.

Figure 3.1

Upper Administrative Structure of CCSD Participants



Sources of Data

The sources of data are eight upper administrators of CCSD as highlighted in Chapter Four. The type of data collected is qualitative data. Qualitative data was selected for this research design with the hope of acquiring the clearest understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The phenomenon being examined is the collective decolonizing actions of CCSD. According to Creswell (2014), “qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 30). Additionally, Palinkas et al. (2015) assert that “qualitative methods are, for the most part, intended to achieve depth of understanding” (p. 534) of a given phenomenon.

The data gathered are qualitative because it is the subjective opinions and thoughts of upper administrators. Qualitative methods were also chosen because reductionist measures can make understanding the human condition difficult (Angen, 2018; Mishler, 1990). Qualitative data consists of the personal thoughts, actions, and opinions of individual participants, in this case CCSD upper administrators, regarding the decolonizing initiatives being developed and practiced

and their benefit for Indigenous students and all students of CCSD. Qualitative research and data represent the idea that individuals construct meaning socially through interactions with their world (Merriam, 2002), and that the meaning that they construct has a multiplicity of interpretations and constructions of reality which may change over time. As Crotty (1998) stated, “according to constructivism, we do not create meaning; we construct meaning” (pp. 43-44). Qualitative research focuses on peoples’ personal interpretations of what they see happening in their world regarding specific phenomenon (Merriam, 2002). For these reasons, qualitative data provides the opportunity to gather educational leaders’ perceptions of the construct and the practices of decolonization in CCSD.

Another critical component of qualitative research is that the researcher is an instrument in the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data of the targeted phenomenon (Merriam, 2002). As an instrument in collecting information, researchers can obtain even deeper understandings through verbal and nonverbal communications, clarifications and summarizations of data with respondents regarding the veracity of interpretations (Merriam, 2002). In chapter one, I provided some narrative of my experiences and expertise in decolonizing education. My intense passion to acquire the best understanding of upper administrators’ perceptions of and roles in the decolonizing initiatives of CCSD is a main reason I chose a qualitative research framework.

The data for this study were secured via one-on-one interviews. The interviews were two hour long semi-structured conversations. The interview questions were the same for each participant. As COVID-19 was still a concern, the interviewees met via an online platform. The online platform utilized by CCSD at this time was Microsoft Teams. Interviews were recorded in two ways. Two voice recorders were used as Microsoft Teams recorded audio and visual and a

second voice recorder was used. Each interviewee was given a copy of this proposal at least a week ahead of time so that they could read it.

I employed a reflective journal during the interviewing to take notes during the interview. Notes were made of things that could not be recorded in the voice recordings. I intended to use it to record things such as body language, eye contact, facial expressions, and comfort levels. As the research was done from an Appreciative Inquiry lens and the questions were provided beforehand, the journal did not fulfill the original intention as the participants all appeared comfortable during the interviewing. It did however help me keep track of which questions I had asked and which had already been answered inadvertently in answering other questions. In using the journal, I aimed to gain further understanding of the participants' responses rather than having to remember it all as it was recorded. As this research ended up being conducted during COVID, the journal did not prove as essential as originally thought because the interviews were video recorded by Microsoft Teams as well.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics approval documents were received from the University of Saskatchewan and also the Calgary Catholic School District's Research Ethics Application for this study. None of the prospective participants are supervised by me. They were all assured of their confidentiality to the best of my ability. They were also informed that they can refuse to answer any question or quit the study at any time before publishing. All of these followed the rights of respondents proposed by Burns (2005) and include "voluntary informed consent, liberty of withdrawal from research, protection from physical or mental harm, suffering or death" (p. 2). During the data-gathering sessions, participants were reminded that they can request clarification of questions or ask that I pause or end the recording at any point during the data collection process.

I adhered to Indigenous protocols as often as possible, as discussed under ethics as well. Indigenous research ethics center on the 4 Rs: respect, reciprocity, relevance, and relationships. I did not interview any Indigenous Elders during this research. Some participants were invited because they are Indigenous, and I treated all participants with respect, reciprocity, and continue to nurture relationships with them to this day.

Data Analysis

According to Flick (2014) “qualitative data analysis is the classification and interpretation of linguistic (or visual) material to make statements about implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making in the material and what is represented in it” (p. 5). An essential element of this research is gaining understandings, interpreting, and presenting data.

Data analysis is a crucial activity in qualitative research because it determines the research outcomes (Flick, 2014). Data analysis and transcription commenced immediately after the interviews. I transcribed my own interviews to become familiar with the data.

After the transcription, I organized the data. The first step of analyzing the data was categorizing the answers together by question, for example, all of the answers to question one were compiled into one document. The second step of analysis was to look for common themes in what participants told me about decolonizing strategies in their roles at CCSD. Thirdly, I looked for findings in the themes regarding decolonizing efforts at CCSD. Then, after completing the analysis, I used the information to formulate recommendations.

Following the collection and organization of data, I coded the data using a two-step coding method. Coding is segmenting the data and assigning themes to the various segments created. These divisions and theme designations allow researchers to get improved descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained that coding aids researchers to develop categories from the data. From those categories, researchers can develop

analytic conclusions about the data and accentuate what is occurring regarding the phenomenon being researched; it also provides prospective leads to pursue (Charmaz, 2014) regarding synthesizing the data and making recommendations. As per Charmaz (2014), “coding distills data, sorts them and gives us an analytic handle for making comparisons with other segments of data” (p. 4). Coding the data guided me in constructing an understanding of the data collected.

In the initial step of coding, I went through the transcripts line by line. As Glaser (2004) explained, “line by line coding forces the analyst to verify and saturate categories, minimizes missing an important category and ensures the grounding of categories the data beyond impressionism” (p. 13). The second step of coding the data can be labeled as “focused coding” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 138). Charmaz (2014) stated that focused coding “means using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through and analyze large amounts of data” (p. 138). This step analyzes and synthesizes the collected, categorized data further. In this stage, I limited biases that may have been brought to the work to maintain the integrity of the study by using only data gathered from respondents. According to Charmaz (2014), focused coding involves

concentrating on what your initial codes say and the comparisons you make with and between them ... you are a part of your analytic work. You bring your analytic skills and perspectives to bear on the analysis through-out the research process – and that can be a gift. (p. 140)

During this second step, focus coding, I gave special attention to codes that have connections to one another. Each step helped to effectively analyze the data gathered in the study.

Summary

I opened this chapter by briefly introducing the research framework and plan. Then I stated the research question and the research sub-questions. After that I explained what the

interpretivist constructivist methodologies are and why they were chosen for this research. Then Critical Theory was explained followed by an explanation of Critical Race Theory and why both are suitable theories through which to study the data that gathered in this study. Subsequently I explained how Indigenous protocols and methods appropriate to the Treaty 7 region where possible were used in this study. The Appreciative Inquiry method and the possibility of appreciative inquiry being in conflict with Critical Theory was explored before explaining Appreciative Inquiry. That was followed by a discussion of ethics and then of data sources, collection, and analysis. There is much to be learned from the data gathered in the manner explained. It is hoped that this work will uncover some promising practices and some areas for growth which will help student success at CCSD.

Chapter 4 Relevant Data and Themes

Introduction

In this chapter I describe contextual features of the organization that is being researched, explain participant selection and recruitment procedures, and introduce the participants. Data collection and transcription processes are highlighted and the themes that emerge in the research are delineated. The data, organized by themes, is also presented. The themes that emerged from the data were governance and administrative protocols, structure, resourcing, professional and personal accountability, relationships, Catholicity, and resistance.

Description of the Organization Where the Research is Being Conducted

CCSD is a publicly funded Catholic school district and is the fourth largest school district in Alberta. At the time of the study, CCSD had 118 schools, served 58,490 students, and employed 5,585 people. 3,523 of these staff were certificated teachers, 1,520 were support staff, 355 were caretaking staff, 173 were exempt employees, and 5 were senior officers (CCSD Annual Report, 2020).

Approximately three percent of the district's student population self-identifies as Indigenous. Since the district has not asked its staff to self-identify, that statistic is not available; but anecdotally it is likely less than the percentage of students who identify as Indigenous. For the 2020-21 school year across the province of Alberta, 62% of self-identified Indigenous students graduated high school. The graduation rate of self-identified Indigenous students in CCSD was 81.1%. The dropout rate of self-identified Indigenous students in the province of Alberta was 5%. At the CCSD, the dropout rate of self-identified Indigenous students was only 2.1% (Alberta Government, 2020).

It may be tempting to simply celebrate that CCSD Indigenous students graduated at a 19% higher rate than Indigenous students across the province, but it is also worth noting that the

graduation rate of all students in the province was 83.4%. This means there is still a 2.3% discrepancy in graduation rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in CCSD. If the situation was reversed, that 2.3% may be intolerable to non-Indigenous students and their communities. It should be intolerable to all communities. That means there is still work to be done in decolonizing education until Indigenous student graduation rates are commensurate with all other students.

CCSD is a large organization with many layers to support various initiatives. As a school district that attempts to respect and adhere to the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and the Alberta Education Teacher, Leader, and Superintendent Quality Standards, CCSD has implemented some of its own local strategies and practices as well. As a centrally structured school district, these can be mandated for all schools and all employees in the district. These are highlighted in CCSD's four district priorities set out by the trustees. They include Faith Formation, Student Wellness, Student Success, and Indigenous Education. In support of the Indigenous education priority designation, the district engages strategies at a variety of levels to nurture decolonization, Indigenous student success and wellness, Indigenous education integration, and Indigenous community relationship-building and maintenance.

District priorities are reconsidered each year; and trustees decide if any of the priorities need to change or be revised. As a reminder, I have taken the Indigenous Education quarter of the wheel and posted it as Figure 6. In their decision making, the trustees seek input and advice each year from all stakeholders and from staff members who lead each priority area, including the Indigenous Education team. The wording suggested by the team was very intentional so that staff understand the direction set forth by the trustees and what is being asked of them.

Figure 4.1

CCSD Board Priorities 'Indigenous Education' priority 2023-24



The phrase 'honouring the shared responsibility' speaks to the fact that integrating foundational knowledge with Indigenous peoples' perspectives within the curriculum is not a burden but an honour. It is also a 'shared responsibility.' The word 'embracing' as the action that precedes 'supporting Indigenous students' success and belonging' suggests that this is something staff must do willingly and enthusiastically and that students not only need to be successful, but they also need to feel like CCSD is a place where they belong as part of the community. Finally, the word 'nurturing' was chosen explicitly because CCSD knows that because of the legacies of the past and things that are beyond their control, many historic relationships between Catholic School staff and Indigenous people have been damaged or broken. CCSD acknowledges that its staff must nurture current and future relationships with care to rebuild trust. Having Indigenous Education as one of its four priorities, with such purposefully chosen language and goals, conveys a clear sense of the importance placed by CCSD on developing and implementing decolonization strategies.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

Research participants were chosen from a pool of 29 upper administrators in the district, including five superintendents, 14 directors, and 10 supervisors. Based on purposeful sampling approaches, the eight participants were selected and invited according to my opinion of the likelihood that their roles may contribute to decolonization in the CCSD and that they would be

able to provide the insights necessary to answer the research questions. I also purposefully extended invitations to the two upper administrators who identify as Indigenous. Invitations were sent to eight potential candidates via individual emails (Appendix B). All potential candidates responded as being interested in participating and interviews were then scheduled via email.

Introducing the Participants and their Understanding of Decolonization

Each participant was asked introductory, contextual questions about the roles in educational systems, and about their level of post-secondary training regarding decolonization as outlined in Table 4.1. The participants' identities are kept as confidential as possible via pseudonyms, though their genders are not hidden as I felt this may be an interesting factor when considering some of their observations.

Table 4.1

Contextual Information for Participants

Participant name and years in education	Education re: Decolonization in Post-secondary	Educational roles over the course of career
Kit: 26 years, with CCSD and one other board	Received decolonization education as he attended an Indigenous teacher preparation program.	10 years as teacher, 13 as school-based administrator and 3 as upper administrator
Susan: 32 years, with CCSD and one other board	Received no formal decolonization education, but was raised beside a First Nation with 'significant cultural presence'	6 years as teacher, 18 as school-based administrator, and 8 in upper administration

Jack- 33 years with CCSD	Received no decolonization in undergrads or graduate studies	5 years as teacher, 14 as school-based administration, 14 as upper administration
Yvonne: 24 years, with CCSD, abroad, and one other school board David: 27 years with CCSD	Received no decolonization education in undergrads or graduate studies Received no decolonization education in undergrads or graduate studies	5 years as teacher, 15 as school-based administration, 4 in upper administration 6 years as teacher, 14 as school-based administration, 7 in upper administration
Aubrey: 39 years, with CCSD and one other board	Received no decolonization education in undergrads or graduate studies	11 years as teacher, 5 as school counsellor, 7 as school-based administration, 16 years in upper administration
Erin: 31 years, with CCSD and one other board	Received no decolonization education in undergrads or graduate studies, but teaching experience in Kanawake during the Oka Crisis.	16 as a teacher, 11 as consultant, 3 in upper administration
Sylas: 25 years with CCSD	Received no decolonization education in undergrad or graduate studies, but some training in Diversity in his Master's in leadership.	3 years as teacher, 14 in school-based administration, 8 as upper administration

When introducing the participants further, I choose to include their understanding of decolonization in their description. This is done with the intention of creating a more fulsome understanding of each participant before reading their responses to the research questions. The upper administrators' understanding of and experiences with decolonization inform their

perspectives when answering the research questions, so I felt it important to include this information with each participant's introduction to enable them to articulate their understanding of decolonization.

The first to be interviewed was Kit on April 15th, 2022. Kit is the only participant to receive post-secondary education regarding decolonization, likely because he is one of two participants who identify as Indigenous and he attended an Indigenous teacher preparation program. When speaking of his post-secondary experience regarding decolonization, Kit said:

at [name of post-secondary program] there was a wonderful balance between the theory and the application of teaching, and then also the cultural components. So, it was awesome because a lot of it was land-based stuff as well. And the great part about the experience was that all of our teaching experiences, the practicums, they all occurred within Indigenous communities. So, we had an opportunity to have both rural experiences on reserves, and so I did one practicum on [name of First Nation] and another one on [name of First Nation] and then even when it was in the city, it was at a 'community school.' So, I always having an opportunity to put into practice with Indigenous Communities.

When asked to speak further about his understanding of decolonization, Kit said:

my understanding of decolonization is that the most important part is reflection. And so, for me, it's a process. It's not just one thing that you do and now all of a sudden, you've decolonized. It's a process. So, it's understanding how the structures of a district, how curriculum, even the relationships, the powers within relationships, all impact our Indigenous students and our Indigenous communities. So, that's why for me, the most important part in all of that is reflecting on that constantly, right?... it's constantly thinking about and reflecting

about what the term is and what that looks like on a day-to-day basis within our schools.

When asked about the importance of decolonization, he responded:

if we look at the reality for a lot of our Indigenous students and their families, you know, regardless of where they live or where they go to school, whether it's in a remote community, whether it's in an urban setting, whether it's in a smaller community, and we look at the statistics that are there, whether it's the socio-economic, whether it's related to the Criminal Justice System or Child and Family Services. The statistics there in terms of the reality for our people, is, for lack of a better term, atrocious and embarrassing. And, decolonization within our schools can play a huge, huge role in making steps towards changing that reality for our students and families.

The second participant, Susan, was interviewed on April 28th, 2022. Susan did not receive any formal post-secondary education regarding decolonization but did train as a Social Studies teacher and spent some time teaching in rural Alberta where she encountered ethnocentrism and ignorance regarding race and history. Susan's understanding of decolonization was that it is "stepping back and reflecting on the other ways" of being and doing things and she has "been aware for a long time that the European way, the European narrative, is the dominant one." She added,

so, to me, decolonization has always been trying to move away from 'the European way is the right way,' trying to just be more open to the fact that Europeans came in, took over, hijacked, and then everything about their way was the 'right way,' the acceptable way. And so, decolonization to me is stepping back and reflecting on the other ways.

The third participant, Jack, was interviewed May 9th, 2022. Like most participants he did not receive any formal post-secondary education regarding decolonization. When asked, Jack said, "I would say my understanding of decolonization is, each individual needs to take a step back and reflect upon their role in society, and their actions, their words, their thoughts. And how they either advance or harm another group of people." He added "I think as a professional educator in Alberta, we all need to understand the history of Canada and the history of Indigenous people." When asked if and why he thinks decolonization is important in education he reflected on the role especially as it pertains to Catholic educators,

I think another reason it's important is because with the recent discoveries related to residential schools. And we know the Catholic Church has played a huge role in all of that. Catholic schools are deeply connected to the Catholic Church. And I think, you know, we have a role and a responsibility to make amends and to try to repair relationships, and to do what is right and just. Not only for the Indigenous community, but for all people in Canada and Alberta.

The fourth participant, Yvonne, was interviewed on April 8th, 2022. Although Yvonne identifies as Indigenous, she did not receive any formal post-secondary education regarding decolonization. To explain her understanding of decolonization, Yvonne said,

my understanding of decolonization is that it's breaking down the colonial system, the systems that we have that oppress Indigenous people or people of 'other' races, all of that stuff, the European system. And so to decolonize that is to start to first of all reflect and look where we are at and then start to break it down in a way that would not exclude or hurt the others. So I always call it 'making space,' because that's when we think of decolonizing, making space. So if we look at a math class, everybody is sitting in rows. Can we not sit in a circle

and have a debate about a formula or something? So, start to look at those things. That's what decolonizing means to me is to look at the systems and break them down.

David, the fifth participant, was interviewed on April 17th, 2022. He did not receive any formal post-secondary education regarding decolonization. David explains his understanding of decolonization as

trying to learn from some of our past mistakes. And the way that we as Westerners have dealt with our Indigenous populations here in Canada. And there's a long history, unfortunately, of some very, very bad practices that were hurtful and wrong. And while we can't change the past, we can learn from the past and impact the future in a positive way. So that's kind of where I see myself, is that I can learn from, hope to learn from, some of the mistakes that have occurred.

When asked if he has seen changes regarding decolonization during his career, David replied, "I would say probably within the last five years that I've been able to pay more attention to Indigenous education, Indigenous perspectives, and the importance of the piece that I need to play in that role of understanding better."

The sixth participant, Aubrey, was interviewed June 6th, 2022. Aubrey did not receive any formal post-secondary education regarding decolonization. She reflected on her understanding, or recent lack thereof, with honesty and humility - "I was definitely one of 'those people.' And even when I supervised, back then, 'the FNMI Team,' it was 'you're gonna do it our way.' And I was tasked - charged- with this. This is only, you know, if you think about it, this is only about 20 years ago, 15 to 20 years ago." When asked where she was at now in her understanding of decolonization she replied "now we have to act. And our actions will prove our apologies. And I

think that's key, because without action then the apology means nothing. But with action we will see it come to fruition and grow. And I think that's where we need to be.”

The seventh participant, Erin, was interviewed on June 6th, 2022. She did not receive any formal post-secondary education regarding decolonization, but she was teaching in Kanawake during the Oka Crisis and was deeply impacted by those events early in her career. She sees decolonization as an opportunity saying,

it's like an opportunity for non-Indigenous people to really reflect and look and accept the realities of what we've done as Canadians in how, as colonists, what they've done through history and how they've affected things. We need to accept that history has not been there for Indigenous people and what the impact of the colonizers has done to this community of people, individuals, and how it's transferred across generations. So we need to break down that system and do better, make peace with that, like do better so we can move on so that the next generations aren't hit in the same way because we're seeing all of that trauma. So, I don't know if I'm saying that appropriately, but we don't want it to continue. Essentially, we need to have an understanding of what it means to colonize and what the effects of colonization did to people. The peoples of Canada or Indigenous peoples, and make sure that we don't do that again or continue to do that and make sure that their future generations are not affected by that anymore.

The eighth participant, Sylas, was interviewed on April 25th, 2022. He did not receive any formal post-secondary education regarding decolonization, but did receive some training and education around diversity in his Master's studies in Educational Leadership. When asked about his understanding of decolonization and how it has changed over recent years, Sylas said, “I

don't know that I ever thought about it in the way that we are now. In the sense that we really robbed people of their culture and from that side of it, that's really been a lot of learning for me in the last 5 to 8 years.” When asked about how best to convey the importance of decolonization, he said “recognizing the importance of being really deliberate about it and really intentional about saying to people... You know, I guess at the level that I'm at now is being really intentional about why we do this.” He added, “I think for me the biggest thing is, is when in the positions that I've held, is understanding that we need to learn about other cultures rather than just assuming cultures will take on the traits of our society.” He spoke to the importance of recognizing all students’ perspectives, “this isn't about kids learning our rules. It's about us helping them understand why those rules are in place and then helping them figure out how that fits within their culture.”

Data Collection

As there were still concerns regarding COVID, all interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams meetings. That was helpful because Microsoft Teams has the ability to record meetings and the option to loosely transcribe meetings, which significantly reduced transcription time. The interviews were also audio recorded on a cell phone. Each of the eight interviews took between 90 and 135 minutes. I transcribed all the interviews.

Organizing the Data: Coding Methods and Themes

The first round of coding involved separating and grouping the responses of all eight participants in relation to interview questions. The second round of coding highlighted evidence that assisted in addressing the research questions. In highlighting those sections, categories began to become apparent. These included governance, structure, resourcing and staffing, communication and transparency, district decolonizing systemic initiatives, working with Post-secondary Institutions and data-driven models, staff professional growth, school-based procedures, and classroom practices. The

third round of coding sought to collapse these categories to delineate themes. The themes identified were district governance and structure, systemic strategies, professional and personal accountability, professional development, relationships, Catholicity, and resistance.

District Structures and Strategies

Several participants confirmed that the leadership personnel of an educational organization play an important role in mobilizing its priorities. Susan spoke of how “the trustees want to really hit home this idea of sharing responsibility for moving forward Indigenous ways of knowing.” Based on the priorities set out by trustees, the upper administration of CCSD is the operational arm of the district and decides on the direction, the structure, the staffing, and the resourcing. It also creates the Administrative Protocols (AP) to support the priorities in a safe and effective manner. When Erin spoke of CCSD strategies toward decolonization, she was very direct, noting “our Chief came out and said we have racism in our district. And that was a key, a catalyst.”

In discussing the genesis of decolonization commitments within CCSD, participants identified the influence of international, national, provincial and district directives. Participants were aware that UNDRIP and the TRC were seminal documents in the evolution of Indigenous rights globally and saw it as pushing Canada and Alberta to respond to Indigenous presence within schools. Susan said,

I think what the TRC has done, I think what the language in the LQS has done it, it's labeled it. You know what I mean? It's actually identified and given structure and so I would say there's pressure now, but it also has made it easier. It's given tangible things and I think that tangibility is really important. So, I think those things have really helped.

International governmental organizations, the federal government of Canada, and the Alberta government have set some solid direction and legislation in place to help guide citizens and school districts toward decolonization. This commitment is mirrored at the governance level within CCSD, as trustees' have made Indigenous education one of their four priorities.

Participants, including David, spoke of how important having Indigenous Education as a district priority is to their efforts:

so when we talk about Indigenous education, people cannot ask, 'well, why are you talking about Indigenous education?' Well, we're talking about it because it's one of our district priorities. So, by keeping the emphasis and the focus on it as a priority, and it needs to remain there because we have so much more work to do, that helps us manage and put resources towards those mandated priorities much easier than if they were not a focal point.

In the 2021-22 school year, the district also formed and funded an Indigenous Advisory Circle made up of Elders from the Treaty 7 region. Their aim is to meet every six to eight weeks to build relationships and discuss district initiatives and strategies. The district provided a budget, with oversight given to the district Elder regarding providing appropriate honouraria and gifts for the Circles' insights and teachings. The trustees have also met with the Indigenous Advisory committee to hear Indigenous community voices and learn from the Elders with regard to the decisions they make about the direction of the district and the Indigenous Education priority.

The fact that CCSD is centrally structured came up again and again as an asset regarding the advancement of decolonization. All district schools, leaders, and employees are under the direction and supervision of the central office. When asked about why CCSD may have had more

success, statistically, in the areas of Indigenous student success, participants cited the centralized structure. Jack, for example, mentioned the centralized structure often.

I think one area would be because we are centrally managed versus site-based management. So, when you have a centrally coordinated response, as we do in Calgary Catholic, I genuinely think that's the main reason why we are more successful. In a site-based managed scenario, the school leader, typically the principal, determines how money is going to be spent and unless Indigenous Education is at their forefront, it may not see the resourcing that we have targeted here in a centrally managed system.

David also spoke about how a centralized structure can help initiatives to be implemented in a more timely fashion -

In a big organization like ours change happens very slowly. But I would say that we have a trump card to play that other school jurisdictions don't have. We are centralized, so our centralized nature allows us to, I think, better impact system-wide policy changes or changes in practice much more effectively than a jurisdiction which is site-based. If we mandate something that has to happen, it's easy for us to roll out, because it's done from a very centralized model system. And so, I feel that the system that we have in place, even though change is slow and people are sometimes pulled along, dragging and screaming, it can still happen much more effectively in a centralized decision-making model rather than a site-based decision-making model.

In addition to its centralized district structure, CSSD also has a centralized Indigenous Education Team. David sees the team as integral to CCSD's success regarding Indigenous Education, "we're so fortunate we have the Indigenous Education Team. Without a dedicated

team of individuals who have those experiences and are connected, the community engagement piece with the Elders and the communities and all the nations. It's non-existent.”

The team operates out of one location and works together on many projects and initiatives, sometimes specializing in certain areas. Every single participant mentioned how important the centralized Indigenous Education team was to the decolonization of the district. Jack iterated this aptly when he said “we need to work closely with our Indigenous Education team. It can't be the team of superintendents just making the change and imposing it in the system, because that's just more colonization.” Having a centralized team allows members to work together and benefit from one another. It also allows the district to regularly have access to all members of the team at once and the team can work as a unit. This centralized department helps address the educational needs of Indigenous students, but also the decolonizing and Indigenizing needs of the entire district. Susan said,

I really take my hat off to our Indigenous Ed team because, you know, it's [them]

that I would say in the last few years have really brought this term

(decolonization) to light. And I think it's become part of our vernacular now.

Certainly, it's a term that we use when we're interviewing for administrators. It's

a term used when we are talking with teachers, in hiring practices, and things like

that.

Part of this centralized department includes a district Elder. Having a dedicated District Elder on staff sets a precedent. Research reveals that school districts in Alberta definitely work with Elders, but no other district has a full-time District Elder on staff. This Elder is paid at the top of the salary grid within the support staff union and is given flexibility in schedule while being encouraged to be a part of other Indigenous education advisory panels and gatherings across the province. Also, recently the district Elder has been invited to sit on interviewing and hiring

committees for staffing within CCSD regarding Indigenous student support and educational positions. Yvonne attested to the impact of a district Elder when she said, "I really love that we have an Elder. I know when you think of decolonization, you might think 'deconstruct a classroom,' but by allowing the voice of an Elder at the table of the trustees and they listen to her - that's huge." CCSD having an Elder on staff with whom they have built a relationship for over 35 years, who is a member of a nation on the traditional territory which the school district is situated and who identifies as Catholic is an unbelievable resource in their decolonization efforts.

Having a supervisor designated solely to Indigenous education is another key aspect of the CCSD structure and staffing with regard to decolonization. Most CCSD staff at the supervisor level carry several portfolios as well as supervision of a number of school sites. The Indigenous Education Supervisor's role includes only Indigenous Education Team supervision, upper administration meeting and decision-making responsibilities. The supervisor is the conduit between upper administration and the rest of the Indigenous Education Team. The Supervisor also works with outside partner organizations like the neighbouring First Nations and their education agreements. The supervisor meets with Alberta Education to discuss accountability in reporting, progress, procedures, and results. The decision to have the Indigenous Education supervisor only hold one portfolio was made in the 2021-22 school year. Yvonne discussed the importance of having a dedicated specialist in the Indigenous Education Team supervisor's role noting,

it's always coming to the table with a presentation, a proposal, a teachable moment as to why we do this work. [They are] always representing the Indigenous communities and people and bringing it to the table, bringing it to [the trustees and upper administrators'] attention and then they make the

decisions from there. Sometimes those presentations become long dialogues because they [the upper administrators and trustees] are not seeing through the lens of the Indigenous people. And that helps them decolonize, when they realize their unconscious bias, or the why of decolonization. For example, they may ask 'why would I take money from a diverse learning vulnerable student to support an Indigenous student?' And then the supervisor will say: 'Pause for a moment. Often an Indigenous student is vulnerable and a diverse learning student, too, because 61% of Indigenous students in our district have a learning support plan.' And then they realize, 'Ohh I didn't know that.' So, it's giving them information so they can make better decisions.

This highlights the importance of having a senior administrator within an educational organization whose only responsibility is to ensure that all members of the organization are learning about the work of decolonization, spending time in Indigenous community, and best able to represent Indigenous voices at the upper administrative table discussions. If a supervisor had to balance a number of portfolios, it would take away from their ability to do these things well.

The centralized, specialized Indigenous Education Team has two consultants. The Teaching and Learning Indigenous Education Consultant is tasked with meeting the needs of schools, teachers, community relationships, and Indigenous Education across the district. The Diverse Learning Indigenous Education Consultant meets the needs of and supports diverse Indigenous learners and their families to be successful in the district as well mentors and guides all staff supporting Indigenous students and families regarding resources and best practices when working with Indigenous families.

The team also has two Indigenous Education Teachers who travel to schools and classrooms across the district, teaching classes and mentoring teachers in the Indigenization and decolonization of their classrooms. In addition, the team has two Indigenous Wellness Workers who are trained social workers who collaborate with the consultant for diverse Indigenous learners to provide mental health supports and access to community programs and supports for students and their families. The district has one liaison staff who works in the high schools with the highest populations of Indigenous students to liaise with the school staff, the students, and their families toward achieving success in high school. Recently, the department also added two central Cultural Liaison workers for the district. They field requests from schools and parents to work individually with Indigenous students who are struggling in school. Finally, the Indigenous Education Team has a dedicated administrative assistant who is well-versed in the cultural protocols, district procedures and forms, and budget codes involved with Indigenous education work. The team has twelve members in all. With reference to the importance of the team regarding decolonization, Susan said, “that team is what supports our junior colleagues to advance them in decolonization.” She also said, “particularly for Calgary Catholic, that Indigenous Ed team has laid stuff out for us.”

Participants acknowledged that there are drawbacks to having a centralized team who are involved in all levels of decolonization in the district. Kit worries that people will become too dependent on the team: “If we don’t have further integration or layered involvement with stakeholders, then what ends up happening is... the work of decolonization then is looked upon as the work of the Indigenous Education team.” How to balance the benefits of a centralized team with the imperative to embed decolonization work within all aspects of the organization is clearly a tension within CSSD and something to be considered when deciding on what structure best facilitates decolonization initiatives.

In addition to identifying the critical role of governance and the dedicated Indigenous Education Team, participants highlighted the importance of district policy in advancing decolonization. The district is governed by their Administrative Procedures (APs) which are created as support documents regarding procedures within the district. The APs must be followed by everyone employed in the district. APs are continually being written as needs arise and edited when required. While imperfections exist in the CCSD's systemic strategies toward decolonization, progress is being made and much can be learned by what is currently successful.

AP 203 (see Appendix C) is the most important with respect to Indigenous students and Indigenous educational processes. There are ten procedures under AP 203. The procedure starts by giving a background of CCSD's commitment to "providing high quality instructional programs and educational services for Indigenous students and to increasing understanding and acceptance of Indigenous cultures for all students" and describes a key priority of "improvement of educational achievement among First Nations, Métis and Inuit students through meaningful educational opportunities from Kindergarten through to Grade 12" (Administrative Protocols, 2020, p. 196). It goes on to say that CCSD recognizes the spiritual needs of the Indigenous community and, in a limited capacity, introduces the practice of Smudge and Pipe Ceremonies stating that CCSD recognizes "smudging and the use of herbs and tobacco are a part of the Indigenous traditional way of life and are, therefore, permitted in District schools, subject to proper safety measures" (Administrative Protocols, 2020, p. 197). Then it goes on to list the ten procedures which can be found in Appendix C. The protocols set out: clear directions and expectations for all staff regarding the education of Indigenous students, recognition and respect for Indigenous cultures and spirituality, expectations for Indigenous student success, responsibility to the TRC and the goal of reconciliation, commitment to hearing, consulting, and valuing input from Indigenous parents, providing professional development opportunities for

staff. It also provides non-Indigenous students with knowledge of Indigenous cultures and people while learning respect for Indigenous Elders and community members, and the provision of education to students living on-reserve via educational agreements with government agencies. The final procedure provides direction for allowing Smudge and Pipe Ceremonies in designated areas in all CCSD buildings. This protocol and these procedures were presented in rough draft form to the CCSD Indigenous Education Department, led by the District Elder, for consultation and editing suggestions before being published.

In addition to AP 203, there is an “Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Indigenous Presenters Protocols” sheet available on the Indigenous Education Team’s Educational Professional Development (EPD) site. It highlights the etiquette and local protocols around how to invite Indigenous speakers into your school and how to treat them once they are on site. It also highlights the protocols around expectations and procedures regarding proper honouraria.

While affirming the value of APs in advancing decolonizing work, participants also noted the need for additional work. Erin, who praised the Chief Superintendent for catalyzing the work, also noted that the APs are “written with one child in mind. Not all children in mind. They're not written through a culturally responsive lens, and they're written through a Eurocentric way of knowing that's traditional in all the work that we've done. So those things need to be changed.” When asked about the presence of decolonization in the APs, David admitted that there was “probably not enough. I don't even know how much of that is a consideration. I've been involved in the creation of a few APs ... But again, depending on what subject matter we're dealing with, we're not always talking about the impact of decolonization on those decisions.” Yvonne described the process of upper administration and trustee meetings as very colonial, mentioning the hierarchical system and colonized processes, saying “I have to be very honest. There's a system on how you approach the room. How you, who you can speak to, how they call on

names. Like you need to say, 'Madam Chair, Chief, Doctor [Chief Superintendent's name]' like how you have to speak, that's all colonial. So no, there is no decolonization in that process at this time."

Research is powerful and it is not only in the findings of the research. I believe this is an example of that power because in raising a discussion around the colonial aspects of the APs and how they are made, each participant had to consider something they had not thought about before with regard to how much more deeply decolonization could be embedded at CCSD.

The CCSD directs considerable resources toward decolonization. In addition to funding the stand-alone Indigenous Education Department, they also fund other district-wide and school site-based events, as well as designating the resources of district supports, time, and opportunities toward decolonization and Indigenous student success. When Yvonne was asked about how CCSD resources decolonization, her response was:

Indigenous Education did not receive very much money last year. However, in conversation with the board of trustees, with our Chief Superintendent, they were willing and open to hearing that it needed unlimited funds. Can I say unlimited? Because the Indigenous Education Team only had so much to give the Elders and so on. And they said that they were committed to truth and reconciliation, so they call it the 'truth and reconciliation monies.' Which to me, I would think, aligns with Indigenous education and decolonizing. So, the team currently has an unlimited fund for what it is they need to do. So, they just do the work. They've done a few (professional development) videos, and had Elders circles. Upper admin didn't want money to be impeding. This year alone, though, but it wasn't like that in the past.

CCSD is funding the work in other ways, as well. An important branch of Calgary Catholic is called Learning Services. Housed in Learning Services are approximately 200 subject-area and student support consultants, psychologists, specialists, and support workers. All students have access to mental health, educational, and behavioural supports and assessments via the Learning Services Team. Students, staff, and parents can request such supports as the Behaviour Team, the Diverse Learner Teacher team, the Special Education team and so on. They can also request the supports of in-house psychologists and or testing such as psychoeducational assessments. Every student in CCSD who needs these supports has access to them.

CCSD also provides the resource of time. The Indigenous Education team has many opportunities to deliver professional development for all district staff, from district upper administrators, to front office staff, to the human resources team. When asked what she thought about how other school districts could benefit from what CCSD is doing well, Susan spoke about how the district makes “sure that every one of our councils: our AP Council, our VP Council, our Principal Council, is getting professional growth. Also, that we're doing district-wide Indigenous PD days, parent trustee forums, days on Indigenous issues.” In addition to providing the in-house Indigenous Education Team with the opportunity to teach all district employees at all levels, the district also invites the Indigenous Education Team to have outside Indigenous education experts in to speak to leadership and fund the honouraria for those speakers. Staffs are also encouraged to, with the consultation of the Indigenous Education Team, invite in outside Indigenous speakers on their own professional development days and can use district monies to fund these speakers.

The CCSD funds a yearly Indigenous Community Christmas Luncheon. Starting in 2021, CCSD has held a Christmas Luncheon for all Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, educators, and community partners that it works alongside. District staff such as upper administrators,

leadership from teaching and learning, but also from other fields like finance, communications, and human resources attend. It is stressed, and aptly summed up by Jack, that the luncheon is “just bringing people together. Not to get anything from them, but to develop relationships.” Too often when Indigenous people, presenters, educators, Elders, etcetera are invited to schools or a school function the interaction is transactional. The purpose of this luncheon is for CCSD to simply show the Indigenous community appreciation and purposefully forge and build authentic relationships.

Participants noted that every year, the district hosts an Indigenous Student Graduation Celebration. All expenses are paid for each Indigenous graduate to attend with two guests, requests can be made for extra tickets based on the number of RSVPs and the capacity of the venue. The evening includes rental of a hotel banquet room, a fully catered meal, and a variety of Indigenous speakers, cultural and educational. It also has Métis jiggers, pow wow drummers, and pow wow dancers. It starts with a Grand Entry, Honour Song and Flag song, an invocation, and prayers by community Elders before the meal. During the meal, guests are entertained by Indigenous cultural performers. After the meal there are awards, an Indigenous motivational guest speaker, a certificate presentation to each grad, and the night concludes with a Round Dance. In addition to the Indigenous students and their families, the event is attended by Indigenous community members, two staff representatives from each high school, the Trustees, and district leadership. It is a beautiful celebration of the culmination of Indigenous students' success at CCSD.

Participants drew attention to one of the more recent initiatives that the district funded, a series of posters created by the Teaching and Learning Indigenous Education Consultant. The district fully funded the honouraria for the Elders and community members featured, the printing of the posters, and

the dispersal of these posters to every school and worksite in the district. As of the 2021-22 school year, nine posters had been created of Indigenous mentors from each of the Treaty 7 nations and beyond. Very mindfully, the posters are of local, current, active Indigenous people who are contributing to their communities - from Knowledge Keepers, to pow wow dancers, to community advocates. Each of the people featured is known in the schools and has worked with the district in some way. Too often, again, posters or features of Indigenous people are of well-known famous Indigenous actors or athletes or Indigenous figures who are no longer living - historical figures. The district deliberately highlighted

Figure 4.2

Indigenous Peoples Poster of Bruce Starlight



Note: Calgary Catholic School District. Indigenous Peoples Month Posters. (Unpublished)

people their staff and students interact with to show the depth, diversity, and achievements of local Indigenous people they may actually know or meet. These posters won the 2022 BRAVO Coup de Coeur (CACE-ACACE Canadian Association of Communication in Education) National Award. Figure 4.1 provides an example of one of the posters.

Another landmark initiative that CCSD implemented in the 2022-23 school year was an ambitious plan to ensure all CCSD students spend time on the land at least four times between Kindergarten and Grade 12. CCSD has funded school trips for all students in grades 1, 4, 7 and 10 across

the district. Each class is given the funding to travel to recommended locations and learn with Indigenous people on the land. The Indigenous Education team has planned each grade level option to work within the grades' curriculums and extend students' knowledge of Indigenous people and their culture and connection to the land. Given that a large part of colonization was Indigenous people being divested of their land, getting students back on the land, learning from Indigenous people, is an excellent example of decolonized educational practices.

With regard to staffing as a resource, CCSD does not change their staffing ratio based on the number of Indigenous students in a given school or classroom. The district funds staffing based on a needs basis, tracking the numbers, educational coding, and referrals for support to the Learning Services team as indicators when making staffing decisions. The district has also moved several specialized programs to areas of the city that are closer to large Indigenous populations and closer to the First Nations with whom they have educational agreements. When asked about specialized staffing for schools with high Indigenous populations, Susan volunteered that

we do have some schools that I would say have higher (Indigenous) populations, particularly on the west side of our city. And yes and no. Those schools are staffed the same way, just in terms of ratios, however, you would probably see greater incidence of contingency teachers being put in. You would probably see more EA support being assigned. You might see more DLT support assigned.

Susan went on to say:

Staffing would be based on the profile of the students. We try to look at the profile of the child as opposed to, you know, the cultural background of the child. And so, if you have a high number of Indigenous children who also happen to have learning disabilities, behavior, or anxiety or mental health issues, then you

would see more resources put there. But does a higher number of Indigenous children mean that you're going to get more support? No, it doesn't. It doesn't unless those Indigenous children also happen to have a profile that would require additional support. I think back in the day we did, you know, it used to be that way long ago: you would call downtown and you'd say 'ohh, I just got two Indigenous kids' and you got some more EA time. Which is obscene.

This participant is referring to what they feel would be racist, assuming that a student needs more support in school simply because they are Indigenous. CCSD prefers to fund and staff their schools on a needs basis, not a race basis.

CCSD is cognizant of diversity in its staffing. Susan noted that "we have a lot of conversations on the staffing committee about diversity and about children seeing themselves in their teachers and administrators. And we know that we have a diversity issue in Calgary Catholic. We're very white. We're very European." Recognizing this, the district has chosen action over ignorance:

What we're trying to do, particularly when we're looking at different cultures and bringing different cultural groups into administration is we are really mindful of our European bias. And we talk about it, and we name it. You know what I mean? It's not in the shadows anymore... I would tell you that for [name of Chief Superintendent] and senior admin and the staffing committee, getting more visually diverse candidates is really a priority at our level here.

Communication and Transparency

The Board of Trustees at CCSD has demonstrated the importance of decolonization and Indigenous Education by identifying Indigenous Education as a priority in the district for many years. CCSD trustees maintain a clear communication strategy regarding Indigenous Education and decolonizing

initiatives. At the end of each year, a Trustee Report is produced containing the relevant data pertaining to Indigenous student success, the professional development that was facilitated by the Indigenous Education Team, and much of the work that was supported at the district, school, and classroom level regarding Indigenizing and decolonizing efforts. It includes pictures of student and staff activities and student artwork. It is a record of everything Indigenous education and student achievement in the district and is a visual celebration of the work that is happening at CCSD. Many copies of this report are printed, and a copy is presented to each of the trustees as a report to them on what has been accomplished in the priority area of Indigenous Education each year.

To stay informed and be kept abreast regarding what is happening in the Indigenous community and in Indigenous education, pre-Covid the CCSD trustees had an Indigenous Community Trustee Dinner twice a year with the Indigenous Education Team and at least two invited Indigenous guests. The Indigenous Education Team chose the guests, often Indigenous faculty from a local post-secondary institution or an Indigenous leader in one of the many organizations with which the district works. Sometimes, current or former successful Indigenous students of CCSD were also in attendance. The dinners build community and awareness, but are also a chance for the trustees to learn what is going on in the Indigenous community surrounding CCSD - new initiatives, new scholarship, or educational practices. The dinners are relaxed and enjoyable and the invited guests are given the floor after the meal to talk about their work and give the trustees a chance to ask questions.

District Decolonizing Systemic Initiatives

Many of the initiatives have already been mentioned. These include the stand-alone Indigenous Education Team, the Elders Council, the Christmas Luncheon and Indigenous Students Graduation Celebration, the award-winning poster series, having each student spend time on the land with Indigenous Elders and community members at least four times in their CCSD educational careers, the

Trustee Indigenous Dinners, and the Trustee Indigenous Education Report. In addition, CCSD also celebrates or recognizes specific days that have significance to Indigenous people, deliberately seeks to incorporate Indigenous voices, works with post-secondary institutions, research, and data-driven models, secures grant funding for Indigenous education initiatives, ensures all staff have regular access to Indigenous education professional development, and mandates school-based procedures and classroom practices.

CCSD commemorates significant Indigenous events and recognized days of remembrance and celebration throughout the year. Orange Shirt Day, now the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, is recognized each year in September. Every school, supported by the Indigenous Education Team, is required to acknowledge the tragedy of residential schools and the lives that were lost utilizing books, films, and lessons provided to their teachers. CCSD partners with the City of Calgary and the Calgary Board of Education every September since 2020 to put on an event to commemorate The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (alongside Orange Shirt Day) on September 30th. In November, every school recognizes Indigenous Veterans Day and Métis Week. Again, the Indigenous Education Team supports teachers with materials to help students commemorate Indigenous veterans and learn about the Métis. All of the high schools in the district are encouraged to recognize the Moose Hide Campaign in May. On May 5, schools are offered the support of materials and encouraged to recognize the National Day for Awareness and Action for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit People. For each of these school events, the consultant for teaching and learning can and does also network schools with Indigenous speakers, performers, or artists to come in and provide awareness and education. The Indigenous Education Team also provides lessons, speakers, event information, and professional development opportunities for teachers to recognize these days. Where and when they are available, the team travels to schools who have requested their help with events and education as well.

The entire district celebrates Indigenous Peoples Month and National Indigenous Peoples Day in June. Materials are provided, guest speakers are lined up, and lessons are delivered by the Indigenous Education Team. While commemorating these days, CCSD strives to include Indigenous voices, histories, stories, and perspectives wherever possible. It does this in different ways. The CCSD incorporates Indigenous community consultation for appropriate initiatives. The district created a new land acknowledgement, highlighted in Figure 9, with consultation from multiple Elders in its creation. This included creating a seven-minute video of the Elders consulted regarding the purpose of and importance of land acknowledgement that was required viewing for every single staff member. Learning materials were also created for staff to be taught what the Indigenous language words meant, and how to pronounce them, as the district purposefully chose to use the words the Indigenous people call themselves in their own languages.

Figure 4.3

CCSD Land Acknowledgement



Note: Calgary Catholic School District. Land Acknowledgement: 2020-2021. (Unpublished)

For the recent name change of one of their high schools, CCSD hosted three Indigenous community consultations to hear Indigenous voices and perspectives on the change. Three events were held with meals provided at each event. Indigenous community members and Elders were invited from all the nearby nations and from the urban Indigenous community as well. The Indigenous guests were hosted in a circle. An introduction circle was held after prayers and smudge opened each event. Breakout discussion groups were to create lists of suggested names. Then attendees were asked to share their suggestions on new names for the school in circle as well as any thoughts or concerns. Included in each event was a pre-recorded message of current students' and staff thoughts on renaming the school in order to try and include all voices.

Recently, a school near one of the nations in an educational agreement with CCSD moved to a new building. The school hosted an Indigenous parent and community consultation night to get feedback on the new mission and vision, logo, and colours for the school. They then continued work and consultation with Elders from that nation as they prepared to move into their new building. The school also had a grand opening which included Indigenous Elders and ceremony and it continues to work with the Indigenous community today. CCSD recognizes the importance of Indigenous consultation and had their own upper administration at all of the meetings mentioned. The district also consulted with the Indigenous Education team and ensured that proper protocols were followed, and honoraria were given appropriately.

Working with Post-secondary Institutions and Data-Driven Models

Grant work happens regularly between the CCSD and post-secondary institutions. A grant with the University of Calgary was completed in February 2021 with the goal of increasing Indigenous student transition rates to post-secondary. Currently more research agreements are being conducted. One is to assess urban Indigenous students' perceptions of well-being in high school and another is to create Elder video interviews to accompany Indigenous resource lists that have been created. CCSD values

contemporary scholarship and research in helping to decolonize the district and nurture student success.

At every opportunity, CCSD supports students using data-driven models. The Alberta Education Assurance, provides the district and individual schools with data from Alberta Education standardized testing and achievement results. The Student Voice Survey, facilitated and housed within CCSD, asks students to reflect on their sense of belonging in school, whether and how they are supported by staff, and their engagement in the schoolwork and school environment. Upper administration uses this data to determine goals and decipher areas for growth. The Indigenous Education Team uses this data to drive their initiatives, best support schools, celebrate successes, and be aware of areas of concern. Each school examines their data on Indigenous students and must use it to choose their goals regarding the district Indigenous Education priority.

Staff Professional Growth

Through grant work with post-secondary institutions, CCSD district leaders and teachers were asked which areas of the LQS and TQS they felt they struggled with the most to improve their practice. Jack reported that “consistently, strand number five, which is Indigenous education, was mentioned. So, the district feels the pressure from their employees who want to learn more about this space.”

CCSD provides a wide array of professional growth opportunities for their staff regarding Indigenous Education and decolonizing initiatives. Susan explained how the centralized district decides on their direction for professional development choices, “the data that we get and the analysis that we do on that data and the sharing of that data informs the district plan, which then informs the school plans, right, which then inform the PG that we offer.” The Indigenous Education Team creates in-house professional development presentations and provides professional development sessions created by outside organizations, like the KAIROS Blanket

Exercise, or various activities created by the Alberta Teachers Association Walking Together Team. The CCSD Indigenous Education Team has also partnered with post-secondary institutions to create and deliver professional development, most recently the four-part Decolonizer Series with Dr. Yvonne Poitras Pratt. District staff can also contact the Teaching and Learning Consultant, who works to create partnerships with outside Indigenous cultural and content facilitators, to arrange professional development opportunities with outside agencies or Knowledge Keepers for their staff.

David confirmed what Jack said about the need to ensure teachers feel confident and competent in their work Indigenizing and decolonizing schools, in saying, “the biggest barrier to decolonization I see in our schools is the fear of doing or saying the wrong thing when it comes to the permeation of Indigenous perspectives or increasing our understanding of Indigenous ways in a respectful manner.” Professional development is both welcomed and needed. Currently CCSD is offering Indigenous Education professional development in five main ways. The first is district-wide professional development in the form of videos created with the Chief Superintendent and the Indigenous Education Team. These videos are sent out to every school and workplace with the understanding that they will be viewed on designated professional development days. The second is recording of shorter presentations on pertinent content areas. Schools can see these choices on the Indigenous Education EPD site and choose to view them. The third way to access Indigenous Education professional development is via live presentations requested by schools of the Indigenous Education Team. These are arranged between the team and the school professional development leads and facilitated on professional development days, during staff meetings, on ‘Lunch and Learn’ sessions, and during staff designated free from instruction time. The fourth is professional development provided by an outside individual or organization that is booked via the Indigenous Education consultant. The final way staff at CCSD

can access professional development and classroom resource materials is the team's Electronic Professional Development (EPD) page. The Indigenous Education team has an extensive assortment of resources, both for personal and professional learning, as well as for classroom facilitation and student support. The Indigenous Education EPD site also has resources for all of the above-mentioned significant dates and initiatives.

Professional development has been created and delivered in many different areas. There are presentations to learn about decolonization, the Métis, the Inuit, the treaties, the Indigenous aspects of the TQS and LQS, 'Understanding Intergenerational Trauma,' and 'Culture and Identity and Why It Matters in our Schools,' among others. Schools can also put in requests for their specific interests and needs. If the Indigenous Education Team is able and available to address their requests, they plan a completely unique presentation.

School-based Procedures

As mentioned earlier, CCSD is centrally managed. Each school principal must write a yearly school plan for their site. That plan is overseen by a designated area director of schools and a designated superintendent of schools. The school plan must include how they are going to address each of the four district priorities. Yvonne thinks the "school plans are the most effective school-wide strategy" toward decolonization in CCSD. The school must set a goal in the area of Indigenous Education, examine the data they have from the Alberta Education Assurance survey as well as the Student Voice Survey regarding their Indigenous student population, choose a data target for improvement, and set out strategies to achieve their goal and target. Once the data can be collected regarding their targeted goals, the principals must write a short report on whether they met their goals or not with a plan to continue their progress. Principals meet with their area director or superintendent regarding these plans and any follow-up

required. The school-based plan must also be linked to the professional competencies in the TQS and LQS.

Each school must also include in their school plan how they will be acknowledging specific events and days, like The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and Métis Week. All schools and district sites also display the land acknowledgement previously mentioned. The schools and work sites use the acknowledgement and are encouraged to expand on the acknowledgement to ensure that it does not become simply performative. Some schools have a different person read it every time and make a connection to their own ties to the land, others do things like examine alternate land acknowledgements and discuss the pros and cons and differences and how those inform the reason land must be acknowledged. Each school and work site also has Treaty 7 and Métis flags to hang alongside the Alberta and Canadian flags in their buildings.

School principals must also plan their school site's professional growth activities. Those activities should support their goals in each of the priority areas as well as the teachers' professional competency requirement in the TQS. Each teacher must complete a Teacher Professional Growth Plan (TPGP). In it, they must set out goals for pursuing areas of growth in the TQS requirements. They sign off on their TPGP plan with their principal in the fall and meet near the end of the school year to discuss progress and future direction.

Yvonne thinks that school plans are the best tools for ensuring that all educational sites are pursuing the Indigenous Education priority effectively, but she does worry that "they're lacking accountability and I'm being very honest." The plans are only effective if they are followed up on by the school principal, area director, and superintendent.

CCSD Classroom Practices

As established in Chapter 2, decolonizing is not simply Indigenizing content. Rather it involves teachers changing their processes by challenging the dominant worldview. CCSD school leaders and teachers have been challenged to utilize Dr Linda Tuhiwai Smith's 25 Indigenous Principles (2013) when designing school events or lesson plans. School leaders and teachers are encouraged to challenge the Western way or story as the dominant or superior way in all that they do and include Indigenous voices and stories in their lessons. It can be as simple as sitting in circle rather than rows and reading literature from diverse sources, or as complex as revamping lesson plans and assessment methods to incorporate Indigenous content, scholarship, worldview, and values. The CCSD Indigenous Education team's Electronic Professional Development page has dozens of resources, links, and in-house created sample unit plans.

One of the participants, Kit, when asked 'what would it look like if the best was happening within three years regarding decolonization at CCSD' said:

I would love within three years if, if teachers, like individual classroom teachers, would be able to identify how their practice has been changed for the better. When it comes to both decolonization and Indigenization. I would love within three years if every teacher could be asked that question and be able to speak about it. I think that would be huge in terms of the impact that would have for, and again, not just our students, but I think our full school communities, like all of our stake holders.

With this in mind, the primary role of CCSD's two Indigenous education teachers is to help teachers make educated choices in the content they present in their classrooms and the manner that they present and assess it. Those teachers can be contacted about the

appropriateness of materials and lesson plans regarding Indigenous content or decolonizing materials. They also continually create and curate new materials for the EPD site as well as work with other subject area consultants to help decolonize and Indigenize all areas of CCSD curriculum resources. The Indigenous Education Teachers are ever cognizant of Kit's worry regarding their roles. He said "again, I think there are still too many people that identify the Indigenous Ed team as the people that are doing this work and responsible for doing this work." They try to remember to be guides and also attempt to teach teachers how to do what they are doing, as they are doing it, so that they are building capacity in the district as well.

Major Themes

Seven major themes emerged from the data gathered via the interview process. These themes are governance and administrative protocols, organizational structure, resourcing, professional and personal accountability, relationships, Catholicity, and resistance. A preliminary discussion is included below.

Governance and Administrative Procedures

Governance was mentioned with reference to decolonization by every participant. CCSD is governed by all of the same mandates and professional requirements as all other school districts in Alberta regarding decolonization and Indigenous education. The board of trustees must be aware of and striving toward the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, honouring the promises made in Treaty 7, adhering to the legislation of the Leadership and Teaching Quality Standards in Alberta, and following the Alberta Education Act and Outcome 2 of the Alberta Business Plan. The trustees do not set the priorities in isolation, though. With reference to the Indigenous Education priority, Jack said

the Chief Superintendent's role in advancing Indigenous education and decolonization is twofold. So, number one, it starts with, well, actually, it starts

with the district mission and vision statement. You know, from there, it goes into the board priorities. And so, the chief gathers and takes all of the feedback related to what upper administration recommends to be a board priority to the trustees. The trustees then approve, or make a motion to approve, the board priorities. Once they are approved, then the Chief Superintendent needs to work with those under him to come up with a three-year education plan. And that has short, medium and long term goals. And the Indigenous Education priority is coordinated and created through the work of the Indigenous Education team, our Indigenous Education supervisor, and our Superintendent that oversees that space.

David elucidated, as “initiatives are being brought forward through the trustees, it’s up to this Chief Superintendent to operationalize them in schools, and to support that operational procedure by delegating those duties to other members of his team.” This means that the Chief Superintendent plays a huge part in operationalizing priorities how they feel best serves the district. This is summed up nicely by Erin’s statement,

I think initial change has to be stated publicly by the leader of the organizations and have that support from our stakeholders such as the Trustees. They have to be on board because if they're not standing behind the change, then it's a different time frame and it's a different action that takes place, so we don't want the 'them/us,' we want us working together to initiate change and always at the heart of what is best for our kids.

With reference to the importance of governance regarding decolonizing initiatives, many participants spoke about how having Indigenous Education as a priority set by the trustees for the district makes it non-negotiable. Syllas summed up the responsibility of upper administrators when the governance of a school district sets decolonization as a priority,

you've got to remember the chief's the only employee of the board, right? So, from that end of it, my role is to make sure he's successful. So, from a professional standpoint, I need to make sure that anything that I'm given in regards to that priority or those responsibilities are done according to what needs to be done based on the priorities that we have.

If something is set as a priority by the governing body of a school district, then upper administration must mobilize it as upper administration is accountable for implementing priorities. If they are not successful, Jack plainly stated that the Chief Superintendent can be "written up or the trustees would want him to do more in that certain area to improve it." Governance is incredibly important regarding initiatives like decolonization and, just as important, is how the leader of the operational side of a school district decides to move forward regarding the governance that is set.

The trustees set the policies and the priorities. On the operational side of CCSD, employees are governed by what are called Administrative Procedures (APs). As Jack says "APs are different than policy. But that gives direction to administrators, mainly principals, as to how they should run their school in alignment with the district." He adds, "all APs are operational. And trustees do not get involved in the operational world." David elaborated on the purpose of APs saying they "usually come into force because we've seen certain practices in schools, and we felt that it would be best to formalize that procedure in an administrative document that would guide proper practice. So those APs are discussed at the senior administration level." Aubrey added that "a lot of it, for sure, is legally driven... Or responsibility driven or faith driven... But the ultimate goal is that it's always for what's best for the students, for families, staff as well... Now it just becomes, it's who we are as Calgary Catholic." Susan also spoke of legalities regarding district procedures, saying "our legal team weighs in heavily to say we better have something in place because by people not following best practice, the district is vulnerable."

CCSD has one AP regarding Indigenous Education, AP 203, which can be found online in the outward-facing district Administrative Procedures section. It is also included here as Appendix C. Aubrey spoke of the value of AP 203 when facing resistance from parents or students who do not want to learn about or witness Indigenous content, culture, or ceremony. She told the story of an instance with such a parent, “he said, ‘well I don't want her taking part in any of this stuff.’ And I said ‘she's Canadian. She needs to learn this.’ So, part of the AP is written to make sure parents understand that, yes, there may be smudging in schools. Yes. And we have every right to do that because it's in our admin procedures.”

Participants brought up concerns regarding the APs and decolonization. As mentioned earlier, Erin worries that the APs are not written with a decolonized lens and they are only written with one child in mind. David admitted that decolonization is not considered in the AP writing process at this time.

Another concern voiced was that there is no actual policy regarding decolonization in CCSD. When asked about district policies around decolonization and Indigenous Education, most participants admitted to not knowing the policy and were then surprised to learn that there are none. The only legal governance holding the district accountable to Indigenous education and decolonization is the aforementioned Quality Indicator that the Chief Superintendent must prove to the trustees that they are meeting. Syllas said

I don't feel comfortable saying we have a policy on decolonization. I think we have a policy around student success that speaks to looking at students as individuals. Looking at students as, you know, trying to educate the whole kid, and the spiritual side of that. But is there something specific in regards to decolonization? I think I'd have a tough time with that in terms of trying to find something that says that in that language.

Structure

The structure of the district was mentioned as a strength regarding successfully implementing new initiatives by several participants. CCSD's centrally-structured district model was also mentioned as a strength with regard to holding district leadership accountable when implementing new initiatives.

As mentioned before, it was also stated repeatedly by participants that having Indigenous Education as a priority of a centrally structured school district also allowed for a centralized district leadership to hold all employees accountable. When a new mandate or initiative comes from upper administration, principals are held accountable by supervisors, directors, and superintendents via the centralized structure.

As a centrally structured district, CCSD also has one central Indigenous Education Team that is part of their Learning Services staff. David spoke strongly in favour of a centralized team being located near upper administration:

You have to have that link and that connection that that direct line of communication to the people so, and they (the Indigenous supervisor) need to be sitting at the table to give that guidance as well. And you can't, it's like it's that whole 'not about me without me.' And so, if that's not present, then the guidelines and protocols can't be put into place. People need to have a say in those specifically from those communities in my mind. So, putting together those pieces I think is around that awareness, that educational awareness, that it's not just something you can throw together and have it work and put it out there, it has to, the first understanding is that there are protocols and procedures around some of these things that need to be understood and done.

Yvonne also added that as a centrally-located, accessible team, the consultant for teaching and learning can “make sure that they’re supporting every single teacher in their courses and what they need and all of our Elders in our community” as opposed to being tied to a certain location. The same would apply for the rest of the team members.

Resourcing

In recent years, CCSD has taken major strides toward effectively resourcing Indigenous Education. In addition to providing the resources for a dedicated Indigenous Education Department, they also fund other district-wide, school site-based events, and Indigenous student and community events. They also designate the resources of district supports, time, and opportunities to learn with respect to decolonization and Indigenous student success.

Earlier, the Indigenous student grad and the Indigenous Community Christmas luncheon were highlighted. These are funded by the district. Yvonne sums up the sentiment in CCSD well, saying “we know we have to bring back equality regarding what we call, no longer call, ‘the gap’ but the ‘educational debt’ that’s owed to the Indigenous people of the past and present and everything they’re experiencing.” She added, “we need to bring the Indigenous peoples up to where what was owed in the Treaties... but really the importance is so that we can move together as a society.”

Jack specifically mentioned the four field trips every single CCSD student will attend during their 13 years at CCSD. He noted,

at this point in time, there was I think \$750,000 going towards the Indigenous field trip experiences at the four different levels: Division One, Division Two, Three and Four. So that as a child goes through the Calgary Catholic School District, they will, it’ll be mandatory that they would participate in these four experiences that the Indigenous Team is working on. So, for example, going to Blackfoot Crossing could be a mandatory

experience for all high school students. Right? And so that's just one example of money being targeted towards Indigenous Education.

When discussing CCSD resourcing of decolonization, David gave an example that includes both 'time' and 'opportunities' to learn. He offered that,

there is a huge focus on Indigenous education in general. Given that, we set aside specific professional growth days where aspects of Indigenous, the permeation of Indigenous culture, the idea of decolonization, is a focal point for the day. So, you know, we have roughly six professional growth days in a school year. And each one of the priorities gets one specific day where the message is, where we have specific learnings going on about that district priority. So, what that allows us to do, it allows us to get the information out, but it also allows us to plan for the rest of the school year with how the idea of decolonization, for instance, how do we address that with our staff, our students and our parents, etcetera? So, those days really allow us an opportunity to set some goals and some targets and some ideas on how we can move the agenda forward when it comes to Indigenous education in general and specifically decolonization.

When participants were asked about how they saw decolonization being resourced effectively in the district, they mentioned both professional development opportunities and partnerships with other organizations. David also remarked, as did Susan, that the district does not assume that because a student is Indigenous they need extra supports, "I don't think you can pigeonhole an Indigenous student as such, as having a certain profile. Because just like any of our kids, Indigenous students come to us from all walks of life. With all kinds of supports in place. Many, many, many come from wonderful supporting loving families."

Another resource the district supplies regarding decolonization is professional development. The Indigenous Education Team provides education, mentorship, and guidance to all levels of employees at CCSD. When asked how employees are supported in decolonization at CCSD Susan replied,

I would say our professional growth, right, the fact that we have all but burnt out our Indigenous Ed team because they're doing parent trustee forums, they're doing district wide PD days. They are called upon to come in and do presentations and mentorship. They're asked to come in to do all of our councils, right, they are, they are going at 110% all the time. I think the fact that we are asking them to work with all of our other consultants, you know, math consultants, social consultants, you know, helping them sort of infuse, Indigenous influence and ways of knowing into curriculum. I think that's how we've operationalized it [decolonization].

With regard to resources for decolonization, CCSD educators and employees are not dependent upon the Indigenous Education Team alone for professional development. Jack highlighted this,

I would say there are many opportunities to learn about decolonization, the various in-services that our internal team holds. But there are also external opportunities that exist, and whether that's through the Calgary Regional Consortium or conferences that have happened here in the province, such as the CASS Indigenous Conference that happened a few months ago, back in March. So, there's a whole bunch of these things that happen.

Keeping that in mind, participants were asked if CCSD works with outside agencies to resource decolonization and Indigenous students and families who do need extra supports. All

eight participants listed the many agencies CCSD partners with such as The United Way, All in For Youth, Calgary Police Force, Trellis (formerly the Boys and Girls Club), Woods Homes, Hull Homes, Alberta Children's Hospital, Children Development Centre, Luna Centre, Rupertsland Institute, Kindred, the University of Alberta, Catholic Family Services, the CCSD Internal Reception Centre, Stardale Girls, Bridge Foundation, Calgary Foundation, City of Calgary, and University of Calgary were all mentioned.

For the purposes of this research, many of the above-mentioned resources are specifically Indigenous organizations or organizations that work mostly with Indigenous people. It was important to a couple of the participants to make note that, as Susan said, "I don't think that we seek out necessarily outside agency support for Indigenous kids because they're Indigenous. In fact, I hope we don't. I hope that we seek out support for any kid, including Indigenous kids, when they have a profile or a need for it." Decolonization is for all students and staff members.

Professional and Personal Accountability

An unexpected theme that became obvious very quickly in the data was the importance of accountability with regard to mobilizing decolonization in CCSD. I say unexpected because when I began this research my mind went more to the concrete initiatives, not the commitment to implementation. Obviously, I was delighted by the emergence of this theme.

It was mentioned by several participants that the top leadership of the district, the chief superintendent, sets the tone for what initiatives are given importance and operationalized, and that the current chief superintendent of CCSD believes and models that decolonization is imperative. Syllas said, "if you have a more progressive person, change happens pretty fast." Erin said something similar regarding CCSD's chief superintendent, "I think his heart and his mind are in the right place for knowing that we need this work and it's not going away and it's going to continue." Susan elaborated further on

what she sees the role of upper administration as having regarding decolonization when she articulated “I think, Angela, at our levels, it's more about accountability, right. It's more about ensuring that we are following up to see that these things are done.” She further added, “in my particular role, it's a lot about assessing progress, setting goals, determining how we've done on those goals.”

School districts in Alberta are subject to several professional accountability measures. As mentioned before, the TRC's Calls to Action regarding education, the Alberta provincial government's TQS and LQS and SLQS, the Alberta Education Act, and the Alberta Business Plan. CCSD is also accountable to the Alberta Education Results Report (AERR), the Alberta Education Three Year Plan that each district must have, the Alberta Human Rights Act, the Student Voice Survey, and the Superintendents Quality Indicator requirements. Yvonne spoke to this saying, “the AERR, for example, that we list very specifically the number of professional growth opportunities that are provided from the Indigenous Ed team.” Kit also mentioned that “the PAT results, the Diploma results, the High School Graduation rates” are indicators commonly used to monitor Indigenous student, and all student, success. The chief superintendent must also hold CCSD accountable to the Board of Trustees' four district priorities. During the interviews, I was continually reminded that the CCSD Board of Trustees have only one employee, the chief superintendent, but that the chief superintendent holds everyone else accountable. Aubrey supports the idea that the superintendent sets the direction and then the rest of their team upholds accountability. She said, “I think this is where the role of the area director comes in. So, again, it's seeing what's being done in the schools, being present in the schools, getting out. Again, seeing the school plan and holding them accountable with the school plan.”

All participants recognized the role that authentic modelling could have in working toward decolonizing practices. Jack said,

it's so critically important that if you truly do want to decolonize, and move forward, and advance Indigenous education, you have to find time for it. And so,

you have to look at your existing communication systems that you have within your organization, and find time for it. Because if you're not finding time for it, then the message that you're sending is it's not important.

It must also become part of the culture. David gave an example,

this is not a token type of a thing. I think the fact that now we have placed our land acknowledgement as the first piece in all our meetings, the first thing that we do before even our prayer is a land acknowledgement because we are acknowledging the fact that we are visitors on this land, on Treaty 7 land. And that, you know, I'm very thankful for that. And then I think the fact that that has been operationalized for all our meetings. You know, we do, like just today, I had an impromptu meeting with certain members of my team, and we started with the land acknowledgement before we went into prayer. So, you know, just having those traditions become part of our culture allows us just to operationalize them in a more meaningful way.

This may sound like a small thing or a token gesture, but keep in mind that CCSD is a Catholic school district. It is no small measure that the land acknowledgement now precedes the prayer in meetings. Susan added to this sentiment saying, "we just recognize right now that it really matters. It really matters" and added "there is an urgency with regard to supporting Indigenous families because of the time that we're living, the discoveries, the momentum. It's front and centre on our collective conscious." Erin also mentioned the mandatory online courses that all employees must take at CCSD adding that they are "also part of the culturally responsive pedagogical courses that everyone is required to do." I think Kit sums up the general consensus of the sentiment of most participants when he said, "I think we are very, very lucky to work for the school district that we do, because everybody

seems to be on the same page, right? We are all generally pulling in the same direction when it comes to our priorities.” Those priorities create accountability that everyone must answer to.

Relationships

As the Indigenous Education consultant for Teaching and Learning at CCSD, I was keenly aware of how important relationships are in Indigenous communities and toward fostering successful opportunities for decolonization. The entire Indigenous Education Team speaks of the importance of these relationships at every opportunity. I was pleasantly surprised when it surfaced as a theme in coding and showed as important to upper administrators of CCSD for the decolonization of a school district.

In expressing their gratitude to the Indigenous Education Team for the work that they do, many participants mentioned the relationships that the team forges and that the team helps to forge between upper administration and the Indigenous community of Mohkintsis and surrounding areas. When asked to reflect on decolonizing work that is happening in CCSD that she is proud of, Erin said, “I think that it’s the team for me. It’s the people and the relationships that I’m so proud of with the work that you guys are all doing. To educate and bring awareness of decolonization... I think that has made the largest impact is power of the team and the connection with the nations.”

Kit expresses the importance of seeing and valuing people for who they are, learning that through their stories and that you do not have their stories unless you have relationships and connections

We are still at the preliminary stages in terms of helping people understand ‘the why’ of decolonization, okay? So, um, and the most impactful work that I have seen there, is an opportunity for people to hear story, right? Like relevant personal stories... we don't just want to focus on the past in terms of all the

negative that have come out of, you know, federal policy, everything coming out of the Indian Act, uh, Residential Schools and all of that, right? People definitely have to have an understanding of that having caused where we are at, but if that's all we do, then it looks like all we are doing is projecting blame, right? We also want to then celebrate who we are, and celebrate our culture, celebrate our language, celebrate the, the positives as well. 'Education is Our Buffalo,' right? Well, education is not just our buffalo as Indigenous people, there is also the educating in the sense of sharing with non-Indigenous people. And that, to me, when you look at some of the work that could be done there around decolonization is, like, getting people to understand that, yeah, there are different ways of knowing, right? And I love any opportunity to do any land-based teachings with people. And, uh, the fact that we live in Southern Alberta, there are so many different opportunities for that, whether you are connecting with any of the Nations, any of the Blackfoot Nations, whether you are connecting with, uh, Tsuut'ina Elders, Stoney Nakoda, like, there are so many different opportunities there. But a lot of people, uh, don't have the relationships there, right? So again, they're reaching out to the Indigenous Ed team, and figuring out what can that look like.

In line with what Kit said, Jack spoke about the value of those relationships with reference to writing the district's new land acknowledgement.

We worked with the Indigenous Education Team to come up with a revised land acknowledgement that truly listened to and embraced Elders and other people. I think the first iteration was really a White Man's land acknowledgement that we forced upon... So we talk about decolonization, and this is a great example where

our new land acknowledgement came from the people, came from the Indigenous people.

As it was COVID time, the district could not gather Indigenous community together, so the Indigenous Education Consultant for Teaching and Learning took the land acknowledgement that the very diverse Indigenous Education Team had created, under the guidance of Blackfoot Elder Wanda First Rider, out to Elders from each of the Indigenous communities in Mohkintstis. The team could not have done that on the district's behalf without building strong relationships with many local Elders.

Susan also mentioned that the need for relationships is evident in the Board Priorities themselves, "in the board priorities, right, we list that we have to work with the Community, relationships with the Community." Jack brought up the Indigenous Community Christmas luncheon, how the district hosts this luncheon to build relationships, show reciprocity, that it is "just bringing people together. Not to get anything from them, but to develop relationships."

Catholicity

One of the most interesting and unique aspects of this inquiry is that it focusses on decolonization in a Catholic School District. To many, that may feel counterintuitive. In fact, my original interest for study was regarding the fact that when both Catholic and Public education systems are offered for the same cost in the same cities in Western Canada, Indigenous students have higher graduation rates in the Catholic systems. That surprised me. I needed to limit the scope of my research, so I chose to investigate what was going well in Catholic education. Each participant was very thoughtful when asked about why the work of decolonization is so important in a Catholic school district and if being a Catholic school district made this work unique.

When asked if there was a sense of urgency to the work of decolonization in CCSD, Susan reflected on the last couple years saying that if there was a lag on anyone's part, it was because "we were missing the why. And I think what those unmarked graves, that horrific discovery did, is, I think everyone was kind of like, yeah, that there it is right there is the 'why.'" She added:

I would say I think that there is and should be sort of an additional weight or an additional, you know, sense of tragedy with us because we know that as an organization that is, that we are, deeply, you know, influenced by. The church started, created, perpetuated a lot of devastating stuff. And I think that as Catholics, I think just our faith would compel us to work that much harder on trying to address it and right some of the wrongs.

David spoke of what needs to happen now that apologies have been given by the Pope on behalf of the church. That "it's our actions. We have to show up and that's the change that's happening. We're finally in a place where we're recognizing that so, instead of hiding it, we're fully facing it." Susan felt the same, saying "I think there's an additional component of connection and of obligation to the person that we have as Catholics, right? A spiritual connection, a spiritual obligation that maybe teachers in the public board don't have necessarily."

Resistance

In their interviews, participants were asked specifically about what they saw as barriers to decolonization within CSSD. They were also asked about encountering resistance to decolonization and how they tried to resolve that resistance. A number of interesting points came up.

A number of the participants thought shame may be a barrier for some regarding decolonization. Susan said,

I think the other piece that has been so hard for people is the shame piece. You know, I think that particularly as Canadians, you know, we've been raised to think of ourselves in a certain way, and often we think of ourselves by what we are not. And I think we saw lots of awful stuff going on in The States, you know, and then when you pull back and we had to look at that in our own history, I think there's a real shameful piece there, you know, particularly for Catholics.

Another form of resistance is employee resistance. When Susan discussed employee resistance, she mentioned shame again, "I think that shame piece, you know, I think when people can step back from the shame and not feel individually judged by it, you know, you get better buy in." Sylas answered similarly, saying:

in some ways, that word decolonization, I think, probably could be perceived by people as threatening. Which is kind of interesting, right? Like 'Man, the way you guys have been doing things is wrong. You've been mistreating people. Great. We're gonna decolonize you and make you better.' Do you know what I mean? And I'm saying that a little bit tongue in cheek, but there's, I think, there's a lot of truth to that, right? Where people don't want to admit that 'I was a part of something this bad.' And you know, it's part of learning, to accept what your role is or what role your family played in that.

Another barrier that Aubrey brought up was the misunderstanding that decolonization and Indigenization is for everyone, not only Indigenous kids. Aubrey explained,

sometimes, in school plans, principals will say 'I don't have to do anything on Indigenous Ed because I don't have Indigenous kids in my school.' And you know, I'd have to go back to the administrators and go, "That's the very reason why you have to, is because you gotta teach the others. Everybody needs to understand

this is not just about the Indigenous kids. No, Indigenous kids know how they've been treated. They can tell you. So now what your work is is to teach everyone else.

Fear was listed as another suspected barrier by participants. David opined, "the biggest barrier to decolonization I see in our schools is the fear of doing or saying the wrong thing when it comes to the permeation of Indigenous perspectives or increasing our understanding of Indigenous ways in a respectful manner." Erin mentioned this fear, as well in a fundamental premise of Aboriginal philosophies communicating, "so with changes comes fear and media and outside external influences. People get nervous so there is a hesitation that comes along with trying to have change or create opportunities for changes because there's a fearfulness that is abundant and fearfulness of saying the wrong thing or doing the wrong thing."

CCSD must work with the parents of their students as well. Sometimes those parents can represent a barrier to doing the work of decolonization. Jack spoke to that pointing out, there are individuals that don't believe that there are Indigenous graves. And believe that this is, you know, a big scandal and that until it's officially proven... that we're going down the wrong path. And believe that, you know, the Catholic Church had nothing to do with any of this. And so, there's a, like, there are people out there that believe that the story is true and that people like Bishop Grandin are scapegoats for what has happened, you know? How we deal with it is we typically set up a meeting with the individual where members of our Religious Education Team will go out and talk to them.

David said he has worked with parents who are unaware of the church's acceptance of Indigenous culture and encouragement of decolonization.

You know, in a Catholic school, we sometimes get push back from parents that don't understand that yes, we are allowed to have smudging going on in our classrooms. But some parents look at it as a pagan ritual. They call it 'a pagan ritual.' And so we have to have those discussions with those parents to let them know that, no, this falls right in with our spirituality and our faith system.

Aubrey articulated similar sentiments of stakeholder barriers to decolonization, "I think the barriers are still the nonbelievers, the people who just aren't there themselves. And I think that they haven't recognized, they either haven't recognized it in themselves or are choosing not to recognize it in themselves."

Erin spoke of the church as a barrier, not in an active way, but in people learning about the history of the church's involvement in systems like the residential schools and internalizing that trauma either by feeling like they should turn away from the church or feeling like they must defend it. She said,

oh, the church because I think it brings up a lot of, I don't want to speak to it in a negative way because I want to believe there is a positive side to it as well, but I think that, like, specifically, in the last two years with the discovery of the children and things like that I think that has brought up a lot more hurt and pain and trauma for so many people. And, really, at the heart of that is the church. So, I would say that's a barrier that's come into play and that you know there's people who are trying to defend one side and people who are trying to defend the other side. So, I think that could be a barrier that can get in the way of decolonization and the way that we want it to move more forward.

Kit brought up the very real barrier to decolonization of competing needs in a school district, declaring that

the biggest challenge to decolonization that I have faced within the last 10 years within Calgary Catholic School District, as both a school administrator and now in upper administration, is we have so many competing needs within our schools. Our classrooms are so diverse. And there is so much expectation, um, and responsibilities within our roles as administrators, that these competing needs that occur, you know, minute-by-minute, hour-by-hour, day-by-day, depending on the school you are in. The biggest challenge I've seen in the last 10 years would be that those competing day-to-day needs often override, ah, any of our district priorities, right?

He went on to explain that

it comes from understanding what the reality is for a lot of our kids, and perfect example, Angela: I had a conversation with some of your team yesterday about a student at [name of school], right? His family is from Siksika. His mom lives here in the city, but she drives back and forth for work every day. And so, her son is struggling with his attendance. He's struggling with some of the stuff he's getting into in the community. And [name of school] is one of our higher needs schools. So, um, when you look at that school, their biggest priority, I would say, is their new Canadian population. So, they have a lot of new Canadians that are refugees, coming from refugee situations. And they are, a lot of these families are, struggling with their ability to help their children to be successful in school. In a similar way that some of our Indigenous students struggle. But the pressure then comes from the fact that if you look at the number of self-identified students that are Indigenous at [name of school] compared to the visible minority new Canadians, not even close, right? You've got a school of 750-800

kids, and I know for a fact that they have probably close to 200 students that have refugee status. So, you are looking at level 1, level 2, level 3, um, ELL Learners. So, the pressures that are there for them with that override some of the time and the priority that they know they should have in terms of focusing on the Indigenous piece and the decolonization piece.

Erin spoke of systemic barriers as well. She mentioned,

our systems in place. Our systemic piece is a huge barrier in decolonizing simply because we have to look at those checks and balances that are in place and realize that are we truly decolonizing? Or are we bending to fit what's still in place? So, it's like that reworking or reimagining of things. Like if we could throw everything out and start over with everyone coming to the table we'd have a much different set of guidelines and APs and things like that.

Erin also spoke of how current education systems have unconscious bias, saying "our whole system is built around a Eurocentric viewpoint and what we do in education in our province. Even, I would say the Eurocentric viewpoints and the biases that people aren't even aware of is definitely a barrier in bringing people alongside for understanding." Jack spoke of the systems being problematic as well, "you know, we're doing a lot of work in racial justice because, you know, racism, systemic racism, in my opinion, still exists, right? And so that's something, too. That's another obstacle that we're trying to address." Yvonne mentioned the system as well, citing that upper administration has not had their own exclusive professional development regarding decolonization, only attended other professional development for the other levels of employees at times sharing "I have not had any separate PG (professional growth is the term CCSD uses instead of professional development) for senior admin other than dialogue conversations around the table."

Finally, funding was also mentioned as a barrier to decolonization. Jack said “funding, too, is still an issue. Like could we have, you know, more funding to help support Indigenous education. I think that would be something to consider.”

Summary of Chapter Four

In this chapter, I discussed the manner of data collection, the systems and processes used in coding the data, the participant selection and invitation process, and described each participant and their understanding of decolonization. I then explored the dynamics of CCSD, introduced the reader to the participants and their understanding of decolonization, animated many of their decolonizing initiatives, and gave their first-person observations of the initiatives. CCSD has several decolonizing initiatives that are currently being developed and implemented within Calgary Catholic Schools for the benefit of Indigenous and other students and the upper administrators are integral to this implementation. Then, I introduced the categories and the themes that emerged from the participants’ perspectives.

In the next chapter, I will be analyzing these initiatives by aligning data from my inquiry with the findings of secondary research presented in my literature review. I will also discuss what the participants see as the best of what is happening regarding decolonization in CCSD, and which of those initiatives they are most proud of and feel other districts may benefit from utilizing. By applying critical race theory I will also identify ongoing impediments to decolonization with CSSD.

Chapter 5 Analysis of Data

Introduction

In this chapter, I will analyze the data from this study in light of my research questions using Critical Race Theory and Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as theoretical lenses. These two frameworks are conflicting yet complementary in that both share a social constructionist epistemological foundation, both are committed to change, and both seek to encourage or facilitate the “flourishing of humanity” (Grant & Humphries, 2006, p. 410). The Guide to Appreciative Inquiry explains that “AI is *not* about looking at the world with rose-colored glasses and being overly positive. Instead, it focuses on how the future can be built on the best parts” of what is already happening and reframes the study of problems into the study of successes. It also “offers new language that allows greater honesty about difficult topics (<https://www.fsg.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Guide-to-Appreciative-Inquiry.pdf>). I recognize the risks inherent in looking for strengths utilizing AI and then analyzing only those strengths via CRT. Weaknesses or failures may be missed when only analysing strengths, but embarking on the work of decolonization in a historically oppressive system is difficult and involves great vulnerability for the researcher. Obtaining permission to research decolonization in an organization plagued by a history of oppressive practices is complex. Most importantly it involves creating an environment where the organization feels safe in being examined. Conducting research on what a Catholic school district is doing with regard to decolonization, especially a district with exemplary Indigenous student graduation rates, allows for the creation of valuable data. Being able to share those practices and the related data with other school districts may help orient and assist other school districts in their decolonizing efforts. These complicated dynamics made AI the obvious lens through which to do this work. By identifying what is working well through the application of Appreciative Inquiry, and where gaps or

resistances remain through the lens of Critical Race theory, the new knowledge created will clarify and deepen insight into decolonization efforts in Kindergarten to Grade 12 schools, especially within faith-based education systems.

Within the analysis, attention will also be given to how the data aligns with, differs from, or elaborates upon the current body of secondary research with the goal of deepening our understanding of the interface between Indigenous learners and publicly-funded schools in Canada. In this way, insights from CSSD can be mobilized by other schools and systems to create more invitational and culturally affirming spaces to benefit all learners, but especially to animate more equitable educational outcomes for Indigenous students. The themes identified in Chapter Four, buttressed by additional direct quotes from participants, provide the organizing structure for this analysis. These themes include governance and administrative protocols, organizational structure, resourcing, professional and personal accountability, relationships, Catholicity, and resistance. Themes are presented in that order.

Governance and Administrative Procedures

Gallays (2020) noted that “it is impossible to remove racism from society if it cannot be seen by those in power” (p. 31); and those who govern educational systems and create educational policies clearly wield substantial societal power. A large body of scholarship (Cottrell and Henry, 2015; Deal & Peterson, 2016; Gallays, 2020; Hill, 2023; Louie & Prince, 2023) has identified the importance of governance and leadership in promoting deep change within school systems. The importance of leadership and governance in fostering innovation related to decolonization is confirmed by the data presented in Chapter Four. Participants identified the importance of national initiatives such as the TRC and provincial initiatives such as the TQS and LQS in guiding or pressuring the CSSD Board of Trustees as well as upper administration to committing to the work of decolonization within its schools. The assertion by Pont et al. (2018)

that educational leaders are more apt to take up initiatives if they have a clear framework to follow, and that fundamental change is unlikely to occur without multiple points of pressure, is confirmed by the data collected for this study. Similarly, Louie and Prince (2023) noted that for decolonizing efforts to be successful, school districts “must design, implement, evaluate, and redesign approaches to disrupt racism in collaboration with faculty and school leadership” (p. 10).

Appreciation of Governance and Administrative Procedures Within CCSD

Almost every participant interviewed for this study mentioned that Indigenous Education being one of the four district priorities was integral to ensuring that decolonizing processes were actively pursued and implemented within CCSD. Participants suggested that the CCSD Board of Trustees’ creation of its own district priority regarding Indigenous education affirms the mandated LQS and TQS policies from Alberta Education regarding Indigenous Education and reaffirms some of the Calls to Action in the TRC and UNDRIP. Together, these create the multiple pressure points that Pont et al. (2018) described as being needed to create change in an organization. David described how these points of pressure are used productively at CCSD noting

when something is mandated, it's written into law. The TRC has been accepted as that in all the TQS, LQS, SLQS- all have the Indigenous perspectives piece embedded. And, as you know, those are foundational documents that measure our performance in our various duties as a teacher, as a principal and as a district leader, including the Director, Superintendent and Chief Superintendent. So... we have in those documents, outcomes, and competencies that our teachers, our leaders, have to aspire to decolonization. And if they don't, we have something to hold them accountable for.

Another participant added how valuable the Trustees creation of a Quality Indicator for the Chief Superintendent regarding all students having access to Indigenous education was for the decolonization as well. The Chief Superintendent is evaluated by the Board of Trustees regarding the Quality Indicators that they set forth for the chief. All other employees of the board support the chief. Syllas spoke about how having Indigenous Education as a priority set by trustees and a Quality Indicator makes it a non-negotiable imperative within the district. He summed up the responsibility of upper administrators when the governance of a school district sets decolonization as a priority,

You've got to remember, the chief is the only employee of the board, right? So, from that end of it, my role is to make sure he's successful. So, from a professional standpoint, I need to make sure that anything that, that I'm given in regards to that priority or those responsibilities are done according to what needs to be done based on the priorities that we have.

The Board of Trustees set the policy and direction of the district, but the operational side of the organization is directed by the Administrative Procedures. CSSD has an Administrative Procedure (AP) 203 pertaining to Indigenous education. Policies and procedures such as AP 203 are important when guiding decolonization as they "can follow immediately after leadership to set the stage for all other change" or can be a "pivot point" for change (Making Change, 2024, para. 2). AP 203 (see Appendix C) sets the direction and expectations for decolonization via Indigenous education programming, Indigenous student achievement, Indigenous student post-secondary transition, and cultural aspects such as smudging, etcetera, for all students. Newly added to this procedure is an information sheet on cultural protocols, Indigenous Elder relationships and protocols, as well as appropriate honoraria expectations and processes. Documents such as these make it easier for all in the organization to champion

Indigenous students, Indigenous knowledges, and Indigenous cultures with more confidence. While these Administrative Procedures are not always strictly enforced, they do articulate the aspirational values of the organization and provide support and guidance for administrators, teachers and other employees working to advance decolonization within the classrooms.

A Critical Lens on Governance and Administrative Procedures within CCSD

There is much that CCSD can celebrate regarding the mobilization of decolonizing work within the district. However, many participants expressed surprise at the lack of attention to Indigenous education within Board policy. Given that CRT seeks to document power imbalances and oppressive structures within society, it is arguable that the absence of Indigenous Education in CCSD board policy shows a glaring lack of accountability to Indigenous learning in CCSD. Jack said,

I find it really interesting that you look at our four board priorities, and three of them are clearly mentioned in policy, but Indigenous Education is not. That is enlightening to me because I never really thought about that. But we talked about decolonization and having these conversations about things that, hey, this is a miss. To me, this is a miss. And so maybe we should be considering something there.

The fact that Jack, and all other participants, had not thought to look for Indigenous Education in policy, nor noticed its absence, is a perfect example of people in power not being able to see glaring inequalities because of their own biases (Lawrence, 1987). It is also an example of AI improving an organization through the act of asking questions. When it was made obvious to upper administration that decolonization was missing in policy, they all saw the folly in it, and were willing to consider change, as Jack noted above. They were unable to see it themselves, though, so only in examining it with a CRT lens did it become obvious. This is also a great

example of how educational debt is accrued. It is nearly impossible to deliver on commitments if one cannot see those commitments are absent in policy. This makes the next observation even more compelling.

Another critique of CCSO governance and administrative procedures would be that there is no Indigenous representation on the Board of Trustees, the director, or superintendent levels. It is important to note that the district does not control who is elected to the Board of Trustees, but they do control who is appointed on the operational side of things. The highest level of Indigenous voices within the CCSO leadership structure is at the supervisor level. The addition of Indigenous voices at these levels and these tables would help mitigate concerns regarding bias and power imbalances. It would also ensure that policies or procedures which may subordinate or disenfranchise certain groups are exposed and challenged (Milner, 2008), as often these policies are not intentional, but are unseen by those in power. This absence of Indigenous peoples and voices from senior leadership constitutes an ongoing exclusion typical of neo-colonization in organizations (Orlowski & Cottrell, 2019). It both reflects and reinforces ongoing structural exclusions within the larger society which perpetuate education debts. This is especially troubling given possibilities around shared governance practiced in other districts. As Cottrell and Henry (2015) noted, there

is broad consensus among researchers that critical to the achievement of ...systemic transformation towards cultural responsiveness in policy and school practices ... is the creation of innovative governance structures which foster greater [Indigenous] parental involvement in, and control over, their children's education. (p. 9)

Many school divisions across Canada and in other jurisdictions are forging innovative structures that enable shared governance with Indigenous representatives which, when working well,

ensure that elevated responsiveness to the needs of Indigenous students embeds the work of decolonization at all levels of the organization, including, critically, within classrooms.

A final criticism from one of the participants was that there has been no specific professional development regarding decolonization delivered exclusively to upper administration to date. It was made clear in Chapter 2 that decolonization of education requires educators and leaders to do the work of self-implication, taking responsibility for one's own place in the work, and learning how they can contribute effectively so that they can foster and model change because they set the culture of the organization. Professional development has been requested by and delivered to the Trustees, the CCSD legal department, and the CCSD communications department, among others. As the consultant who booked the Indigenous Education Department for their professional development engagements I can attest to this. At the time of my leaving the district, this had yet to be requested by the upper administration exclusively. Upper administration may attend other decolonization professional development, as able, but have had no decolonization training specific to themselves and their roles. That contravenes all six tenets of CRT, most importantly that it is not honouring Indigenous peoples' epistemologies and voices and it is not espousing the importance of racial justice work. As leaders foster change (Fullan, 2014) and play integral roles in setting the culture of their school (Deal & Peterson, 2016) professional development regarding their specific roles and duties would help upper administrators be more competent and comfortable regarding high level decisions they must make regarding decolonization and when speaking about it to those they lead. It is even more essential that this professional development is delivered given the absence of Indigenous voices from the governance of the district.

Summary of Governance and Administrative Protocols

CCSD is making strides toward decolonization. The direction set by their Board of Trustees with its Indigenous Education priority shows dedication to the effort. The tenacity and transparency with which their Chief Superintendent is pursuing decolonization is helping to give precedence to decolonization, which can be argued is evident in their data. The operational APs regarding Indigenous cultural and academic success is heartening. All of these are the best of what is happening at CCSD regarding decolonization in governance and administrative protocols.

Areas for growth at CCSD regarding decolonization are concerning a lack of policy, and the fact that participants did not even realise there was a lack of policy until it was pointed out because of their lack of perspective and personal bias. Another aspect where change is needed is the lack of representation in leadership. As Cottrell and Henry (2015) noted, representation is needed to foster Indigenous and all student success. Ensuring Indigenous representation in governance and leadership would also allow and even require CCSD to confront and seek to disrupt larger societal factors that perpetuate Indigenous exclusion, such as provincial curriculum and equity in educational funding. Finally, the glaring absence of decolonization education and anti-racist training specifically for upper administration needs to be addressed. Upper administration sets the operational direction for the district and not having professional development specific to one of its four priorities is at best a misstep and at worst another example of the neo-colonial tendency to try to do the work of decolonization without Indigenous voices.

District Organizational Structure

As mentioned, CCSD is a centrally structured school district. When interviewed, CCSD upper administrators often mentioned the structure of the district as advantageous in implementing decolonizing initiatives. The related important aspect of the district's structure that makes it unique from many others is their stand-alone Indigenous Education Department.

This department has a substantial staff complement, including a district Elder as well as a supervisor who only holds one portfolio - that of Indigenous Education.

Appreciation of Structure within CCSD

As this study utilized Appreciative Inquiry (AI), it is important to look at what is working well within CCSD structure and strategies regarding decolonization. According to Cooperrider et al. (2003), AI is a way to embrace organizational change and the basic premise of AI is that every organization has something that is working well. The most effective way to improve the organization or move toward a goal is to expand on what is working well.

Many of the participants mentioned the efficacy of a centralized structure when mobilizing decolonizing initiatives and monitoring their administration. A centralized structure allows for efficient dissemination and control over all schools regarding strategies and initiatives. When CCSD creates professional development materials, the centralized system determines what each school will learn about and provides the materials. They ensure that decolonization is a focus of professional development at least once a year. Upper administration also ensures that the Indigenous Education team is given time at least once a year with each of the councils as well: the assistant principal, vice principal, and principal councils as well as the Diverse Learning Coordinating Teachers council and also the support staff professional development opportunities. The ability to determine what these councils will learn and when to create the opportunity to ensure that education around decolonization is occurring for all employees.

Another successful aspect of the structure of CCSD is a dedicated centralized Indigenous Education Team. Every single participant mentioned the stand-alone Indigenous Education team as integral to the success of decolonization efforts at CCSD and identified an entire team of diverse Indigenous education advocates and voices as a critical asset. The research supports the value and strength of localized voices that can help refute colonial tendencies and contribute

their voices regarding Indigenous epistemologies (Battiste, 2012a, 2012b; Donald, 2012; Madden, 2014; Maslow, 1943; Swadener & Mutua, 2008; Wotherspoon & Schissel, 1998b). Team members are tasked with various roles but are also able to work together when needed and sometimes on short notice, because they are not tied to specific separate school locations. Most of the district's decolonizing initiatives originate with ideas or suggestions from the Indigenous Education Team and the supervisor of the team is consulted and invited to explain and comment on all of the strategies and initiatives they are suggesting to upper administration. Viewing CCSD's structure and strategies through an AI lens was heartening as Battiste (2000), Smith (2012), and other scholars agreed that the best places for gaining foundational knowledge about Indigenous people are Indigenous people themselves. Having a dedicated team with a supervisor who is able to attend and speak at upper administrative meetings is a step in the right direction toward identifying procedures, policies, processes, or ways of thinking that may be marginalizing or disenfranchising Indigenous learners, possibly without conscious thought.

An additional strength of the CCSD structure is that it has a District Elder and its Indigenous Education Supervisor holds only one portfolio. All decolonizing initiatives are overseen and vetted by the District Elder. She is invited to the table at Board and upper administrative meetings when they deem that her council is needed to help them learn about the context of a situation, Indigenous culture, or make a decision regarding decolonizing strategies. Significantly, she is involved in the hiring process for Indigenous Education positions and the placement of administrators at schools with the highest populations of Indigenous students. She is Blackfoot as is appropriate given that CCSD is located on Blackfoot traditional territory. She is a residential school survivor who is well-connected with the local community and can utilize those connections to ensure that communication is strong and positive between the district and the Indigenous community and that strategies, implementation efforts, and community consultations

go smoothly. She is also an expert on the protocols of the territory and helps guide the district and its employees on best practice regarding them. She also identifies as Catholic. Given that CRT contends that the way society actually is, versus the dominant worldview, can only be known via the stories of real people in individual situations (Ladson-Billings, 2021), the Elder is a strong agent in the work of decolonization within CCSD.

Most, if not all, directors at CCSD carry multiple portfolios. By contrast it shows recognition of importance and prioritization that CCSD's Supervisor of Indigenous education has only one portfolio. The supervisor is Indigenous and, as they only have one portfolio, has more time to build the knowledge needed and the relationships required to effectively do the work of representing all Indigenous students' and families' best interests and leading the work of decolonization in the district. They are an Indigenous voice, and they are given the time to learn the local Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies as well as build the relationships with and learn about and from local resources, community members, and scholars who can best support their work. They are also an important voice at the table of upper administration.

A Critical Lens on Structure Within CCSD

A centralized structure can be a benefit to decolonization, but it can also be a detriment as it does not allow for variance in voices or directions, as is suggested by proponents of CRT (Gillies, 2018; Lawrence, 1987). It assumes that the choices made and directions set by upper administration are always the correct ones. Given that upper administration has few Indigenous voices - none above the Supervisor position - this is especially problematic. Also, knowing that upper administration has had no decolonization training specific to their roles, it is fair to wonder if the best choices are always made on behalf of Indigenous people and decolonization. Above the supervisor level, there are no Indigenous voices to challenge the colonial aspects of education systems, many of which are invisible to those who do not experience them (Lawrence,

1987) and without those voices, there is the real danger of simply continuing with the status quo (Milner, 2008). CRT creates awareness of structural determinism, when systems utilize actions and processes perpetuating long-term practices that oppress certain groups of people, and the lack of Indigenous voices in CCSD upper administration puts them at risk of not acting when change is needed, out of ignorance because many of those who participate in racist policy are unaware (Freeman, 1995), but also out of neglect as they are not including Indigenous voices at that level.

CCSD is setting precedent in southern Alberta by having a district Elder. However, a CRT lens highlights how this is done in a problematic way. The Elder is only invited to the table of trustees and upper administration periodically, where and when and how they believe they need her voice. A table of educational leadership who are entirely from the dominant culture may be unaware of when an Elder's council is most needed. After she is done speaking, advising, and answering questions, the upper administration and or trustees excuse her and make the final decisions. Given that Indigenous voices are needed and best to communicate and interpret possible solutions for the experiences and injustices felt by the Indigenous community, the district Elder should be present when decisions are made (Ladson-Billings, 2021). She may affect change via her work, but in the end she does not have a voice in the actual decision. This does not effectively address the power imbalances in education or equitably include the voices of Indigenous people in all levels of decision-making. To avoid tokenism there needs to be Indigenous representation at all levels within the organization and that representation needs to involve real decision-making power. (Martell, 2008)

Similarly, having a dedicated Indigenous Education Supervisor is a definite strength for CCSD. Again, at the table of trustees and superintendents, the supervisor is asked to provide context, answer questions, and share perspectives regarding Indigenous education and

decolonization that the trustees or superintendents do not have as they are non-Indigenous. Where there is area for growth is that the supervisor finishes giving the upper-most administrators or trustees the context needed and, again, does not have a say in the decision that is made. As noted by one participant, the supervisor of Indigenous Education, is “always representing the Indigenous communities and people and bringing it to the table, bringing it to their [trustees and upper administration] attention and then they make the decisions from there.” The supervisor is allowed to present their perspectives, make their suggestions and requests, and then has to wait and see if those are respected or granted. Given that CRT’s basic premise is that systems of power impact different groups differently via structural processes within organizations and society, the fact that both the Elder and the Supervisor of Indigenous Education do not have a say in the final decisions regarding the things that they have been called in to teach about illustrates how colonial structures continue to perpetuate social dominance with potentially negative impacts on the outcomes of the lives of those they exclude or oppress without representation.

A final concern was expressed by a participant with regard to having a centralized Indigenous Education Team. His worry was that having the team may give the impression that decolonization is solely the work of that Indigenous Ed team. He worried that having a team doing the work may decrease motivation of others to do their own learning and their share of the work of decolonization. According to Kit, “that’s not the way it should be... Murray Sinclair said in terms of ‘we’ve shown you the mountain. It’s not our work to climb it’ but that’s what a lot of times it becomes.” He added, “it’s got to be collaborative, and if it’s not, then we are not going to have the desired results.” Indigenous people cannot and should not be doing this work alone, so having a dedicated Indigenous unit may result in non-Indigenous employees assuming personal responsibility and agency for decolonization within their practices and classrooms.

Summary of Structure in CCSD

There are aspects of the structure of CCSD that clearly support the work of decolonization within the district. The centralized structure of CCSD means it is able to initiate professional development and therefore can mobilize initiatives and ensure that time is spent pursuing those directives. Having a centralized Indigenous Education Team was identified as having definite advantages. The presence of an Indigenous Elder from the people of the traditional territory that the district is situated on has many benefits. Troublingly, though, is that Elder is only invited to the upper administrative and trustee tables to advise while being prevented from participating in the decision making. The district could be accused of perpetuating the power imbalances and marginalization that has historically established education as such a strong colonizing tool. Having an Indigenous education supervisor who is assigned only that portfolio appears to validate the importance of the various aspects of the role. The same is true of the Elder role, though, that if the supervisor is given time to learn the culture, build the relationships, and lead the work, it is problematic if and when they are not part of the decision-making process on the issues they have been called in to speak about. Again, that is continuing the exclusionary white hegemonic status quo at the highest levels of decision making in the district. Lastly, a potential disadvantage of the existence of a centralized Indigenous Education Team is that other employees may feel like they do not have to do their own learning regarding Indigenous education and decolonization because they have a team of colleagues doing it for them. Given that authentic decolonization requires transformation at all levels of the organization, concentrating that work in the hands of one unit may hinder the distribution of necessary change vertically and horizontally across the school division with the only disadvantage being that other employees may feel like they do not have to do their own learning regarding Indigenous education and decolonization because they have a team of expert colleagues doing it for them.

Resourcing

For efforts like decolonization to be successful in a school district, resources are needed. With burgeoning class sizes, increasing student needs, and shrinking budgets, schools sometimes struggle to resource all areas. Despite these constraints CCSD invests considerable resources into decolonization. These include investments of time, funding a dedicated department, events and initiatives, an Indigenous Advisory Circle, as well as providing localized specialized programming. CCSD builds working relationships with outside organizations as well to leverage additional resources and maximize supports available to support Indigenous students and families, as all resources invested in schools need not come directly from the schooling system.

Appreciation of Resourcing within CCSD

In addition to the salaries and stipends of a stand-alone Indigenous Education department with a dedicated supervisor and a district Elder, the district also supports many decolonizing initiatives and strategies. One of the most important investments the district makes, that was mentioned by multiple participants, is time. Jack is clear when he said

it's so critically important that if you truly do want to decolonize, and move forward, and advance Indigenous education, you have to find time for it. And so you have to look at your existing communication systems that you have within your organization, and find time for it. Because if you're not finding time for it, then the message that you're sending is it's not important.

The district prioritizes time to ensure that all employees in all positions within the organization receive professional development regarding decolonization. David reiterated this noting, "those (professional development) days really allow us an opportunity to set some goals and some targets and some ideas on how we can move the agenda forward when it comes to Indigenous education in general and specifically decolonization." The Indigenous Education Team

is also given multiple opportunities a year to speak to employees at all levels, thereby disrupting prevailing hierarchies in schooling systems. Not only do certificated teaching staff get decolonization training, but so other employees such as the legal department, front office staff, and communications department.

In addition to investing time in their employees to learn about decolonization, CSSD also invests time and resources to ensure its students have decolonized learning experiences. In Chapter 4, it was mentioned by Jack that the district is now investing \$750,000 a year so that every student, at every division of school, has an experience on the land. That means each CCSD student will have at least four Indigenous learning experiences on the land paid for exclusively by the district. Education as colonial tool sought to separate Indigenous peoples from their land and their culture. Conversely it is a decolonial act to provide students and staff with the opportunity to learn on the land from Indigenous resources and voices (CCL, 2007; Tunison, 2007; Wildcat et al., 2014). Such innovative practices are expensive, so this initiative is indicative of CSSD's commitment to transforming pedagogical practices by allocating resources to such initiatives.

The district also supports initiatives like the visual representation of local Indigenous people in their schools through the award-winning Indigenous Peoples poster project, the provision of Indigenous flags for each school, and the Elder-consulted Land Acknowledgement signage in each school and workplace. In addition, it provides the Indigenous students with an annual cultural graduation celebration free of charge to the students and their families, minimizing barriers to attendance. Recently, the district also added a Christmas luncheon where all of the Indigenous community that the district works with professionally are invited to a catered lunch at a hotel conference room where the goal is nothing but to enjoy each other's company and build stronger relationships and understandings.

Aware of the importance of appropriate consultation, CCSD also funded the consultation of Indigenous Elders and community members regarding the land acknowledgment, the opening of a new school building close to a nation, and the renaming a school. CCSD also recently funded an Indigenous Advisory circle, paying for the honorariums of all participants who gather every eight weeks for consultation under the guidance of the District Elder. Indigenous consultation within the education system is a strong move toward decolonizing practices because it incorporates Indigenous voices within the public education system providing balance to the Eurocentric perspectives. CRT sees Indigenous consultation as valuable because it acknowledges the lived experiences and experiential learning of those who are affected by racism. Each of these consultation processes work toward righting the education debt accrued through the dishonouring of educational promises and agreements in the treaties, enabling Indigenous students and communities to see themselves within the modern educational enterprise (Battiste, 2012a, 2012b; Cottrell et al., 2012; Donald, 2012; Madden, 2004; Swadener & Mutua, 2008; Wotherspoon & Schissel, 1998b).

Regarding the resource of specialized programming, CCSD also makes decolonizing efforts. In my interview with Susan, we discussed how the district has moved several of its specialized programs utilized by Indigenous students who attend from a local First Nation closer to the nation in order for more equitable access. Also discussed was that the district tops up the funding received from each First Nation for their students who attend CCSD as the nation's federal educational funding is not commensurate with the district's provincial educational funding. These adjustments are made for the best interest of Indigenous students and families as students are more likely to succeed if they have their specific needs met in the classroom.

CCSD generously resources decolonization within its organization, but it also works with outside organizations to best access and supply its staff and students with appropriate resources

and supports. One of the tenets of CRT is that it must be interdisciplinary in order to have a broader influence. This is an example of decolonization happening at CCSD via and with many resources, including those outside the umbrella of education. Participants in this study listed many outside organizations, previously mentioned, that they access to ensure Indigenous students and all students receive the support they need to continue and be successful in school. Many of these organizations offer the students and families culturally sensitive assistance, some offer cultural revitalization and supports which help address the educational debt incurred by educational institutions that remove Indigenous students from the land and their culture and present only one dominant worldview. These types of supports also help to equalize the educational experiences of Indigenous students, and all students (Wotherspoon & Schissel, 1998b; Battiste, 2012c; Donald, 2012).

A Critical Lens on Resourcing within CCSD

While acknowledging the good work of CCSD in terms of resourcing decolonizing initiatives, data also reveals that more can and should be done. When directly asked if there were different staffing ratios for schools with higher populations of Indigenous students, each participant reported that there are not. Susan said that she thinks altering staffing ratios and support based on the fact that a student is Indigenous would be a racist act, but according to tenet number four of CRT, one cannot look at decolonizing education without examining the historical context and historically Indigenous students were undeserved in education (Gillies, 2018). There are also no active recruitment efforts to increase Indigenous staffing at this time. Formerly, that was something the district prioritized, but they have stopped that process. When asked if there are specific mentorship efforts to increase the number of Indigenous leaders in the district, participants indicated that there are none at this time. So, though the district invests an impressive amount of time and money into decolonization and Indigenous consultation, it seems

that little is being done to increase Indigenous presence within staffing. Smith (2016) made a clear point that

Building capacity of Indigenous educators and educational leaders is of utmost importance in the quest for decolonization of education. Indigenous educators must become agents of change because transformation must come from the people themselves in order for decolonization to happen. (p. 52)

Sylas agreed that work needs to be done in this area, saying “I think we're getting more deliberate and trying to bring out diversity within leadership positions ... So could we be more intentional around that? We need to be.” As noted earlier, Indigenous people are also under-represented within organizational leadership positions and within the governing body of the organization. Research in this area suggests that intentional recruiting and representative workplace strategies are necessary to disrupt and challenge some of the prevailing hierarchies in CCSD and increase their capacity for deeper decolonization efforts (Battiste 2012a, 2012b; Madden, 2014; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2019; Smith, 2016).

Summary of Resourcing in CCSD

This research shows that CCSD has already made significant resource investments toward advancing decolonization. Many of these investments adhere to best practices emerging from scholarship around decolonization and participants suggested that the district is even setting precedents in some areas. There are definitely areas where growth is required, but through the conversations shared in the interview process, it appears many of these gaps, such as staffing and promotion of Indigenous educators, are now being recognized. Susan confirmed that when she said, “certainly we have a lot of conversation on the staffing committee about diversity and about children seeing themselves in teachers and administrators. And we know that we have a diversity issue in Calgary Catholic. We're very white. We're very European.” There still exists a

clear disconnect between the growing diversity within CSSD's classrooms, including a burgeoning Indigenous presence, and a teaching and administrative staff still predominantly characterized by Whiteness. It is my hope that current research and publications (Korteweg & Fiddler, 2019; Marom, 2018; Tupper, 2013, 2014) will reinforce the need for changes in school staffing strategies in the near future toward increased hiring of Indigenous staff and mentorship of Indigenous staff into leadership positions, so that Indigenous students can see themselves reflected in those who wield power within CSSD.

Professional and Personal Accountability

As a researcher and former Indigenous Education consultant for CCSD, it was heartening to see "accountability" to decolonization raised time and again by the participants as important to the growth of decolonization in the district. Policies, procedures, strategies, priorities, plans all can have the best of intentions, but if there is no accountability, they are only words on paper or spoken in meetings. The upper administration participants I interviewed spoke of professional accountability measures, but they also spoke of personal accountability, something that is mentioned much less in educational discussions around decolonization. It would seem that, in the eyes of CCSD upper administrators, both are important to the work of effecting change.

Professional and Personal Accountability at CCSD

There are many professional accountability measures with regard to decolonization in schools in Alberta. The Annual Education Report (AERR), Three-year Education Plan, Diploma and PAT results, drop-out rates, and graduation rates are some of these measures. All are informed by systematic data collection and have Indigenous student success components. As Cottrell et al. (2012) noted,

data emerging from these tests focus attention on the fundamental disconnect between Aboriginal students and provincial curricula. Consequently, the outcomes of testing

challenge policy makers to create more invitational and culturally relevant learning environments ... to ensure more equitable outcomes for Aboriginal students. (p.250)

Representatives from Alberta Education meet with the district upper administration to discuss these measures, what is working well and where there are areas to improve. The goal of the discussions are to use data to determine whether school jurisdictions are meeting strategic educational targets. The data and discussions provide evidence of which strategies are benefiting Indigenous students and which may not be doing so.

CCSD also has in-house measures like its Quality Indicator that hold the chief superintendent accountable to doing the work of providing Indigenous education for all students. CCSD delivers the Student Voice Survey which asks students questions about whether they feel safe at school and in their community. It asks whether they feel a sense of belonging in their school and whether they feel like their teachers listen to them and their needs. These surveys can be examined by different categories, one of which are by the Indigenous student voices. In themselves, these are decolonizing questions as they give students the opportunity to tell the story of their social reality.

In their roles as upper administrators, the participants are accountable for making decisions regarding the professional development of the entire district. Educators are asking for more professional development regarding Indigenizing and decolonizing strategies. Jack revealed that

several universities ... have interviewed individuals within our school district, district leaders, as well as teachers, and asked them, "Which areas of the TQS or LQS do they feel the most comfortable with and which areas are they still struggling with or need more information to improve their practice?" And consistently at the TQS and LQS level, strand #5, which is Indigenous Education, is mentioned.

CCSD teachers and leaders asking for more education about Indigenous education and decolonizing measures create a demand for accountability across district leadership. Susan feels confident that CCSD upper administration are answering that call as she indicated “I feel like we're putting our money where our mouth is. We're making the professional growth a priority. We are making the resources a priority. We're making the team that supports so much of this work a priority.”

With regard to how a school district reacts to the pressures of accountability, Sylas said:

I think it depends on who your Chief Superintendent is. So, depending on who your leader is, the organization might claim that they're changing when in reality, it's just status quo. And they're, I'm going to say, giving lip service to change...If you'd asked me what we've been like in the last two years, we've been pretty progressive.

Educational leadership is crucial for decolonization to be successful. Educational leaders must be progressive in their thinking regarding Indigenous peoples and cultures and model this thinking for other teachers (Berryman et al., 2014). It was mentioned by several participants that the top leadership of the district, the chief superintendent, sets the tone for what initiatives are given importance and operationalized, and how employees are held accountable to that work. Susan explained the upper administrator's role in this accountability,

my job is, you know, to make sure that the area directors are following up with their principals who are following up with their teachers. To make sure that when we're evaluating new teachers that we're seeing, you know, the Indigenous [TQS] standard being lived and taught and utilized.

CCSD employees are held accountable to the work of decolonization via the centralized structure of the district. Teachers report to principals who report to supervisors who report to area directors who report to superintendents who ultimately report back to the chief superintendent. Then, as the sole employee

of the board of trustees, the chief superintendent reports to the trustees. As Indigenous Education is a district priority set out by the trustees, each level of accountability in the scalar chain is well able to defend their need to see evidence of Indigenous education and the related decolonizing efforts.

Upper administration also mentioned personal accountability to decolonization. “Non-Indigenous educators and educational leaders must work to acknowledge that there are other ways of knowing that exist, and value such ways” (Smith, 2016, p. 50). The research is clear that personal accountability to decolonization is essential to its success. David spoke of personal accountability to the work of decolonization, when he stated

have we taken the step beyond understanding decolonization, and are we now starting to get into the weeds and the true belief of what we can do to create the change and make it for the best? And I think that's where we are. So I don't know if I'm expressing this the right way, but what I'm trying to say is that we get it.

The upper administration of CCSD understands that they have a professional accountability to the work of decolonization, and they also clearly see the personal accountability related to the legacies of education being used as a colonizing tool, especially by the Catholic Church. CRT is clear regarding accountability. Systems must be accountable to creating equitable, safe environments and people must be personally accountable to their own journeys of decolonization (Ladson-Billings, 2021; Milner, 2008; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

A Critical Lens on Professional and Personal Accountability at CCSD

Professionally, CCSD is open, honest, and accountable to all measures and processes created to hold school districts in Alberta accountable to decolonization efforts. Their data also suggest that, by colonized standards, they are meeting these requirements. Unfortunately, CCSD’s lack of Indigenous representation at the various levels of decision-making tables signals an environment of institutional racism which “is less overt, far more subtle, less identifiable in

terms of specific individuals committing the acts” (MacPherson, 1999, p. 112) as it is embedded in the organization’s protocols. According to MacPherson’s (1999) understanding of institutional racism, accountability would entail representation at the top decision-making levels of the organization. The lack of Indigenous voices in upper administration decision-making allows discrimination through “unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping” (Macpherson, 1999, p. 321) which puts minority people at a disadvantage. In order to be accountable to decolonization, the district will need to make some changes to its governmental and operational decision-making structures. CRT would insist on a commitment to increasing representation in district leadership, as well, and CCSD is not committing to either of those at this time.

It is clear that upper administrators at CCSD understand that they, as well as the staff of CCSD, have a personal accountability to decolonization. Where they fall short here is mentioned earlier, in that they have not requested or completed any decolonization training offered by the Indigenous Education Team specifically for upper administrators. As Fullan (2009) says in his *Have Theory, Will Travel*, a chapter written regarding the theory of action toward whole system improvement in education, leaders need to be well-versed in the change they are facilitating: “we need leaders who can drill down and be plugged into the bigger picture simultaneously” adding that “a critical mass of change agent leaders focusing individually and collectively on capacity building” (p. 1) is necessary for change in organizations. Leaders must be examples when implementing change in a school district and this lack of commitment to professional development is a glaring oversight with regard to their personal accountability to decolonization.

Summary of Professional and Personal Accountability at CCSD

There are several types of accountabilities to decolonization that became evident in this research with CCSD. There are the provincial and district accountability tools, measures, and checks and balances that

exist for all Alberta schools. There is accountability expressed in hearing the request of leaders and educators within the CCSD for more information on Indigenous education and decolonization implementation in schools and classrooms. Research is clear that educational leadership must live the accountability of an initiative in order to facilitate it. Upper administrator participants made it known that they understand that leadership sets the tone of what will be actioned in a district and how effectively staff will be held accountable to requirements. Where the district is not accountable to decolonization and inequity is in the exclusion of Indigenous voices in the decision-making processes of the district regarding decolonization. Finally, leaders also clearly expressed a personal accountability to the work of decolonization because of the role they or their families may have played in colonization, the role education played as a colonizing tool, and the role the Catholic Church had in all aspects of colonizing Turtle Island. The research is unambiguous, as Louie says in a recent publication regarding barriers to decolonization, the work “entails interrogating our core beliefs and reflecting upon how we are unconsciously trained to think, show privilege, have high or low expectations contingent on identity, and carry unconscious assumptions about people and ways of knowing from non-dominant cultures.” (Louie, 2024) Upper administration must begin their own journeys of decolonization and understanding around Indigenous history and culture in order to be accountable and to set the tone and standard that the rest of the organization must follow.

Relationships

Relationships are the backbone of Indigenous culture. As Castellano (2000) said, the premise of all Indigenous philosophies is that everything, humans, animals, plants, the earth are related. In the district priority, the third bullet dictates nurturing successful relationships with Indigenous communities. Therefore, establishing relationships in the work of decolonization at CCSD is literally a priority and as such it is imperative. Much research literature points to the need for improved relationships between

schools and Indigenous students and families to improve outcomes. So, decolonization is fundamentally about creating new relationships (Martell, 2008; Needham and Cottrell, 2026; Wallin & Tunison, 2022).

Appreciation of Relationships at CCSD

Decolonizing education involves building relationships with the Indigenous community in order to support each child (Berryman et al., 2014). In a study of two school boards in the same geographic region as CCSD, Hill (2022) showed that school leaders in the Treaty 7 region know the value of relationship in decolonizing work, “most frequently referenced was the importance of building relationships with and learning from Indigenous Elders. Leaders spoke of the need to support building these relationships including knowing who to contact” (p. 13). Numerous participants credited the relationships that the Indigenous Education Team are forging with the nations and the Indigenous community, then parlaying those relationships into relationships between the nations, communities and the district as integral to the progress of decolonization in CCSD. Sylas spoke about the value of those relationships when he said, “if you still don't have those people to build those relationships, it's not going to matter. So, I think just the relationships that have been created, to me, are having the largest impact” on decolonizing efforts at CCSD. Erin felt the same, “I think what has made the largest impact is the power of the team and their connection with the nations.” Upper administration clearly understands that the work of decolonization cannot be done without strong relationships with Indigenous people.

The relationships with the outside Indigenous community are important, but participants also highlighted the relationships that the Indigenous Education Team has made with their colleagues at CCSD. When asked about what she was most proud of regarding decolonization efforts at CCSD, Susan said “I would say the strength of our Indigenous Education Team. I would say the trust that we have in them. I would say the relationships that they're forging.” Sylas added to that sentiment when he said, the Indigenous Education Team

have brought a pride to what it is that you're trying to promote. And in the past, I'm not sure that that was there. I think there's real visibility... real accountability. I think there's real intention in terms of bringing the issues to light in a way that's being done authentically.

Every participant from upper administration has been in the district for at least 20 years, some near 40 years, so they have seen changes and shifts in the district over that time and are accurate witnesses to the relationships that have grown between the Indigenous community and CCSD as well as between the Indigenous Education Team and the rest of the district.

When Walia (2014) spoke of the need for relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in order to effectively do the work of decolonization, he said it is because non-Indigenous people “must be accountable and responsive to the experiences, voices, needs and political perspectives of Indigenous people themselves” (para. 6). This is not possible unless relationships are forged and perspectives are shared via those relationships. CCSD has nurtured many successful relationships with Indigenous Elders and community members in and around Mohkinstis. Examples of this are seen in the community consultation done on initiatives like opening new schools, re-naming existing schools, and the Elder Advisory Circle. The value and appreciation of relationships is seen in the Christmas luncheon, as well, where the only expectation is that people get to know one another in a social setting with no expectations of either group regarding their roles in education. CCSD knows the value of relationships with outside organizations that work with Indigenous students and families, as well. The district is smart to utilize all the resources available to help Indigenous and all students have equitable access to support a more equitable life and educational experience so as to be more successful in school (Louie & Gereluk, 2021; Maslow, 1943). The outside organizations can help with that in ways that the district cannot, so the relationships are very valuable to decolonization.

A Critical Lens on Relationships at CCSD

It shows respect and cultural understanding that the upper administration of CCSD knows the value of relationships with Indigenous community. Again, though, it seems that upper administration is letting the Indigenous Education Team spearhead all of those relationships, rather than embracing the work themselves. They did not mention attending Indigenous events outside those of the district. They also made no mention of doing their own relationship building without the district. This is clearly illustrated when Syllas mentioned having “those people” to build the relationships with Indigenous communities and people. This appears to be exactly what Kit feared, the district seeing the Indigenous Education Team as doing the work of reconciliation for the district and by proxy for upper administration.

Though it is progress to know the value of relationships, it is not best practice to rely solely on the team to create, nurture, and facilitate relationships for CCSD. That means upper administration is not seeking out, initiating, building, and nurturing their own relationships by visiting the nations and Indigenous events themselves. Personally visiting nations and events would be much more authentic learning for upper administration. It would be a clear decentering of themselves and their privilege (Walia, 2014, Louie 2024). If Indigenous staff, students, communities, and event organizers witnessed upper administration visiting their nations and attending their events, upper administration would experience more authentic reconciliation because reconciliation requires both sides to move out of their comfort zones and both sides to seek out relationships. It would also show the Indigenous community that upper administration is authentically engaged in personal decolonization. In addition, and possibly most importantly, visiting nations and Indigenous events would create opportunities for building genuine and balanced relationships between upper administration and the Indigenous community.

Summary of Relationships at CCSD

Data from this study confirms that CCSD upper administrators value relationships with Indigenous nations, Elders, community members, and outside support agencies and understand the value of interrelatedness inherent in Indigenous community values. They value the strong lines of communication and warm relationships that the Indigenous Education Team has created with local Indigenous community. They also see how the Indigenous Education team having trusting, respectful, intentional, authentic relationships with colleagues is lowering resistance to change among staff and building confidence and competence at CCSD regarding decolonization. Upper administration is also aware of the value of networking Indigenous students and families with organizations who can help them have more equitable home and school lives.

Unfortunately, at this time it appears that upper administration considers initiating and building these relationships solely the work of the Indigenous Education Team. As relationships continue to evolve in the district and understanding continues to grow, I am hopeful this may change.

Gram-Hanssen, Schafenaker, and Bentz (2021) described decolonization as “a continuous process undertaken by people with intersectional identities rather than an end-point at which people and places have become decolonized” (p. 676). They also delve into the idea of ‘right relations’ and how right relations are the antithesis of colonization. I think that is a great way to see the task for CCSD and the relationships they form as they journey toward decolonization.

Catholicity

One of the most unique aspects of this inquiry is that it was conducted in a Catholic school district. The bulk of research conducted on decolonizing education in Canada focusses on First Nation or public school systems and in my literature review I was able to find very little research that even featured Catholic school settings, let alone highlighted entire school districts’ efforts at decolonization. One article regarding decolonization in Catholic schools by Mudambi and Sada (2022) makes clear that

continued instances of racism in society coupled with the history of the Catholic church's culture of colonization demonstrate that "decolonization in Catholic settings continues to be a must rather than an option" (p. 168). In fact, 60 years ago, Pope John XXIII very clearly supported decolonization and encouraged all Catholics to engage in it by saying the following:

Indeed, the best interests of justice are served by those public authorities who do all they can to improve the human conditions of the members of these minority groups, especially in what concerns their language, culture, ancient traditions, and their economic activity and enterprise. (Papal Encyclicals, *Pacem Terris*, 1963, para. 96,)

The recognition by the Pope of the Catholic church of the importance of Indigenous languages, cultures, and traditions is significant. An encyclical is written as direction and spiritual guidance for all Catholics to follow. If only this had been adopted more commonly in the years following its publication.

Knowing the history of the Catholic church regarding colonization and residential schooling (Carr-Stewart, 2002; Cottrell, 2000; Little John, 2006; TRC, 2015), one may assume that Indigenous students would experience less success in the Catholic schooling system, but that is not the case. Where Catholic schools are offered as public schooling alongside public schools, Indigenous students experience higher success rates, utilizing the most common definition of success, graduation rates (Alberta Government, 2020; SGCS Annual Report, 2021; SPSD Annual Report, 2021).

As expected, both positive and negative aspects of the Catholic faith were mentioned and raised often during interviewing. It is clear that the upper administrators of CCSD know the implication of doing this work in a Catholic school district and that they understand the weight of the history involved. Susan communicated it very well when asked about her thoughts regarding the importance of decolonization in all schools and particularly in Catholic schools. She said:

I think we have a collective responsibility to undo a lot of the damage that was done to that group of people over generations... And the Catholic piece of it is

just more so because we, because this religion that we associate or consider ourselves part of, was part of the architecture and perpetuating what happened in residential schools. I just feel like the responsibility is so much more so on our shoulders. If we had, if it hadn't been Catholic churches that that had done this, would we still be responsible, and would we still need to be participants? 100%. But the fact that ... so many of them were run by the Catholic Church, it just makes our, I don't want to say our culpability, that's not the right word, but it just makes our responsibility, I think just that much greater to try to do everything that we can in our schools to begin to undo some of that.

In his 1963 encyclical, Pope John Paul II further illustrated the need for decolonization, writing that “human society, as we here picture it, demands that men be guided by justice, respect the rights of others and do their duty” (Papal Encyclicals, *Pacem Terris*, para. 35). The Pope’s message shows an understanding of the need for Catholics to make right relations with Indigenous people. *Pacem Terris* (1963), without saying it directly, also addresses the responsibility Catholics bear to try and make amends for the assimilative system that not only portrayed one worldview as superior, but declared all other worldviews as sinful and bad. Sylls expressed the same understanding, when he said

I guess, more specifically for Catholic schools, you know, the irony of that, I guess, in terms of when you look at the history of Indigenous kids with Catholic schools, it becomes even more important of recognizing our role in history. And realizing... I'm certainly part of this systemic problem that exists.

The Catholic Church had complete sovereignty over Indigenous people with regard to supporting the government’s effort to assimilate Indigenous people via the school systems, and added the assimilation of their souls (Choquette, 1995; Cottrell, 2000; Miller, 2010; Pope Alexander VI, 1493; TRC; 2015). As Walia said (2014) “decolonization requires us to exercise our sovereignties differently

and to reconfigure our communities based on shared experiences, ideals and visions (*Decolonizing together*, para. 16). The Pope's vision in *Pacem Terris* supports this. Catholics were charged with making their world more equitable for all. Recognition of the inequity should also have increased understanding of the resistance and mistrust Indigenous students and families may have for Catholic schools. The trauma Indigenous students and their families and communities suffered at the hands of the church, the church's role in dishonouring the promises made in the treaties, and the added aspect of evangelization are all part of the educational debt owed by the church. The church, and the schools who support it, need to show humility, so it is heartening to see members of the Catholic church and Catholic school system recognizing these things. Data for this inquiry suggests that the upper administration of CCSD recognize the added responsibility to and the added complexity of doing this work in a Catholic school district to make authentic progress in decolonization.

Appreciation of Catholicity at CCSD

Many aspects of the Catholic faith support reconciliation and decolonization. The teachings of forgiveness, repentance, all people having equal dignity and worth, and the provision of pastoral care came up directly. When speaking about her respect for those Indigenous people who still follow the faith and send their students to CCSD schools, Susan said:

I just, I can't quite wrap my head around the enormity of forgiveness and faith, right? I still really struggle with that. I think that us being Catholic absolutely has to play into it. I don't know if it's the pastoral piece. I don't know if it's the dignity and worth piece. I don't know if it's that. We, on some level, we just know that we are, you know, we've inherited this and because we're Catholics we just bear more responsibility.

The church has apologized for the sins committed against Indigenous people in residential schools by members of their faith. That has paved the way for members of the church who work

in Catholic schools to do the same. David is hopeful that the church's recent progress will be encouragement for other Catholics taking on decolonization.

You know, I'm encouraged by the way Pope Francis has taken, you know, responsibility for the wrongdoings of residential schools. Because, you know, he's our Holy Father. And if he has got the staff, and he's leading us in a direction, it allows us to also accept accountability. I mean, if the Pope could accept accountability, I sure the hell can accept accountability, kind of thing, right? So, I think the fact that we have a religious leader who really has acknowledged the wrongdoings that went on, and the role that the Catholic Church has played in those wrongdoings, I think puts the focus on us having to do better.

This is a clear example of David locating himself in the work. Many other participants spoke similarly. Locating oneself in the work of decolonization is absolutely necessary (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Other upper administrators brought up different aspects of the Catholic faith that permeate Catholic schools as strengths with regard to doing the work of decolonization.

According to Sylas it is,

the education of the whole person, it's commitment to safety of students, it's commitment to parents being the primary educator of their kids. I think those are really foundational pieces. You know, our faith, I think, gives us a common ground to build from. So those things are what I believe are why Indigenous kids are successful in Calgary Catholic.

The spiritual connection that Susan mentioned earlier is what Sylas spoke about when he referred to the "the whole person." This is in alignment with the CRT tenet of valuing racially oppressed

peoples' epistemologies. Respecting Indigenous peoples' right to spirituality and respecting the 'spirit' in every child, recognizes the spiritual element of the Indigenous medicine wheel. Jack added that

when we think of the Catholic faith and our schools are all required to be Catholic communities of caring. And so, you know, one of the Values of a Catholic community of caring is 'family.' Is respect... these are values that are at the root of our Indigenous communities as well.

Respecting the values of Indigenous culture and families is imperative in doing the work of decolonization (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Tupper, 2011).

With reference to the TRCs Call to Action #64, CCSD has a section in their Religious Studies curriculum that studies Indigenous spirituality. They also have an Administrative Protocol that allows smudging in all district buildings and validates it as a form of prayer. In addition, the Indigenous Education Team partnered with the CCSD Religion consultants to create professional development for staff that contextualizes the two faith systems. It examines their similarities and validates Indigenous peoples' cultural practices. It also teaches that the Catholic doctrine has never stipulated that one must give up their culture to be Catholic (Papal encyclicals, *Pacem Terris*, 1963. Para. 96), despite what may have happened in the past. When possible, it is delivered by members of both departments, a priest, and an Elder together, so that all perspectives are honoured. This presentation has been requested for university classes by St. Joseph's College at the University of Alberta and by Catholic Womens League groups in Calgary because it helps Catholics find a place for their feelings of conflict as well as giving them hope for a better future for the Catholic church regarding reconciliation and decolonization.

A Critical Lens on Catholicity at CCSD

The Catholic church is slow to change. It was not until the summer of 2022 that the Pope officially apologized to Indigenous people on Indigenous territory for the wrongs perpetrated by members of the church in their residential schools. The Pope stopped short of apologizing on behalf of

the Church, the Catholic faith and he stopped short of apologizing for the Papal Bulls sanctioning murder and theft in the name of the church. He did not apologize for the Church, in many cases, knowing about what was happening in the schools and doing nothing. The apology on Indigenous territory was progress, but it was not perfection. (CBC/Radio, 2023)

Erin admitted that she thinks the Catholic church still constitutes a barrier to decolonization and reconciliation at CCSD in her interview, saying,

I think the Indigenous people are more about forgiveness, and this is gonna sound terrible, than the church is. I just think that they're more open to finding peace in their community. I don't even know how to say that, Angela. I just feel like that's the barrier and a big part of the barrier is the church.

There was lag and resistance to admit any wrongdoing and apologizing on this territory until the discovery of the 215 graves at the residential school on the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation in Kamloops, British Columbia. It is sad that, for many, it took the discovery of hundreds, now thousands, of unmarked graves of Indigenous children to catalyze change in their mindsets and move the Pope to action (Why Canada is Mourning the Death of Hundreds of Children, 2021).

Summary of Catholicity at CCSD

Many Catholic values support the work of reconciliation and decolonization. As Catholic school districts work with and under the guidance of the church, the apology by the Pope on Indigenous territory marked a renewed call to the work of decolonization. Aubrey spoke well to this, saying “I think the growth in the Catholic Church has miles and years and days to go, but the fact that our teachers, our Pope, have apologized, our Bishop here has apologized. Now it's in the action of the work that the church does.” Given that the Catholic Church leads Catholic school districts, there is cause for hope for progress with decolonization. The church moves and changes very slowly. I have heard it referred to as glacially slow. It appears, though, that upper administration in CCSD understand both the strengths of

working for a Catholic school district and the drawbacks to working for a Catholic school district that is striving toward decolonization. This understanding of and respect for both sides of Catholicity and both Catholic and Indigenous forms of spirituality will be vital and valuable in their efforts. Incorporating the spirituality of Catholicism and Indigenous spirituality into K-12 education creates invitational spaces where Indigenous students may be more likely to succeed. This may honour more Indigenous holism, the belief in the need for the four dimensions of physical, mental, spiritual and emotional being in balance for humans to thrive (Shroff, 2011).

Resistance

Initiatives that challenge the status quo or threaten current systems often encounter resistance. Foster-Boucher et al. (2022) cite Lennon (2020), McLeod (2020), and Regan (2010) offering that as settlers engage in this work, we are moved outside of our comfort zones; this discomfort may invoke a sense of guilt or shame, as well as grief, loss, and anger, but is critical for authentic transformation and the paradigm shift required to engage in true decolonization and reconciliation work. (p. 8)

When asked about the sources of resistance to decolonization, CCSD upper administration listed many of these things. They spoke of the role that personal accountability plays, the varied emotions people experience, the disbelief of many, the system itself, the learning needed, and competing demands for time and funding. Each of these play a role in creating barriers to decolonizing a school district.

Appreciation of Resistance at CCSD

The most common forms of resistance mentioned by CCSD upper administrators were emotional and personal. Yvonne summed this up so well, noting:

decolonization is calling us all to look at ourselves. Look at what we've learned. Look at what we know. How do we play in the system, in this colonial system? How are we oppressing others? How are we oppressed? Like, it's harder to adapt

to this change because we need to look at ourselves, we need to understand the truths, and be accepting of the truths, and move forward. Not everybody's gonna accept the truth, and not everybody's going to want to decolonize.

Yvonne recognizes the personal accountability that all people must feel in order to work toward decolonization (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Walia, 2014). She also recognizes that it is not easy work to analyze, own, and be responsible for your own unearned personal privilege. Knowing that, she also acknowledges that not everyone is going to be readily willing to take this on.

Susan was referenced in Chapter 4 acknowledging the shame with which some people are struggling. Much of Canadian identity is based on being a multicultural society characterized by tolerance, inclusion, and respect, unlike other places in the world. Much of Catholic identity is based on the teachings of faith, hope, and love. So, admitting that one is a part of these things even though they are Canadian, and they are Catholic, is difficult for some. Admitting that their church and their country perpetrated such wrongs is also difficult. Some choose to deny or resist it for these reasons. Syllas spoke to the fear that he thinks some feel with regard to decolonization saying, "I think for the average person, 'decolonization' is a scary word... Because I think people get defensive about it because there's an admission there, right? In terms of there's an admission to 'Oh my God, have I been ignoring something?'" People do not like to admit they are wrong, or the way they have thought about or been taught about something has been wrong. This is another reason that AI is an appropriate theoretical framework to look at decolonizing processes; AI encourages the investigation of multiple stakeholders' perspectives on a given initiative. People want to believe they are good people. The personal accountability piece can be difficult for some.

There are systems in place at CCSD for those educators who are especially resistant.

David explained:

It's up to the principal of the school to ensure that they are [decolonizing]. And if the principal is not following those mandates that are in place, then they have to answer to the area director who ensures that they are. So that structure, again with a centralized unit, that we have allows for accountability.

CCSD is ready for resistance but they may be reticent at times to handle resistance to decolonization with too heavy a hand, though. Susan explained that reticence -

you can either go the path of discipline or you go the path of evaluation. And I think if we want to build relationships and build understanding, I mean I think being heavy handed in terms of evaluation or discipline would be the last thing we want to do. You know, disciplining a teacher or terminating a teacher because they're not, you know, meeting the TQS and supporting Indigenous kids. We're not gonna gain any Indigenous advocates there, right?

As a researcher, I can say I see both positives and negatives in this response. Susan is right, punitive rather than restorative justice is very colonial. Decolonized approaches to discipline are restorative, not punitive. I can also see the other side, though. Why not discipline as harshly for an educator not meeting the mark regarding decolonization as you would for them not meeting the mark on assessment? Why is decolonization different? The CRT tenet of being skeptical of liberalism is useful here. I understand Susan's desire to foster an environment that lessens resistance rather than provokes it, but liberalism such as this can "mask and maintain the structures of White supremacy" (Gillies, 2018, p. 17). There is a certain delicate irony and complexity to this response, thus I wanted to include it.

Another form of resistance mentioned often was about resistance from some of the parents of children at CCSD. That resistance seems to stem from two sources. The first is those who think that decolonization is only for Indigenous students. The second, is from parents who do not believe that the

atrocities occurred or that Indigenous ways of knowing or being belong in the Catholic school system, or any school system. Both are problematic.

Susan explained the situation of some not understanding that decolonization benefits everyone. "I think there's resistance because people initially saw it as though it was about supporting our Indigenous people that were in front of us as opposed to just changing our broad perception and approach around Indigenous culture and ways of knowing." This is a concern from parents as well as staff. Some believe that decolonization is only about helping Indigenous children in schools, but that is not the case.

The latter is much more troubling. Aubrey spoke of a specific incident where she dealt with a parent who was resistant to their child learning about Indigenous ways of being and spirituality. The parent wanted to know why their child had to participate in the learning, "I said, 'well it comes first of all from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Government of Canada, the province of Alberta, and the Education Minister.' He said, 'Well, I don't want her taking part in any of this stuff.' And I said, 'She's Canadian. She needs to learn this.'" Aubrey went on to explain how the Administrative Protocols helped with the situation, "the AP is written to make sure parents understand that, yes, there may be smudging in schools. Yes. And we have every right to do that because it's in our admin procedure." This shows a clear understanding by CCSD upper administration of the levels of government that support this work and the broad spectrum of people who need to participate.

David spoke of parent resistance as well, saying,

you know, in a Catholic school we sometimes get push back from parents that don't understand that, yes, we are allowed to have smudging going on in our classrooms. But, some parents look at it as a pagan ritual. They call it a pagan

ritual, right? And so, we have to have those discussions with those parents to let them know that, no, this falls right in with our spirituality and our faith system.

In fact, in past times, the CCSD would send a member of the Indigenous Education team to speak with a resistant student, teacher, or parent. To speak to resistant Catholic school students, teachers, or parents is not the work of the Indigenous Education Team. It is the work of the church and the school district upper administration. In that regard, I was very happy to hear that, more recently, the CCSD has been sending their Religious Education Team members out to speak to such students, teachers, or parents about why it is absolutely acceptable and, in fact, mandatory that Catholic schools teach this history and allow these cultural practices in their schools (Papal encyclical, *Pacem Terris*, 1963; Pope Paul III, *Sublimus Dei*, 1537).

Yvonne spoke to another popular form of resistance mentioned, that of funding, but also that of the system, a curriculum in Alberta that does not support decolonization, “I’m gonna say funding is a big one because decolonizing would mean to bring more of Indigenous peoples and developing courses that will change a curriculum. Right now, our current curriculum is a terrible barrier, a huge barrier.” Many teachers and post-secondary scholars have spoken out publicly regarding the newest version of the K-12 curriculum that was released in Alberta (Schilling, 2023). Some of it has since been edited or was not released, but, much of it still problematic with regard to Indigenous content and presenting worldviews other than the dominant one.

A Critical Lens on Resistance at CCSD

It is worth mentioning again here that CCSD does not have any Indigenous voices in the decision-making processes of the district above the supervisor level. As addressing resistance to decolonization is the role of upper administration, it essential that Indigenous voices are part of the upper administrative body that decides on the procedures to deal with resistance. Indigenous people must be part of the process so that it is done properly, fully informed, and with decolonizing acts such as

restorative justice rather than punitive justice. Having an Indigenous person (or people) in the process will also hold the district accountable to actually actioning measures when resistance is encountered. Also, as those in power often cannot see oppression or exclusion of others, it is imperative that Indigenous people are represented at the highest levels of decision making so that resistance can be effectively identified.

Much of the resistance facing decolonization can also be attributed to White fragility. This is evident when Syllas spoke of many finding simply the word decolonization threatening. It is also seen when parents do not want their children participating in and learning about the values of another culture. White fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering defensive reactions (DiAngelo, 2018). It can include many of the reactions discussed in participant interviews such as anger, fear and guilt, but also behaviours such as argumentation, silence and leaving the stress-inducing situation. As Susan reported, White Canadians have never had to consider their own race, religion, or country in these ways before. So, it makes sense that having to consider their role in the need for decolonization and their role in the implementation of decolonization would feel foreign and overwhelming.

Summary of Resistance at CCSD

The upper administrators of CCSD face resistance to decolonization from many sources and directions. They seem well-versed in why decolonization is important. It appears they have systems in place for when it is not being practiced or attempted. They also have defended its necessity to resistant parents and written protocols to ensure decolonized Indigenous practices are defended against such attacks. Missing in this process is an Indigenous voice and perspective at the highest levels of decision-making in the district. That is needed in order to properly identify where resistance is coming from and to address it in an appropriate decolonized manner.

Summary of Chapter 5

This chapter highlights the strengths and areas for growth regarding the themes that came out of the participants' interviews about the roles upper administrators in CCSD have regarding their efforts toward decolonization. First discussed was the theme regarding governance of the district and the district's administrative protocols that pertain to decolonization. Then, the various types of resources CCSD puts into decolonizing efforts and how the upper administration decides on the types and amount of resources. After that the theme of professional and personal accountability to decolonizing was expanded. The fourth theme discussed was relationships and their value to decolonizing work. As this research was done in a Catholic school district, the theme of Catholicity was examined next. Finally, this chapter discussed resistance to decolonization in CCSD, its many forms and how it is handled. The next and final chapter will contain conclusions and recommendations that arose from this work.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

In Chapter One, the context around Indigenous educational policy was explored, and the nature and purpose of the study were also described. Then, I positioned myself as a researcher. After that the disciplinary contributions and descriptions of all aspects of the study were explained, including key terms that were important to the study. In Chapter Two, secondary literature was studied and reported on for the purposes of establishing what is already known in research surrounding the area of study. In Chapter 3, all aspects of the research design and methodology were revealed, including the dual theoretical lenses of Appreciative Inquiry and Critical Race Theory, and the sources of data. In Chapter Four, the data was coded into major themes and those themes were explored. In Chapter Five I presented the analysis and synthesis of those themes with regard to the secondary literature. Chapter Six is the conclusion where major themes, findings, and recommendations will be discussed.

Calgary Catholic School Division has exemplary Indigenous graduation rates, is setting precedents in areas of Indigenous Education strategy, and is making great strides in its decolonization efforts. The district's Indigenous graduation rates are what originally drew me as a researcher, as they are nearly on par with their overall graduation rates. CCSD is setting a precedent for other districts, especially Catholic school districts, with its Indigenous Elder and Indigenous Education supervisor who is responsible for only one portfolio. One of their greatest strengths in their efforts toward decolonization is their dedicated, centralized Indigenous Education Team. All of these strengths exist because of decisions made by upper administrators in CCSD. These upper administrators are aware of the professional and personal reasons for decolonization. They know the value of relationships in Indigenous culture and also in the work of decolonization. They are aware of the delicate situation they are in being that they are a Catholic school system, and the Catholic Church is implicated in much of the rampant settler colonization of Turtle Island as well as the majority of residential schools. They also have protocols for addressing resistance directly.

Summary of Thematic Findings

In the areas of governance and administrative protocols, strengths are having Indigenous Education as one of the four district priorities, having a Quality Indicator that the Chief Superintendent must meet for the board of trustees, and writing an Administrative Procedure and Protocols regarding decolonizing measures and actions in the district. Areas for growth were the complete absence of policy regarding Indigenous Education and a lack of representation in the decision-making upper levels of administration. Together, these contribute to a lack of perspective and a lack of awareness of personal bias regarding making decisions for people without any voice from that group of people in the decision-making process (Cottrell and Hardie, 2019).

The centralized structure of CCSD has many benefits including being able to ensure that education around decolonization happens at each school site. Also, CCSD can mandate decolonization of certain aspects of activities at each work site. The district can also choose how it uses its professional development time and councils. They also have chosen to have a dedicated, centralized Indigenous Education team, the benefits of which have been highlighted. Lastly, the district structure includes an Indigenous Elder, local to this area and well-networked and well-versed in the local community and cultures. In addition to the District Elder, CCSD has also chosen to appoint an Indigenous Education supervisor who is Indigenous and carries only the portfolio of Indigenous Education. A drawback of a centralized structure is that decision-making voices, perspectives, and experience are limited. The possibilities for a variety of directions and strategies are also limited to one direction dictated by upper administration. Also, there are no Indigenous people at the decision-making tables of the upper-most administration. Having an Indigenous Elder and centralized Indigenous Education Department is listed as a strength by every participant, but it can also discourage other Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees from fully participating in the decolonization of CCSD. Indigenous people cannot and should not do the work of decolonization alone.

CCSD dedicates considerable resources to decolonization and Indigenous education. The obvious would be the salaries and stipends paid to an independent department, a District Elder, and a dedicated Supervisor. In addition to those, the district also dedicates the resource of time to decolonization, time for professional development and initiatives as well as for community consultation and hosting community events. In addition to in-house resourcing, CCSD has moved programming with high Indigenous student demand to schools closer to the First Nations they partner with and networks students and families with community resources.

Where CCSD needs to re-assess their resourcing of decolonization is in their staffing and mentoring strategies. CCSD has no alternative strategy for staffing schools with large Indigenous student numbers to address the educational debt. CCSD also has no strategy to hire more Indigenous staff or to mentor Indigenous staff into leadership positions to remedy the current lack of Indigenous staff representation in schools and voices in upper administration.

It is remarkable that CCSD upper administrators identified not only professional accountability as a need regarding decolonization, but they also fully recognized the personal accountability required to ensure the work is successful. CCSD adheres to all provincial legislation regarding Indigenous Education and decolonization, meeting with representatives from Alberta Education regarding those measures and being accountable to them. Professionally, they have Indigenous Education as one of their four priorities, a Quality Indicator for the Chief Superintendent to meet, written and implemented Administrative Procedures and Protocols for all staff to follow. Upper administration also ensures that staff at all levels from all sectors have the opportunity for professional development regarding decolonization. Upper administration is able to speak well to the need for personal accountability and the special accountability a Catholic school district bears. CCSD does have room for growth regarding their professional and personal accountability to decolonization. Where they previously invited Indigenous Education consultants to meetings with Alberta Education regarding Indigenous student and

educational provincial accountability measures, they have discontinued this invitation, decreasing the number of Indigenous voices present and the number of voices of the staff members who are actually implementing the work. As previously mentioned, CCSD also needs to increase accountability to Indigenous education by having actual Indigenous people and voices involved in the highest levels of decision-making in the district. This may require a change in governance and operational structure where Indigenous representation is mandatory. This would also require efforts in the areas of increasing Indigenous employee recruitment and mentorship of Indigenous employees into positions of leadership. The district also needs mandatory decolonization and anti-racism training for upper administrators specifically, as personal accountability to decolonization requires each participant to embark on their own personal journey.

CCSD works hard to establish relationships with the Indigenous community of Calgary, Alberta but, there is room for improvement. CCSD upper administrators need to build their own relationships, not depend solely on the Indigenous Education Team to build those relationships and leverage them to the benefit of the district. In this effort, upper administration would do well to visit the Indigenous community and First Nation events and celebrations on their own. This would create relationships of more equal power and investment and lower barriers to working together toward decolonization.

A unique aspect of this research is that it was conducted in a Catholic school district. I found little to no extant research regarding decolonization in Catholic schools. The district being Catholic was identified as a strength. The leader of the church, the Pope, coming here to apologize to Indigenous people, being a proponent of decolonization was mentioned by participants as a motivator. Even the writings of Papal Bulls suggest a different way of doing things than what happened historically and still happens currently. As mentioned, Indigenous students achieving greater academic success in Catholic schools, where and when Catholic and Public schools are offered free of charge alongside each other, can also be seen as evidence of the value of Catholic schools in the quest for decolonizing education.

Participants mentioned the values of the Catholic church, pastoral care, the dignity and worth of all people, and others as reasons upper administrators support this work effectively as well. Also mentioned was the idea that a Catholic school recognizes the spiritual aspect and needs of each child and thus the spiritual quarter of the Medicine Wheel. Two participants mentioned an additional accountability and responsibility borne by Catholics and thus Catholic school districts because of the church.

The Catholic Church was identified as a limiting factor by participants in the study, as well. All are glad the Pope came to Indigenous territory to apologize for the atrocities that happened at residential schools, but many felt that apology was not complete. A complete apology is needed and reparations that follow an apology need to happen. One participant commented on how now that the apologies have taken place on this territory, the true work must be undertaken, and the Church must make good on its promises to help with reparations. The Church is slow to change, but change is needed, and the proof will be seen in its actions.

Resistance to decolonization was experienced by every upper administrator in a variety of ways. It seems that much of the resistance faced by CCSD upper administrators is emotional and personal. These are reflected in the forms of the personal accountability and the emotions that come with the guilt, shame, and disbelief of many as well as the time that it takes for people to process much of our shared history. Other resistances were in the system itself, the professional and personal learning required, and the funds and time needed to decolonize a school district. Stories were also relayed about resistance from parents, many of which are based in misunderstandings. When addressing that resistance, it became obvious that Indigenous voices are glaringly absent at the decision-making levels of upper administration in CCSD. In order to identify, correctly address, and effectively communicate with staff, students, and parents regarding resistance as well as plan for the future to deal with resistance, Indigenous voices are needed. White Fragility was also mentioned as a barrier to

decolonizing CCSD. One participant commented on how White Canadians have never had to consider their race, religion, or country in some of the ways that they need to be considered to effectively do the work of decolonization. That can be challenging and often brings up feelings of resentment, fear, guilt, argumentation, and other stress-inducing emotions. For many Catholics, this is very new territory, but their leader, the Pope, is calling on them to take this on.

Summary of Research Lenses

Utilizing appreciative inquiry was advantageous as there is much that is working well in CCSD regarding decolonization. Measures of student performance, like graduation rates, indicate high levels of success. Governance and structure promote Indigenous Education as a priority and Administrative Protocols highlight culture and importance. Tremendous resources are being invested into decolonization at CCSD. Accountability is seen as not only professional, but also personal. Relationships are being forged and maximized. At the highest levels, the Catholic Church is taking up the work of decolonization. Though upper administration faces many forms of resistance, they can speak well to how they handle each one, including some areas where they can see growth is needed. Appreciative Inquiry allowed for this research to be conducted as I am certain permissions would not have been attained if the study was going to be conducted using only a Critical Race Theory framework.

Examining this research through the lens of Critical Race Theory alongside the Appreciative Inquiry methodology was revealing. CCSD has many strengths when examined via CRT- they have an Indigenous Elder, an entire centrally-located department, and a dedicated Supervisor. The district also has Indigenous Education as a literal priority and has Administrative Protocols written to help with the work of decolonization. Upper administration also values and nurtures the relationships with Indigenous people and communities that the district has made. They seem also to clearly understand their personal accountability in the work of decolonization and the added responsibility borne by the district because of the role of the Catholic Church in colonization of Turtle Island. However, it became

obvious that they need to have Indigenous representation in the highest-level of decision-making in the district. The fact that there is not already Indigenous representation at these levels also shows that upper administration of CCSD is blind to the power and privilege of non-Indigenous people in institutions. Indigenous representation pointing these blind spots out and calling for upper administration of CCSD to address power imbalances would increase accountability and decrease the neo-colonization present at CCSD.

Recommendations Arising from the Research

Through this research, I have several recommendations for the upper administration of CCSD to consider on their further journey toward decolonization:

- *Increasing Indigenous staff at all levels, but especially at the upper administrative and trustee decision-making levels.* Ladson-Billings (1998) noted that schools continually reinforce racialization through “distortions, omissions, and stereotypes” (p. 18) and Freeman (1998) wrote about how racism is best identified by those who experience it. Without Indigenous representation at the decision-making levels of an organization the perspective needed to do the work well is missing.
- *Actively attempting to recruit more Indigenous staff and creating a mentorship program specifically for current Indigenous staff interested in leadership roles.* Swadener and Mutua (2008), Tuck and Yang (2012), and Wildcat et al. (2014) are clear about the need to foreground Indigenous voices in the work of decolonization, therefore there needs to be more Indigenous voices in educational leadership. Organizations can, even unintentionally, oppress the experienced reality of the oppressed if they lack Indigenous voices in leadership.
- *Consideration of hiring from outside the district, especially to increase Indigenous staffing levels.* *This could also ensure varied perspectives of decolonization measures.* The three participants who had the clearest understanding of decolonization were the participants who had worked

outside the district. Those participants also had the most real-world experience with regard to discussing decolonization with students and staff and to implementing decolonizing practices in their schools and classrooms. This may be a coincidence, or it may be that having this study situated in the interpretivist paradigm, focusing on “the perspectives, feelings, and beliefs of the participants” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 237) highlighted how participants who bring a wider variety of perspectives also have a richer understanding of decolonization.

- *An equity scan is needed as the district cannot say exactly how many Indigenous staff they have nor how many Indigenous people they have in leadership positions.* This is essential as the TRC (2015) and UNDRIP (2017) both call for more Indigenous representation in education. This way the district will have a metric by which to measure progress in this area. There are models created for this already. In August 2016, the B.C. Ministry of Education designed an equity scanning tool to “support school districts in identifying barriers that were impacting Indigenous student achievement” (Louie & Prince, 2023).
- *Indigenous Education must be added to school board policy.* As mentioned, all participants were surprised to learn that it was not in policy, including the chief superintendent. Policy should reflect priorities and having Indigenous Education in policy creates a level of permanence in the organization.
- *Upper administrators must have professional development regarding decolonization specific to their roles.* Fullan’s (2009; 2014) writing is clear about leaders fostering the change they want to see in their organization. To lead change, upper administrators need to have a thorough understanding not just of the content, but also their place in it. Many scholars write about how decolonization is in large part a personal reckoning with our own roles in the historical and contemporary oppression of certain groups (Louie, 2024; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2019; Sensoy

and DiAngelo, 2017) this adds to the importance of upper administrators having educational opportunities specific to themselves and their roles.

- *Upper administration should attend Indigenous community events and celebrations in order to build their own authentic relationships with the community and better understand the work they are doing.* It is a concrete example to those they lead and to Indigenous community members of decentering themselves and their ways of knowing and being and valuing the ways of other people (Louie, 2024; Walia 2014). Louie and Prince (2023) are clear on this when speaking about their decolonizing work with schools in British Columbia: “any meaningful attempt at establishing equity in education for Indigenous learners must reflect upon the relationship with the Indigenous community” (p. 14).
- *Teachers and leaders need to be held accountable to TQS and LQS 5 specifically, annually, to motivate their continual striving to meet the quality indicators.*
- *Increasing the terms of Indigenous Education Team personnel would be beneficial.* The role is unique, and established relationships are important. Illustrating this perfectly was, again, the work of Leona Prince in her research with Dr Louie (2023), where Leona, the Director of Instruction- Indigenous Education and Manu Madhok, the Superintendent of the school district, were able to negotiate and sign over a dozen Memorandums of Understanding for their research in mere weeks, instead of the usual months or even years. An example of this specific to CCSD is their national award-winning poster series highlighting local Indigenous people. Blackfoot values stress humility. Without trusting relationships, the Indigenous people of Treaty 7 would not have agreed to be a part of the project and that perspective shifting learning opportunity would have been lost.

In response to my secondary questions regarding what strengths CCSD has within their decolonization strategies that may be beneficial for other school districts to espouse, most involve prioritizing resourcing:

- Every participant referenced having a District Elder and a centrally located Indigenous Education Team as enormously important to aiding the work, building the relationships, and building the confidence of colleagues' in decolonizing a school district (Louie, 2024; Louie & Prince, 2023; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2019; Sensoy and DiAngelo, 2017, TRC, 2015; United Nations General Assembly, 2017; Walia, 2014)
- Dedicating time for professional learning at all levels and in all sectors in the organization (Fullan 2009, 2014; Louie, 2024; Pinar, 1993; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2019; Poitras Pratt, et al. (2018); Sensoy and DiAngelo, 2017)
- Engaging in and then following guidance and learning from community consultation (Milner, 2008; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2019; Swadener & Mutua, 2008; TRC, 2015; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wildcat et al., 2014)
- Prioritizing and enabling students to have opportunities to learn on the land from Indigenous knowledge sources (CCL, 2007; Tunison, 2007; Wildcat et al 2014)

Areas of Future Research Interest

Through the research and writing involved in this thesis, a few areas of interest for future research were identified. A study, similar to this conducted with the Calgary Board of Education, the public school district that parallels CCSD, would be incredibly interesting. I would love to identify what is working well for them and their areas for growth. It may also give me a clue as to why the districts experience differing success rates with Indigenous students, even though they are located in the same city. Another area where my interest has been piqued as a result of this study is to better understand the role that teachers have in decolonizing a Catholic or public school district. Teachers are the

backbone of education and schools, they are where the 'rubber hits the road,' so it would be interesting to study their roles and understandings of the work of decolonization. This could possibly be a comparative case study with teachers from both CCSD and the CBE. Finally, I am quite interested in studying the nature and sources of resistance to this work and looking at ways that resistance may be overcome.

Personal Insights

This study has been an interesting journey for me, especially as I started it as the Indigenous Education Consultant for Teaching and Learning at CCSD and ended it as an Assistant Principal for the CBE. Much has changed for me in the last three years - one of which I was on leave from my studies due to the changes aforementioned and the events that precipitated them. My hope is that people will see the richness and diversity of efforts made by CCSD and their upper administration toward decolonization, also the intricacies and challenges of doing that work in a Catholic school setting and the courage and self-examination that requires. It was important to me that people see this work is being done in Catholic school districts. I am also aware that some will have questions around the trustworthiness of this data produced in a Catholic school district by an employee of the same school district, but it's worth mentioning again that the study was purposefully looking for what was working well. The research did not set out to look for faults or failures: thus the participants could be comfortable speaking truthfully. I also feel the fact that I was no longer an employee of CCSD when I moved into the analysis portions of this research adds to the validity as I was under no pressure nor felt no loyalty to the district when answering my research questions.

This research also forced me to examine my identity and to look for my biases. As mentioned, I walk into every situation in life as a non-Indigenous person and can then choose to identify and situate myself in any interaction how I am most comfortable. This affects my

perceptions and perspectives. It is something that my Blackfoot mother and I talk about often, even when we are leading discussions, as a gift and a drawback. They are called 'unconscious biases' for a reason, but I continually strive to examine my perceptions and perspectives, to push myself to be honest in my thoughts and feelings, so that I can do the work of decolonization to the best of my ability.

I very much hope readers gather ideas from some of the initiatives that CCSD has undertaken and capitalize on the areas of strength that CCSD has in this work. For all of its limitations, CCSD is achieving some of the best colonized outcomes with regard to Indigenous student success and these are worthy of inquiry and celebration. As mentioned in my literature review, there are many other factors that can be considered when determining Indigenous student success other than graduation and dropout rates, but for now those are the most closely studied and published indicators. As indicators, they are valuable, and my hope is that in the future there will be more varied measures and more widely accepted definitions of student success, especially Indigenous student success.

I'm glad that the need for Indigenous people and voices in the upper echelons of school board leadership became so obvious. I am delighted that the less tangible areas of accountability and relationships came through so strongly in the coding. Those areas are more difficult to quantify, but participants spoke well to them, enabling me to try and qualify them. My hope is that much can be learned from the best of what CCSD is doing regarding decolonization and from the areas highlighted for them to improve. If that learning can happen and then be mobilized for the best outcome for all students, then every hour spent on this thesis was more than worth it.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions:

Perspectives, understanding, conceptions, via narratives or stories

1. How long have you been in education? What roles have you held in that time? Did you have Indigenous education or decolonization training when you were in teacher education?
2. What is your understanding of decolonization? What is your experience of decolonizing practices in education? How has your understanding of decolonization and its importance changed over the last 20 years?
3. Describe a role you have played or a challenge you have experienced regarding decolonization.
4. In what way do you see decolonization being important in schools generally and in CCSD schools in particular?
5. Given the international, federal, and provincial government mandates, how do you, in a senior leadership role, experience the pressure for change as part of decolonization?
6. Describe your role in in the scalar chain (i.e.: working with those above you, beside you, and below you) to advance board policies regarding decolonization.
7. Can you share what you know about CCSD's policy on decolonization? How do you they compare to the policies regarding other priorities? If any, what policy additions would you see as helpful for CCSD's decolonization priority?
8. Decolonization requires systemic change. How does your organization respond to change generally and are there differences in the organizations response to decolonizing change compared to other sources of change?

9. CCSD has many procedures and protocols around decolonization, and even has it as a district priority. What is the process for creating protocols and procedures and how do these become policy? Can you talk about where decolonization is within this process?
10. Describe your experience and insights regarding the development of District Procedures around Indigenous Education and decolonization?
11. Describe your experience and insights regarding operationalizing the board priority of Indigenous Education and decolonization district-wide? What strategies have been employed? Pedagogy, curriculum, infusion of culture (Indigenous ways of knowing and being)?
12. Can you speak to how decolonization is resourced within Calgary Catholic? If there are competing priorities, who decides how competing priorities get resourced?
13. What are the Indigenous student demographics in the district? And are there specific schools with large Indigenous concentrations? Are there differences in how schools with higher Indigenous student populations are staffed and supported?
14. How does CCSD create accountability around decolonization? What metrics are used to determine accountability? How does this accountability process flow up and down the operational scalar chain?
15. What accountability relationship exists between the board and the Ministry of Education regarding Indigenous education priorities? Does that relationship affect upper administrative decision-making, promotion, or retention?
16. What opportunities exist for professional development regarding decolonization? Is there an evaluation process for the effectiveness of the PD delivered in terms of student outcomes? How is that measured?

17. Regarding the Administrative Protocols, how much attention is there to embedding decolonizing practices within all APs and, secondarily, within the APs that apply specifically to Indigenous education or students? How is that approached?
18. In your experiences, which policies or procedures are most effective in facilitating system-wide decolonization? (School plans, district plans, TPGPs, APs, data reporting and collecting, etc.) Why do you feel they are the most effective?
19. What outside agencies are helping CCSD to facilitate decolonization and Indigenous student supports in your district?
20. What is your understanding of the responsibility borne by the district regarding the legal obligations of your division to deliver on commitments made in tuition agreements with the First Nations?
21. In your experience, can you speak to barriers you see to decolonizing CCSD schools? How might those be addressed?
22. Have you experienced employee resistance to implementing decolonization? How do you see the district helping those employees feel motivated and equipped to facilitate decolonization in their workplaces?
23. How do you think other school districts might benefit from what is working well in CCSD's approaches to decolonization?
24. What kind of strategic planning is in place around Indigenous staffing and mentoring Indigenous teachers into leadership positions?
25. From your perspective, can you share some areas that you deem requiring improvement or additional resourcing to advance decolonization?
26. What examples of decolonization in CCSD are you most proud of? Which have, in your opinion, made the largest impact?

27. With the Jubilee Year coming up in 2025, if Calgary Catholic were to present their best decolonized self, consistent with Catholic values, what would that look like?

Appendix B

Recruitment Letter

Hello,

My name is Angela Houle and I am a graduate student working under the supervision of Dr. Michael Cottrell at the University of Saskatchewan in the Educational Administration department.

I am contacting you because I am conducting research on decolonizing initiatives that are currently being developed and implemented within Calgary Catholic Schools for the benefit of Indigenous and other students, the role administrators play in developing and ensuring implementation of those initiatives, and how other school divisions could benefit from knowledge of these practices. I am looking for participants who are upper administrators for Calgary Catholic School District (CCSD) and help facilitate policies and or procedures that help in decolonizing schools and their practices.

Participation in this research would involve participating in one interview for approximately one to two hours. Interview questions pertain to your experience with and understanding of the policies and procedures in place to aid in the decolonization CCSD schools. This study is in response to the TRC Calls to Action and the LQS and TQS in Alberta Education. It intends to investigate, via a critical theory lens and qualitative approaches methodology, wise practices with regard to creating and supporting policies and procedures that allow schools and educators to decolonize their workspaces.

All attempts will be made to keep the identity of upper administrators confidential. This research has been reviewed and approved by the Behaviour Research Ethics Board of the University of Saskatchewan and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-council Research Ethics guidelines. It has also been approved by the CCSD Ethics Committee.

If you are interested in participating in this research, please contact me via email at angela.houle@cssd.ab.ca. Interviews will take place in April and early May 2022.

Sincerely,

Angela Houle

Graduate Student

Department of Educational Administration

College of Education

University of Saskatchewan

Appendix C

Administrative Procedure 203: Indigenous Education Procedures

1. The District shall provide instructional programs designed to address the academic, cultural and spiritual needs of Indigenous students and will provide opportunities for Indigenous students to acquire an education equal to other students. All instructional programs will be learner-centred and culturally respectful.
2. The District shall set and maintain high standards for Indigenous student achievement and shall support students in accomplishing such success. Through the provision of school-based and Learning Services resources including consultation and collaboration, instructional programming for Indigenous students will reflect their culture and provide access to culturally sensitive support services. In addition, the District and its schools shall track and report Indigenous achievement to Alberta Education as required on an annual basis.
3. In order to increase high school completion and successful post-secondary transition for Indigenous students, the District shall provide school-based resources and supports to facilitate student access into a post-secondary diploma or degree program, apprenticeship training or employment. School based and District resources for Indigenous students shall be provided to encourage Indigenous students to access career planning programs and services available at District high schools.
4. In the context of educational programming, the District shall provide opportunities for Indigenous students to study and experience their own culture. In addition, the District will encourage Indigenous parents/legal guardians and leaders in the school community to contribute their expertise to the education of Indigenous students. In achieving optimal

learning environments for its Indigenous students, the District shall provide programs for First Nations, Métis and Inuit learners that reinforce and recognize cultural identity, enhance character development and develop life management skills.

5. The Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) Call to Action document outlines 94 recommendations that support the practice of reconciliation. Within the context of a Catholic learning environment, the District shall provide (in accordance with TRC recommendation #64) opportunities for students to plan for and participate in spiritual activities that emphasize an Indigenous context.
6. Aligned with the District's respect for all parents/legal guardians as the primary educators of their children, First Nations, Métis and Inuit parents/legal guardians will have meaningful opportunities to participate actively in decisions that directly impact their children's education. In addition, District principals shall ensure that, as with all students, Indigenous parents/legal guardians are aware of and have easy access to information concerning their children's education.
7. Consistent with Alberta Education's expectations, and with the District's commitment to quality professional development, teachers, administrators and District staff shall have access to resources and in-services supportive of best practices related to teaching and learning for Indigenous students.
8. The District shall bring to its non-Indigenous student population opportunities to develop recognition of and appreciation for traditional and contemporary Indigenous life and the diversity among Indigenous cultures. Included in these opportunities, shall be recognition of and respect for the role of elders and community resource people.

9. The District is willing to provide education for non-resident Indigenous students living on reserves in the Calgary region as outlined in agreements with government agencies.
10. The following apply to smudging and pipe ceremonies:
 - 10.1 If smudging is to take place in a District building, principals/supervisors must ensure staff understand the associated protocols and importance of smudging and pipe ceremonies as part of the Indigenous traditional way of life.
 - 10.2 If smudging is to take place in a District building it will be in a designated area.
 - 10.3 Any areas designated as smudging areas are to be in a well-ventilated area and approved by the Director, Facilities or designate.
 - 10.4 Designated smudging areas must contain a fully charged fire extinguisher.
 - 10.5 Staff responsible must be instructed on the use of fire extinguishers.
 - 10.6 When smudging ceremonies are completed the materials must be fully extinguished and disposed of in an appropriate manner.
 - 10.7 Smoking or warm smudging materials need to burn out on their own.
 - 10.8 Smudge remnants and matches are to be placed in a tin can and saved.
 - 10.9 Smudge remnants are never to be placed in trash receptacle.
 - 10.10 Tobacco is used in pipe ceremonies and only by a pipe carrier. The same safety protocols as found in 10.8 and 10.9 are to be followed. (CCSD Administrative Protocols, 2020)