



EdD in Educational Leadership

INVESTIGATING SCHOOL-BASED LEADERS' CONCRETE STEPS TOWARDS WĪTASKÊWIN IN TREATY 6 TERRITORY

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By

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ABSTRACT

This five-paper organizational improvement plan builds understanding through a critical analysis of how school-based leaders engage with policy and implement the Inspiring Success (IS) educational policy (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018) to support the improvement of educational outcomes of Indigenous children learning in Treaty 6 territory.

I conducted an instrumental case study with seven school-based leaders (SBLs) from public schools in Treaty 6 territory in Saskatchewan in 2024 that specifically examined their attempts to engage the government of Saskatchewan's Inspiring Success educational policy. In preparation for the case study, I completed a reviewed of the literature which identified four major topics that framed the study; the treaty legacy and historic relationship with Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island, in Canada, and in Saskatchewan, the social context in which educational policy must thrive, principals as educational policy leaders, and public education and educational policy. The seven semi-structured interviews generated rich participant data that often closely aligned itself to the literature reviewed for this study. The participant data, generated from ten questions delivered during one-hour semi-structured interviews, was carefully analyzed using a strategic four-stage process. As a result of the analysis, I identified eight categories; policy, place, people, relationships, change, action, barriers, and needs, and three overarching themes; roles, relationships, and responsibilities. SBLs were identified in the participant data and the literature to have unique roles, responsibilities, and relationships and were entrusted to act in the best interest of many stakeholders with unique needs, wants, and worldviews. Although SBLs are responsible to bring about change through the provincial Inspiring Success educational policy, bringing the Inspiring Success policy to life and achieving the five goals requires all members of the policy chain and stakeholders to uphold their roles and responsibilities through dynamic relationships.

The five goals listed on p. 14 of the Inspiring Success Educational Policy Framework (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018) are:

1. First Nations and Métis languages and cultures are valued and supported.
2. Equitable opportunities and outcomes for First Nations and Métis learners.
3. Shared management of the provincial education system by ensuring respectful relationships and equitable partnerships with First Nations and Métis peoples at the provincial and local level.

4. Culturally appropriate and authentic assessment measures that foster improved educational opportunities and outcomes.
5. All learners demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the worldviews and historical impact of First Nations and the Métis Nation.

I affirm that Wítaskêwin (Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000); getting along on the land, as the outcome sought and the pathway forward for all treaty people, including the policy chain. The findings of the study, such as deep systems leadership and systems thinking, seeking relationships and partnerships that would improve educational outcomes, and rigorous investigation into the policy chain were offered to improve the efficacy of the system and to remedy the research practice gap identified. Also suggested was a unified response between stakeholders and the policy chain to end the settler colonial project which would address the policy imperatives identified in the IS policy document. Although this is easily suggested, the literature has identified that bringing about this type of societal change would take multiple generations of concerted and dedicated effort. Finally, to begin this work, I suggest that the policy chain should immediately advocate and communicate the needs of the system to stakeholders so that adequate reinvestments in public education can be made allowing school boards to improve the quality of its services, including instruction and assessment practices, so that learning outcomes can be improved and the educational gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students can be eliminated.

Background:

Treaty 6 Song

Composed by Art Moosimin and the Red Bull Singers

This song honours and pays homage to the relationship between First Nations and the Crown and was composed in the early 1900s.

Kiycho Kimaskwew Kikiymiykonow

Iskiwaywin

Kakikay Kawaywaypasta

Meaning:

The Queen, she gave us a flag, for it to fly in the wind forever.

My name is Charles Paul Bazin Webster. I am a white male settler (Battell Lowman & Barker, 2015) born and raised in Treaty 6 territory in Saskatoon who adopted their treaty identity as an adult. My Scottish and French heritages were birth gifts given to me by my mother, Marie Suzanne Bazin, and my late father, Laurel Myril Webster. I have spent the entirety of my professional career working in Saskatchewan's PreK-12 Public Education system. In this dissertation, I will present the many peoples in my home community that are First Peoples, First Nations, and Indigenous peoples. I will respectfully use the term Indigenous to refer to a diverse group of peoples who were on these lands before the arrival of my family (Merlan, 2009) and the Métis who are the children of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. I will also make multiple references to community, and the reader will note that I asked research participants about their school and municipal community. As a researcher and a person, I frame community in two broad senses; first, stakeholders (Mitchell et al., 1997) that are within or connected to the school such as students, parents, caregivers, and employees of school divisions that work in schools or division office, and secondly, stakeholders, human and non-human as well as ecosystems beyond the school, be it that they are directly or indirectly connected to the school in the same rural or urban municipal, provincial, or federal community. I affirm that our interconnections and interdependence are significant and that our survival and mutual benefit must be honoured and safeguarded. The study's findings will make mention of community and communities, and the reader is encouraged to view these through my frame, but is also invited to apply their own worldview of community if it is more appropriate or relevant.

I used Plains Cree in this dissertation, one of the Indigenous languages of Treaty 6 territory, because as a treaty person, I have a responsibility to accept and to share language and culture with others. Treaty 6 territory is my homeland and the location where my family was able to settle. My culture and language hold great importance and define who I am, how I exist, and how I understand the world and the people around me. I believe that all treaty people should know Indigenous languages and cultures because they are the first peoples and languages of this land, and being in relationship with others, as treaty people, means accepting the responsibility of relationship, to engage in relationality (Wildcat & Voth, 2023), and to share ways of being and doing. I trust using Plains Cree will demonstrate to the reader an attempt at trying to create ethical space within this argument (Ermine, 2007). Using Plains Cree in my dissertation is also a strategic act of opposing the monocultural uniformity and hegemonic dominance of the English

language in my community and the settler colonial project that promotes dominance, control, unequal power relationships, and the erasure of Indigenous peoples and cultures (Cottrell et al., 2021). Sachez que je suis uni avec ceux qui luttent pour la préservation et l'épanouissement de la beauté et la richesse culturelle qui existe dans chacun de nos groupes ethniques et dans nos familles et ceux qui s'opposent à l'élimination de la diversité par le moyen de la haine, du racisme, et du contrôle sur les autres pour créer une uniformité universelle.

In preparation for the use of Plains Cree words in this dissertation, I sought relational guidance (Donald et al., 2012; Donald et al., 2013; Wildcat & Voth, 2023) from Judy Greyeyes, an Iskwe friend and colleague and Dr. Linda Young, a nêhiyawiskwêw friend and colleague to better understand the meaning behind the words I learned during my Treaty Catalyst Teacher training. Each generously taught and gently guided me in their own way. Linda encouraged me to access and use Harold Cardinal and Walter Hildebrandt's book *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan*. She assured me that these words were offered by the Elders and should be used without hesitation, but with full respect and accuracy. It is with this guidance, teaching, and vision that I proudly use Plains Cree words and concepts in this dissertation and trust that this will be accepted by the reader.

Although I am a non-Indigenous man and deeply impacted by my settler-colonial heritage, as a treaty person, I wish to meet the expectations placed upon me by fulfilling my responsibilities and obligations and ensuring Wîtaskêwin; living together on the land, and Tâpwêwin; Speaking the truth or speaking with precision (Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000). I endeavoured to complete this by conducting an instrumental case study (Baxter & Jake, 2008; Stake, 1994, 2003) in which I investigated the efforts of public education SBLs in Treaty 6 territory to engage with and implement the Inspiring Success policy document. Their work would support Wîtaskêwin through publicly funded education and be an act of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Trustworthiness and Tâpwêwin were sought so that the reader could analyze and apply the findings of this five-paper organizational improvement plan in their own unique context and participate in reconciliation. The strategies, concepts, and recommendations are believed to have the power to create powerful change, ensure more efficient and efficacious educational policy implementation, and to act as a call for greater efforts towards reconciliation and more harmonious relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples on Treaty 6 territory.

Problem of Practice:

Despite ministerial rhetoric, three significant educational policy documents (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018; Ministry of Education, 2010; Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2011), and attempts to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students, Saskatchewan's PreK-12 public education system continues to produce persistent disparity between the graduation rates and reading levels of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Educational leaders are tasked with closing the achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students relying exclusively on the existing funding provided by the provincial government (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018). School-based leaders (SBLs) in various school boards in Treaty 6 territory have attempted to achieve the policy goals and to close the achievement gap; however, these efforts have made little impact (Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, 2023). The problem of practice is the gap between ministerial policy, the goals, and Indigenous educational outcomes in Saskatchewan.

Purpose:

The purpose of the instrument case study is to critically analyze how school-based leaders engage with educational policy and implement the IS policy to support the improvement of educational outcomes of Indigenous children learning in Treaty 6 territory and contribute to Wîtaskêwin. The inquiry question guiding this study is how do school-based leaders engage with educational policy and implement the IS policy to support the improvement of educational outcomes of Indigenous children learning in Treaty 6 territory and contribute to Wîtaskêwin?

Methods:

This study was conducted using a qualitative research design with seven participants who were active SBLs in Treaty 6 territory in Saskatchewan during the 2023-2024 school year with two years of prior educational leadership experience. Purposeful sampling among interested applicants was used to find the most relevant perspectives and voices. The study employed semi-structured interviews and created triangulation of evidence between prior research, participant data, and the policy document. This study didn't employ Indigenous research methodologies because of my lack of knowledge, experience, and connections to people who would accept to guide me in this worthy pursuit during the bounded three-year program. Using non-Indigenous methodologies ensures ethical research practice but also limits the richness of the study, and if it were possible in the future, I would fully explore this possibility. I accept full responsibility for

any shortcoming or problematic nature that arises from the use of non-Indigenous methodologies in this study.

Findings:

The case and context were investigated vigorously, and I perceived the results to be typical, although surely nuanced, of other cases that could be similarly investigated in other parts of the province or in Canada. The value of the study's findings and their relevance beyond the case are suggested to the reader and they are invited to analyze and apply these to their unique contexts, as they deem it appropriate. The study has determined that Treaty 6 territory is experiencing a policy paradox and a perfect storm that limit the progress of implementation and impacts of the IS educational policy and progress towards Wîtaskêwin. If the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples is to be reconciled, as directed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, and the impacts of the settler colonial project are to be lessened and eliminated, a policy response that uses a systems approach to eliminating engrained racism and white supremacy must be co-designed with stakeholders and the will to implement and fund the response vastly through all levels of the policy chain must be maintained to create meaningful change.

Figure 1

School-Based Leaders' Concrete Steps Towards Wítaskêwin in Treaty 6 Territory



Note. Remixed content created by Charles Paul Bazin Webster. From *North America satellite orthographic.jpg* [image] by Ghalas, 2005, Wikipedia

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turtle_Island_-_/media/File:North_America_satellite_orthographic.jpg). PDM 1.0.

From *medal-viki-84ca7d* [photograph] by Unknown, 2016 (<https://picryl.com/media/medal-viki-84ca7d>) PDM 1.0.

Artifact:

This five-paper organizational improvement plan seeks to influence the Government of Saskatchewan's policymakers and educational leaders by gathering the voices of Treaty 6 territory SBLs to determine the current state of public education, their noted successes towards policy implementation and policy goals, and the barriers they face in the education sector. The problem of practice is the gap between ministerial policy and goals and Indigenous educational outcomes in Saskatchewan.

Research questions:

- How do leadership actions, beliefs, and processes lead to policy success in public schools in Treaty 6 territory?
- How do barriers persist despite leadership actions, beliefs, and processes and limit policy success in public schools in Treaty 6 territory?
- Is the Inspiring Success educational policy a remedy or a roadblock to the improvement of Indigenous learning rates and the treaty relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Saskatchewan?

Conclusion:

The gap between the ministerial policy and its goals and the educational outcomes for Indigenous learners in Saskatchewan is a compelling problem of practice for school-based leaders (SBLs). This instrumental case study, which provides insights into an issue (Baxter & Jack, 2008) focused on the results and not the topic, highlights that Saskatchewan's PreK-12 public education system is policy rich and impact poor. This study has identified the need for concerted whole-system efforts to bring about the needed second order change and decolonization efforts, including re-establishing Indigenous sovereignty and governance (Washington & Johnson, 2023), Indigenous self-governance to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students. The provincial government and the policy chain deliver education locally to students in a context of continuous improvement. The policy paradox and perfect storm in Treaty 6 territory must be addressed through systems leadership (Meadow, 2008) in ethical space (Ermine, 2007), in communities where Wîtaskêwin continues to be lacking. There is a great need for all members of Saskatchewan's education policy chain and stakeholders to make sense of the peoples, places, and ministerial policy, and to implement the policy appropriately to their context. Beyond this, the development of a full cadre of culturally

responsive/culturally sustaining leaders (Papp & Cottrell, 2021; Paris, 2017) who monitor and address the root causes of underperforming initiatives related to Indigenous student success are greatly needed. These leaders are anticipated to share and disseminate promising practices across the educational leadership landscape, to lead organizations towards successful system learning, to overcome the barriers to student learning that exist in the current state, and the re-establishment of Indigenous sovereignty and governance (Washington & Johnson, 2023).

Practice Implications of Inquiry:

This study creates empirical evidence describing the policy progress made to date, informs and guides policymakers and policy implementers who seek to create societal change in Saskatchewan and beyond, and uncovers policy, improvement, and change barriers that exist in the contemporary educational landscape. The policy chain, understood to be the ongoing legacy of hierarchical authority, power, and control from the Ministry of Education over local school boards, and finally from school boards to individual schools, is the colonial structure that guides and informs educational sector change management (Leonard, 2013). A significant political, economic, racial, and societal power frames the organizational context where SBLs make sense of and implement educational policies. The outcomes of the education sector in Saskatchewan are the result of the ministry's, school boards', schools', leaders', and teachers' dominant worldviews and undermine students' individual experiences and outcomes. Those in the policy chain with leadership responsibilities must make sense of policy, people, and place to implement educational policy in an ethical and trustworthy manner.

Key words:

Treaty 6, Tâpwêwin, Wîtaskêwin, Inspiring Success, Government of Saskatchewan educational policy, colonization/decolonization.

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I recognize, honour, and give thanks to those who came before me, those working to create change today, and those who will come after me.

This study was completed thanks to the guidance and contributions of many. I am better for the guidance offered to me by my supervisors, Dr. Michael Cottrell and Dr. Gordon Martel. Your suggestions, provocations, and leadership have made me a better researcher and person. I am deeply appreciative of Dr. Linda Young and Judy Greyeyes who guided me, helped me to better understand which Plains Cree words to use, how to use them ethically and respectfully, how to continue to work in a good way for our community, how to be a helper in my own way, and for guidance on how I could contribute to Wítaskêwin. I trust that my attempts at Tâpwêwin will be recognized as coming from a good heart and will be well received in Treaty 6 territory.

I recognize the committee that oversaw this work and ensured that it meets the highest possible standards. Thank you, Dr. Marc Spooner, for serving as the external examiner and to Dr. Jing Xiao, for serving as the internal examiner. Your expertise, generosity, and involvement in my journey were greatly appreciated.

To the participants of the study who gave generously of their time and shared their perspectives, experiences, and good thoughts, this couldn't have been possible without your voices. I have shared your messages with the greatest of care and trust that the amplification of your voice will bring about the change that we all desire. I learned a great extent from each, recognize your expertise in the educational leadership landscape, and share the successes of this study with you. We are better thanks to your leadership, and we are lucky to have you in our community.

Finally, I thank the reader and am humbled to think that these findings might support your work in your community. I stand alongside you and am willing to help.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is first dedicated to those who never had the chance, or chances that I have had. I have many privileges, and labour to make opportunities more accessible to others as an attempt to give back and to help others.

Secondly, this dissertation is dedicated to the voices of the research participants and the researchers on which I relied to better understand my homeland and the people I share it with.

Thirdly, this dissertation is dedicated to and only exists because I had the support and encouragement of my family; young and old. They lifted me and tolerated my absence during many significant moments, big and small. My greatest strength comes from Meaghan, my better 3/4s, and our three children Zéphyr, Véronique, and Quillon. To my parents, Marie, Laurel, Marilyn, Tom, and my sister Micheline, thank you for being my first teachers and providing the conditions for my growth and development. To everyone else in my little family, thank you for always accepting me despite my unique ways of being and doing.

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to Treaty 6 territory. *As long as the sun shines, the grass grows, and the waters flow.* I recognize the land, the water, the air, the sun, and all of creation that have always kept me. I strive to ensure that the next seven generations have these same opportunities.

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Paper One: Reflections on Leadership Growth

1.0 Introduction –

The treaties between Indigenous people and the British Crown were the building blocks for Canada which were based on Plains Cree principles of ““Miyo-wîcêhtowin” (“Living together on the land”), “Wîtaskêwin” (“Getting along with others”), and “Pimâcihowin” (“Making a living”)” (Office of the Treaty Commissioner, 2008, p. 9). As treaty partners, we must work together, positively, and respectfully on this land, we must honour our responsibilities given to us by Creator, we must honour the commitments we made, and we have to take care of each other, especially those who hold leadership positions that must ensure the well-being and growth of others. This partnership, described as shared management of the provincial education system, is the third goal of the Government of Saskatchewan’s Inspiring Success educational policy (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018). My treaty responsibility is something I have taken to heart and that I live out as a SBLs in Saskatchewan. To honour the intent of the treaty, as a sign of respect, and to begin to create ethical space (Ermine, 2007), I strive to include Plains Cree in this dissertation to value the people, language, and the culture that have accepted my family to these lands and to expand the linguistic and cultural content included in this document.

To better understand the Plains Cree principle of Wîtaskêwin, I sought guidance from Auntie Judy Greyeyes in October 2023. I asked her for her continued support and guidance in a good way and she accepted my request with a good heart and shared a powerful message about the importance of identity, roles, and responsibility from her nêhiyawiskwêw worldview. She described her recent work supporting the development of a vision and beliefs of Wîtaskêwin with the municipal government of the City of Saskatoon. She spoke to me about my responsibility to care for the fire and how she saw me as a helper of others. Our conversation eventually touched on our shared contemporary reality, and we asked ourselves how well we have maintained the responsibilities given to us by Creator, especially in light of the current problems we face (J. Greyeyes, personal communication, October 25, 2023). My time spent with Auntie Judy re-inspired me but also compelled me, as did my supervisors, to dig deeper into the notion of Wîtaskêwin. In December of the same year, I sought guidance from Dr. Linda Young to understand the origins of Wîtaskêwin. She generously shared with me her extensive work, research design, and learning from her PhD. I was in awe of the process she designed and the data she collected. Later, I asked her once again for her support and guidance, in a good way.

She accepted my request with a good heart and explained that if unsure, she would seek guidance from others. To better understand the principle of Wîtaskêwin, she guided me back to Cardinal and Hildebrandt's book, *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan* (2000). I frame my work as a school-based leader, as a person who ensures that community enacts Miyo-wîcêhtowin, supports the growth and well-being of the community, works to undo the cycles and patterns of harm inflicted on others, and attempts to be part of a solution. As a SBL, I am concerned that Wîtaskêwin is absent, and that the settler colonial program continues (Needham, 2021; Tupper, 2012; Tupper & Mitchell, 2022; Veracini, 2011) in Treaty 6 territory and beyond.

This study and work are from a sacred place. "The political and spatial construction known as Saskatchewan are superimposed on the traditional territories of Cree, Dene, Saulteaux, Dakota, Lakota, Nakota, and Métis peoples and on subsequent treaty boundaries" (Cottrell et al., 2012, p. 247). I recognize and offer this work to those that came before me, those that walk this journey with me, and those that will come after me. I trust that this work and the messages I share will make Treaty 6 territory a better place for the living and non-living for countless generations that come after me.

We are thus led to conclude that the problems that planners must deal with are wicked and incorrigible ones, for they defy efforts to delineate their boundaries and to identify their causes, and thus to expose their problematic nature. The planner who works with open systems is caught up in the ambiguity of their causal webs. Moreover, his would-be solutions are confounded by a still further set of dilemmas posed by the growing pluralism of the contemporary publics, whose valuations of his proposals are judged against an array of different and contradicting scales. (Rittel & Webber, 1973, p. 167)

I had presuppositions about the reasons for which my problem of practice persisted over time, the sources of its complexity, and the extent to which it would be difficult to design an appropriate solution. This study confirms many of these.

1.1 Background - Enacting Change in Saskatchewan Schools

Continuous improvement (CI), as described by Park et al. (2013), has become a catchphrase in education despite its unclear nature and manifestation. Improvement in education is not a new pursuit (Ebel, 1982). In a Saskatchewan educational context, there have been multiple iterations of CI such as the *A Time for Significant Leadership* (Ministry of Education, 2010) document, the *Pre-K-12 Continuous Improvement Framework* (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2011), the

Inspiring Success: First Nations and Métis PreK-12 Education Policy Framework (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018), and the Framework for a provincial education plan 2020-2030 (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2019) policy document. Public policy, in the form of policy documents, expresses the goals, decisions, and actions adopted by authorities and governments (Abele, 2007; Reyes et al., 2014). When decisions or actions are made, they are recorded as policy for stakeholders (Mitchell et al., 1997) and the work carried out on behalf of its citizens often takes the form of policy instruments. Policy instruments (Cohen et al., 2007; Datnow & Park, 2009; Hettiarachchi & Kshourad, 2019) are techniques used by authorities to achieve goals such as grants, guarantees, and funding sources (Saskatchewan School Boards Association, n.d.). Systemwide improvement and initiatives (Park et al., 2013) recorded as policy, aim to create provincial continuous improvement. The province of Saskatchewan has engaged in equity-based (OECD, 2012) continuous improvement initiatives in hopes of ameliorating the reading rates and graduation rates of the most underserved and marginalized learners in Saskatchewan, who are without a doubt Indigenous people (Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, 2023), while refusing the allocation and deployment of additional policy instruments (Orlowski & Cottrell, 2019). It remains unclear if these policy actions are contributing to success or roadblocks (Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, 2023)

Of note, the context in which continuous improvement has been sought is deeply marked by the impacts of a historical legacy of colonial actions and tools of oppression and destruction such as the seizure of land and resources, treaties, legislation, the pass and permit system, and policies such as the Indian Act that eventually created the mandatory attendance of Indigenous children between the age of 7 and 16 at Indian residential schools (Office of the Treaty Commissioner, 2008; Union of Ontario Indians, 2013). These schools sought to remove, replace, and control the governance and leadership structure of Indigenous peoples (Peach, 2011; Powell & Peristerakis, 2014; Sloan & Castleden, 2019; Veracini, 2011) and to try to create a future with no distinct Indigenous peoples (Patzer, 2014). This policy legacy has created institutional and societal oppression and racism towards Indigenous peoples who must now free themselves from the systems of social and political control imposed by the federalist Canadian state (Powell & Peristerakis, 2014).

The last Canadian residential school operated in Saskatchewan and closed in 1996 (Union of Ontario Indians, 2013), a mere 27 years ago. Since its closure, Indigenous peoples have

continued to survive poor socioeconomic realities (Jutras, 2022; Wallin & Tunison, 2022). The government of Saskatchewan now suggests that educational outcomes for Indigenous students must improve while the colonial program maintains unequal relationships through dominance, dispossession, and occupation (Veracini, 2011) indicating that the government maintains its oppressive stance. The government of Saskatchewan and non-Indigenous peoples are comfortable maintaining their privilege through access to captured land and resources while continuing to have Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations shaped by the pervasiveness of dominance by non-Indigenous peoples (Tupper & Mitchell, 2022). Provincially, the context for continuous improvement is defined by a legacy of racially based tensions that are clearly noted in the systemic marginalization of Indigenous peoples (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015; Matthew, 2022; Mattison & Aber, 2017; Patel, 2021) where SBLs and schools must address the harms perpetrated by past school systems (Madden, 2019a; St Denis, 2007; Union of Ontario Indians, 2013) and the legacy of systemic racism and genocide (Patzner, 2014; Powell & Peristerakis, 2014; Wallin & Tunison, 2022) through the federal and provincial governments' settler colonial project (Veracini, 2011). For simplicity's sake, and to be crystal clear, continuous improvement in Saskatchewan has been carried out in a society that is structured by white supremacy (Gibbons, 2018), where white ignorance reigns supreme (Mills, 2007), where white resistance is active (Plaut et al., 2011; Valesco & Sansone, 2019) and material inequities created by colonization are still endemic (Cottrell et al., 2012; Orłowski & Cottrell, 2019). Saskatchewan, as it exists today, is a neoliberal (Orłowski, 2015) and neocolonial (Orłowski & Cottrell, 2019) that maintains itself through provincial policies that lack financial resources.

1.1.1 Key Concepts Related to Problem of Practice

I have an honest desire to know the difficult truth of our shared history between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, to meet my responsibilities as a beneficiary of the treaties, to reconcile the treaty relationship with my Indigenous brothers and sisters, and to act by working differently and bringing about much-needed change in my school, school division, and the entire Saskatchewan education sector. Education is recognized as a powerful tool that can bring about equity for oppressed groups (Cottrell & Orłowski, 2015; Jutras, 2022; Leithwood, 2021; Orłowski, 2008). I am confident that my hopes are shared by most of my SBL colleagues and that this study will assist in the transformation and change needed in our communities.

The government of Saskatchewan has a complex educational achievement problem that it wishes to resolve and a treaty relationship that it wishes to reconcile between Indigenous and non-Indigenous citizens (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018; Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, 2023). The IS educational policy document lists “equitable opportunities and outcomes for First Nation and Métis learners” (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018, p. 14) as its second policy goal. I believe that this type of change, as well as the other four policy goals can only be realized by a strong policy response and robust implementation driven by school divisions and professional SBLs, paired with adequate and predictable funding, resources, and support that are needed to fully address students’ learning needs. The change sought by the government of Saskatchewan seems to be first-order change (Daly & Chrispeels, 2008; Leonard, 2013) as changes to Indigenous students learning rates are sought within the existing provincial education system and its existing parameters. This is an attempt to get different results by largely doing the same thing within a static system.

The space where I have the greatest professional impact, and that, in my opinion, requires immediate reform, is the education sector. The chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Justice Murray Sinclair, stated: “education got us in this mess” (Madden, 2019a, p. 292). Battiste (2013) places the blame for Aboriginal education solely on the Canadian government indicating that a century-long assimilation plan administered through the education system has resulted in the rejection, suppression, and ignoring of Indigenous heritage and knowledge. She suggests that a decolonizing approach is needed where dominant Eurocentric practices and knowledge are deconstructed and challenged while incorporating diverse worldviews and knowledges. This suggested approach to change would be considered second-order change (Leonard, 2013). Publicly funded education has been lauded for its ability to mediate inherited societal inequities and to enable all members of society to fully actualize their potential, which is of benefit to the individual, their family, and the community (Cajete, 2016; Calliou & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2014). Therefore, the education sector and public education are the context where this change should be pursued.

The settler colonial project (Veracini, 2011) is alive and well in Saskatchewan (Needham, 2021). To avoid a continuation of the devastation, oppression, and hardship that has begun to be uncovered through the truth and reconciliation process (Madden, 2019b; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), the project, and the colonial system requires a

well-designed change process to be carried out that causes its disruption and termination. White settlers are the dominant member of the hegemonic society in every measure (Gibbons, 2018) and have proven to be difficult to influence and to be compelled to make equity-based societal changes for others (Eibach and Keegan, 2006; Velasco & Sansone, 2019). It remains the responsibility of members of the white dominant majority to use their racial and treaty privileges to create spaces for, to champion, and to lead change for those who are marginalized and systematically removed from spaces of power and decision-making and to ensure the self-empowerment and a return to self-governance (Cottrell et al., 2012; Paris, 2017; Peach, 2011; Sloan & Castleden, 2019; Veracini, 2011; Washington & Johnson, 2023).

Self-Situating

Self-situating in this dissertation allows for the reader to know my story as a treaty person, a researcher, and my journey towards school-based leadership. The reader, in turn, has a better opportunity to understand why I am conducting this study, why I believe that improvements in the educational opportunities and achievement for Indigenous students are worthy of our collective concern and investment of limited public resources, and finally, why I believe it is the treaty and professional responsibility of SBLs and their staff to bring about the necessary sector changes in our province and to reconcile the treaty relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. My homeland is a place where the attempted genocide of Indigenous peoples has taken place and settler colonialism continues to this day (Calderon, 2014; Patzer, 2014; Powell & Peristerakis, 2014; Tupper, 2012; Tupper, 2013; Tupper & Mitchell, 2022). This process will attempt to describe my interactions with people and place through significant noted moments in time during my life (Spooner, 2019).

My Racial Experiences in Saskatoon

I am a white male who grew with the birth gifts bestowed by his Scottish/English and French heritages and oblivious to my white settler identity and privileges. I grew up in Saskatoon, the largest city in Saskatchewan, a non-governmental city that straddles a series of bends on the South Saskatchewan River. I was raised by my teacher mother, Marie Suzanne Bazin, and independent businessman father, Laurel Myril Webster, on a small middle-class crescent in the east side neighbourhood named College Park, with my younger sister Micheline Flores Anne-Marie Bazin Webster. The entirety of my youth was spent in a nearly white only context. My only community interactions with Indigenous people were through a very limited number of

experiences in sports where unequal opportunities and realities were visible. My soccer games seemed to be the only reason our family would travel from our neighbourhood on the east side of the river, to the far west side of the river to Scott Park in Westmount. Otherwise, we stayed mostly on the east side of the river in our white community. My mother, throughout her career as a public-school educator, taught in various neighbourhoods, and for several years, taught in Hudson Bay Park in the division's lowest socioeconomic neighbourhood French immersion school. My father ran his businesses for more than 30 years in the lower valued light industrial region in Kelsey Woodlawn. Although I helped him with the family business throughout my life, we travelled to the shop to work and earn income and left at the end of the day. We served customers throughout the city and province, but we had little if any interaction with the local community as our customers travelled from their neighbourhoods to our shop, we would deliver, or we would attend their homes for service. I saw every extreme, wealth, poverty, and a range of socioeconomic realities in between. I knew they existed in Saskatoon because they were visible to me, I served them in their homes through our small business, and I listened to my father make meritocratic and racial discourses. My father grew up on a small poor farm, with marginal saline soil. They were always fed, but what they had, they produced from the land. My grandparents lived through the Great Depression. Pride in self, work ethic, and perseverance were family values and beliefs discourse. My father's family were Manitoba farmers who were given marginal land at no cost for having served as surveyors who divided land for the Canadian government to be sold to European settlers. Being given land for acting as land surveyors was acknowledged but never recognized as an advantage and privilege. Our family's story was shared with me to motivate, inspire, and to encourage. My mother's family origins are those of a large French family that was raised on a northern Ontario farm and a small urban poor French family from Québec. Within the same generation, my grandfather became the sole income earner as a professional family doctor. Our family narrative was one of success, perseverance, and benefit through meritocracy, goodness, and innocence (Schick & St Denis, 2003). Wítaskêwin was absent in my familial, educational, and societal narrative and my youth in Saskatoon was defined and framed by narratives of meritocracy and largely absent of experiences with Indigenous peoples.

My Racial Experiences in Education

As a Student in PreK-12 Public Education.

As a student, I attended a French first language school in Saskatoon where nearly all students were of middle to upper class and white. There was only one known Métis family in the school, whose mother was Cree and the father was francophone. The family had an older boy and a younger girl who was in my class. We were taught a white European/Canadian curriculum and worldview absent of Wîtaskêwin or Indigenous content. Later, I attended a French immersion program in a large Catholic high school on the east side of the river that had nearly no Indigenous students.

Few significant moments come to mind from school. I was never taught Tâpwêwin about settler colonialism. My Grade social studies instruction included significant amounts of anti-Canadian/Crown content regarding the oppressive stance of the Crown towards francophone, Indigenous, and Métis people. This shaped my early notions of governmental and organizational ethical behaviour and the possibility that the English and white federal government is hegemonic, oppressive, and brutal. Another was reading self-selected news articles for a high school history class on the death of Neil Stonechild in Saskatoon, the starlight tours, later, the lack of criminal charges for the officers responsible for Neil's death, and the Oka crisis. I recall a moment of ignorance and biases when confusing the closure of the last Indian Residential School in Saskatchewan. At the time, I had misunderstood it to be something positive like the residential school my father attended as a young man at Notre Dame in Wilcox, Saskatchewan. It should come as no surprise that the news article that I read prior to 2000 about the closure of the last residential school included no details about the atrocities and the cultural and physical genocide of the residential school system that were tasked with ridding Canada of its *Indian problem* (Facing History and Ourselves, 2020, n.p.). My publicly funded education and the media to which I was exposed were tools of the settler colonial project that opposed Wîtaskêwin. The promises made during the negotiation of Treaty 6 were broken and ongoing colonial logic and the erasure of Indigenous peoples from all accounts and content of my publicly funded PreK-12 education benefited the settler colonial state, made me ignorant and complicit, and allowed for the delivery of inferior educational opportunities to Indigenous students in the same city and province.

As a Teacher Being Trained.

I trained as a teacher at age 19 in the early 2000s. I left my home city in Treaty 6 territory and attended the predominantly white University of Regina in Treaty 4 territory. Of note, I knew

neither of these treaty territories and they were nearly non-existent in my university course content in the faculty of education. The First Nations University had started but I took no courses from the institution. Dr. Stephen Kenny shared accounts of European and Indigenous relationships, alliances, and significant historical Indigenous figures. Dr. Shauneen Pete exposed me to an overview of the Indian Act, the treaties, and notions of privilege in Introduction to Indian Studies I. I can still remember relying on key lyrics from Propagandhi's A People's History of the World to begin to express my unrefined ability to see the unjust nature of class warfare and the Settler Colonial Project to Dr. Pete.

At age 27, I returned to the predominantly white University of Saskatchewan to complete a Master of Education in Instructional Design. The beginning of my exposure to ideas of colonialism, globalism, and neoliberalism came from time spent learning from and alongside Dr. Sheelah McLean, who would later work with the Idle no More movement and studying under the guidance of Dr. Howard Woodhouse.

As a Professional Teacher.

As a teacher, I have taught in Moose Jaw, Regina, and Saskatoon from K-12 and have served my community in nearly every educational role possible. I have always taught in single or dual stream French Immersion schools in urban centres with various socioeconomic realities. Some family or community poverty was known, but the near majority of students I taught were white and middle-class or greater. Métis families and children were enrolled in greater numbers than Indigenous families and children. Indigenous student enrollment and representation in the French Immersion program were always well below that of the English program or their proportion of the provincial population. The French immersion program's student body eventually started to change throughout my career. As students progressed through the program, male attrition made the face of French immersion largely female and white.

One day, an Indigenous man who was employed by the same school division visited the school where I was teaching. During the short conversation, he asked me many questions about the school, the French immersion program, and about myself. Rather quickly, he spoke Tâpwêwin and promoted Wîtaskêwin and equity for Indigenous students and communities. He shared the significant difference in funding between our provincial students, especially those in French immersion, and the rate of funding for children attending schools on reserve, the needs of the communities, and the disparities that systematic inadequate funding were creating. I was

largely ignorant to this reality and found it hard to hear his message, at first. I only heard the equity critique, the open conflict between races and classes over limited public funding, and I initially took it as something for which he felt I was directly responsible. I quickly realized that the conflict wasn't between the two of us but rather between us and the government and its neoliberal economic policy of fiscal restraint towards much needed public expenditures. My initial emotional response clouded my rational mind to recognize that it is my responsibility as a privileged professional teacher, as a treaty partner, and as a human being to speak out against inequitable and oppressive systems whenever I encounter them.

At the end of our conversation, I expressed my struggle and that I clearly understood what he was sharing. I thanked him, which made him laugh, and I told him that I would share it with others and do whatever I could to try to bring about change. Later, in my treaty teacher training program, I thought back to the experience as we reviewed the treaty promise and the content and provision of the treaties. I use my voice in this work as part of my effort to ensure Wítaskêwin as my friend challenged me to.

It wasn't until I was hired as a teacher in Saskatoon, in 2009, three years into my teaching career, that I was introduced to Indigenous traditions and ceremonies. Prior to this, the closest educational experience I had was looking at picture books with Indigenous content (likely written and published by white authors and publishers) in the school library and online. I was introduced to Indigenous perspectives, ceremonies, and traditions and I had the opportunity to invite Traditional Knowledge Keepers to teach me, teach with me, and to support the classroom learning for my students. I slowly established relationships with Indigenous brothers and sisters. These relationships supported my personal, professional, and human growth and helped me to understand tangible elements of Indigenous worldview, beliefs, vision, and culture connected to people with whom I was in relationship. I am a better person for what has been shared with me and the time I spent with them in miyo-wichitowin (healing energy or medicine generated from being together in relationship) (Donald et al., 2012). All it took from me was openness, a good heart, generosity, and a willingness to serve others as members of my family. Others generously reciprocated these same feelings of kinship, and these experiences and relationships compel me to do better personally and professionally. These relationships, for me, were an alliance across cultural and racial identities towards Wítaskêwin (St Denis, 2007).

My Experiences in Creating Continuous Improvement in Public Education

As a Classroom Teacher.

As a teacher, I was challenged to demonstrate positive change as Continuous Learning (CI) during my entire professional career through numerous provincial and local school division initiatives and strategies. At first, I experienced the Continuous Improvement Framework which expected me to focus on improving literacy rates and equitable opportunities. As a result of neoliberalism (Orlowski, 2015), my school division was tasked with smooth transitions and system accountability and governance (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2011). This was never framed or explained by leaders as an act of Wîtaskêwin nor as an attempt to address the colonial legacy and was rather a (perceived) waste-elimination or economic efficiency strategy. Later, this was replaced by the Education Sector Strategic Plan, 2014-2020 which refined the sector focus on narrowly defined metrics of success (Lowenhaupt et al., 2016; Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2014; Spooner & Orlowski, 2013). Again, this version of CI was defined by neoliberal economic policy and was absent of Wîtaskêwin. These different CI initiatives had local strategies and processes that were driven by my school-based and central office leaders and required me to demonstrate that I was improving my professional practice, nearly always in literacy instruction and measured by my students' ability to read at grade-level. School division accountability measures required forms and briefs for my SBLs and the documentation of yearly professional learning targets. These measures were often a source of criticism and cynicism from my colleagues because they felt it added unnecessarily to the work, which in their opinion was already perceived to be overburdened and taxing.

In the end, I grew professionally but I was never sure if I truly gained efficiency, efficacy, accelerated my students learning, or if I was achieving temporary gains in one area due to additional time and effort at the expense of something else. The CI process, measures, and conclusions were always murky, disjointed, and bound in time-served logics. These felt as if they were additional externally driven accountability requirements, and I never fully embraced and pursued the opportunity to grow. There were brief moments of collaboration, but most of the work was completed individually, and driven by removed managerial supervisors. Staff shared that they felt continuously demoralized because, despite best efforts and with dwindling resources, they were never, ever, able to reach our targets which created feelings of guilt, culpability, hopelessness, and toxic us/them realities. As a teacher, my efforts to continuously improve were largely made in isolation. I invested time and energy to grow myself and little in

growing those around me as the structures and supports were absent. This professional growth experience lacked cooperation, true collaboration and synergy. In my professional context, Wítaskêwin and was absent.

In Various Teaching Roles.

Unlike my classroom teacher experience, when I served as a resource teacher or teacher librarian, rather than investing in myself, I invested more and more energy outward to grow those around me. Through relationships, collaborative teaching schedules or projects, and professional learning structures, I worked closely with colleagues on goals set by our school division or school to improve our professional competence and practice. I acted as a bridge between the people and school and the First Nation, Inuit, and Métis Branch to increase Indigenous content, perspectives, and Treaty Education in classrooms. It was then, as it is now; a mutually rewarding experience for myself and those I had the privilege to support that resulted in shared growth. Regarding efficiency, efficacy, and accelerating student learning, the same uncertainty existed for each of us but the positive experience, miyo-wichitowin (Donald et al., 2012) for the students and teachers, left us more energized and wanting to work together again in the future. Looking back, this experience had elements of Wítaskêwin but was creating slow change at a small scale.

As a School-Based Leader and Division Leader.

When selected and placed in formal leadership roles, I was responsible for designing programs, systems, and supports according to ministerial, division, and school goals. CI targets were better knowing students and curriculum, through literacy-based instruction and metrics, and narrowly focused on students' ability to read commercial grade-level texts. Being responsible for leading CI was humbling and daunting. I was committed to honour knowledge, experiences, and perspectives and to be guided by what worked best. I let my leadership decision-making and actions be guided by these and consistently created connections and relationships and to leverage collective learning and exploration. I worked more closely and frequently with colleagues from the First Nation, Inuit, and Métis Branch, which was a gift. Regarding efficiency, efficacy, and accelerating student learning, the same uncertainty existed about our collective impact and unfortunately the distance between teachers in their home-school and my location at central office didn't leave me with the same positive feedback and energy as when I was working

alongside teachers as a school-based colleague. Although I laboured against it, I was removed from the heart of teaching and learning, students and teachers.

Final Thoughts

I am lucky to say, and feel obligated to state, that I am a successful man. I recognize that the public education system and the societal structure were accessible, lacked personal barriers, and worked for me. The odds were in my favour as a middle class, white, bilingual male. I was able to learn and grow in safety and have been fortunate enough to access post-secondary education and two levels of graduate studies. I have a happy and healthy family, and we live in a comfortable home. I have nothing for which to complain and I lack nothing of significance. When critically assessing and writing my experiences and pathway to this moment in life, there is an ongoing theme in my narrative, the erasure and absence of Indigenous peoples. Despite being Treaty 6's first peoples, they are absent in my schooling experience and largely absent in my professional world. My life has taken place in complete racial and cultural segregation (Gibbons, 2018). As I have learned, this segregation and erasure have been deliberately created, are propagated through white supremacy, and are the result of the settler colonial project. I live on traditional Indigenous lands and was born approximately 16 kilometres away from what I hope will one day be a UNESCO World Heritage Site at Wanuskewin, a sacred site and gathering place, and yet, through oppression and dispossession, my human daily human existence could regularly occur without ever seeing or interacting with Indigenous people. I stand against this reality and am willing to work actively to change this. Finally, I recognize and acknowledge the advantages I have had in my life thanks to white-preferential and male-preferential processes and accesses that exist in my community, province, and country.

I am a non-Indigenous man and deeply impacted by my settler-colonial heritage. As a treaty person (Office of the Treaty Commissioner, 2008; Tupper & Mitchell, 2022), I wish to meet the expectations placed upon me by fulfilling my responsibilities and obligations and ensuring *Wîtaskêwin* (living together on the land) and *Miyo-wîcêhtowin* (getting along well with others) and *Tâpwêwin* (Cardinal & Hiderbrandt, 2000). Once I knew *Tâpwêwin*, I kept my heart and spirit open, adopted my treaty identity, and was gifted the opportunity to be trained as a Dakota fire keeper community officer (Holmes, 2020).

These thoughts explain my beliefs about the importance of improving the educational opportunities and achievement for Indigenous students and why the investment of limited public

resources is worthy of collective concern and societal commitment. I am convinced that there is a pressing need to reconcile the treaty relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and to end the settler colonial project. I hope that through my work and my commitment to action, I can one day be accepted as an Indigenist, someone who follows tenets of Indigenous paradigm and supports Indigenous rights and perspectives without themselves being Indigenous (Donald et al., 2012; Jutras, 2022).

1.1.1.1 Allied Concepts

The gap between the ministerial educational policy, its goals, and Indigenous educational outcomes in Saskatchewan could be considered akin to other significant social problems. Improving educational learning rates for Indigenous learners must be thought of and conceptualized similarly to implementing a new approach or program across a whole system where end users do not understand the complexity of the problem, the level of change needed, and where the policy chain doesn't see the need or value in changing the system or applying the necessary policy tools to bring about policy success. Second-order changes are required to bring about the desired results, which will require changing the culture and beliefs throughout the entire system. Those who carry out the work, SBLs and teachers, must work differently and achieve something never before possible. This work should also be conceptualized as engaging in healing, restitution, and reconciliation to victims of great injustices. Education was the tool that was used to carry out physical and cultural genocide against Indigenous people and it is now the tool that is meant to bring about culturally sustaining and healing practices through rapid policy changes.

1.1.1.2 Theory Pertaining to Problem of Practice -

My study, and the problem of practice, are influenced by and aligned with the following theories. A brief explanation of each is included to support the reader.

Systems leadership and systems theory (Meadows, 2008; Senge, 2003; Senge et al., 2007; Senge & von Ameln, 2019). Meadows (2008) explained that we can begin to understand how systems work, their results, and their patterns once we understand the relationship between the structure of the system and its behaviour. Systems are sets of things, like people that are interconnected and produce patterns of behaviour over time, which can be observed and described. There are many forces and influences that affect systems, both internally and externally, and clear and direct responses to these are, most typically, complex. Systems

typically cause their own behaviour, are driven by feedback loops, and are more than the sum of their parts.

Critical race theory (Baker, 2006; Gillborn, 2015; Held, 2019; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015; Park & Bahia, 2022; Sleeter, 2017; Sablan, 2019; Su, 2017). There is “no single unchanging statement of the core tenets and perspectives that make up critical race theory” (Gillborn, 2015, p. 278). Characteristics and assumptions include the reality that unequal access to rights and privileges based on race exists, that educational policy is dominated by mechanisms of white supremacy (Su, 2017), that race is socially constructed, perpetuated, and reinforced (Held, 2019), and that socioeconomic status helps people to avoid risk thanks to their flexible resources that are unequally distributed in the society (Cloutson & Link, 2021; Rydland et al., 2020). Critical Global Race Theory, explained by Weiner (2012) suggests that critical race theory extends beyond national lines to explain how racialized practices that essentialize, dehumanize, other, and oppress minorities while elevating the privileged groups with power and resources in nations across the globe.

Settler Colonial Project (Elliott-Groves & Fryberg, 2019; Veracini, 2008). The settler colonial project maintains its existence on notions that land and resources can be claimed by a dominant group because they belong to no one. This is described as *terra nullius*, a land with no master (Veracini, 2019) where the Indigenous peoples that existed on the land first are stripped of their humanity and claims to ownership because of logics and doctrines. The project aims for their total erasure (Veracini, 2011). This is the logic and process applied to Canada; since signing the treaties, non-Indigenous peoples gained privilege and benefit through economic and social privileges (Tupper, 2013) and built communities founded on settler colonial assumptions of white privilege (Wallin & Tunison, 2022). The perceived superiority and entitlement of non-Indigenous peoples have been engrained in Canadian society, reinforced, and normalized (Tupper, 2013). Education is an enduring structure of the colonial project that maintains, reinforces, and replicates the ideology through curriculum, policies, and practices that teachers universally deliver to students (Masta, 2019). Curricula is written through a Western non-Indigenous lens and then Indigenous content is incorporated (Webb & Mashford-Pringle, 2022). Non-Indigenous peoples use their accumulated wealth, privileges, and special access to maintain and grow their power, privilege, and wealth while excluding Indigenous peoples from these same possibilities. The colonial encounter has not ended, and its complex impacts continue to this day

(Dei & Kempt, 2007). The domination of Indigenous people is perpetrated by settler individuals and institutions that resist equity initiatives, such as equitable funding of Indigenous education in hopes of protecting perceived self-interests and making changes to the provincial education system so that it better serves Indigenous students (Berryman et al., 2014; Bishop & Berryman, 2010; Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2009; Bishop, Ladwig, & Berryman, 2014).

1.1.1.3 Contexts Pertaining to Particular Problem of Practice -

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada has compelled many provincial governments, including what is now called Saskatchewan- an ethnically diverse multicultural and a pluralistic western Canadian province, to create educational policy that responds to the Calls to Action from the commission's final report and to strive to create more equitable learning opportunities for Indigenous students (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015; Wotherspoon & Milne, 2021). Saskatchewan has a long and mostly untold history of cultural and physical genocide (Calderon, 2014; Patzer, 2014; Powell & Peristerakis, 2014). The last Canadian residential school was in Saskatchewan and closed in 1996 (Union of Ontario Indians, 2013), less than 30 years ago. Since its closure, Indigenous peoples have continued to survive poor socioeconomic realities (Wallin & Tunison, 2022). Despite the province's prior approval, support for, and participation in residential schools that sought to "get rid of the Indian problem" (Facing History and Ourselves, 2020, n.p.), the provincial government of Saskatchewan demands improvements in the educational outcomes for Indigenous students through educational policy. This worthy change is a significant sector improvement that requires significant effort and resources. The colonial program acts as a counterforce and simultaneously intends to maintain unequal relationships through dominance, dispossession, and occupation (Veracini, 2011). The Government of Saskatchewan and non-Indigenous peoples continue to be comfortable maintaining their privilege through access to captured land and resources and to have Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations continue to be shaped by the pervasiveness of dominance and unequal benefit (Tupper & Mitchell, 2022).

The provincial government of Saskatchewan, through the IS policy, seeks to undo the decades and generations of destruction by reconciling the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples by improving the otherwise nearly stagnant and inequitable achievement and educational experiences of Indigenous students. The implementation of the IS educational policy is a problem of practice that is persistent, contextualized, and a specific issue embedded in

the work of professional practitioners, that if addressed, has the potential to result in improved understanding, experience, and outcomes (CPED, 2016; Ma et al., 2018). For the school divisions of Saskatchewan, maintaining long-term multi-year strategic organizational focus on the policy goals, demonstrating organizational continuous improvement in assessing and responding to the learning needs of Indigenous students, creating equitable learning opportunities that grow Indigenous students' knowledge, skills, and dispositions, and ultimately closing the graduation rate gap is a significant task in the resource-starved sector.

School divisions face multiple competing demands and the role of SBLs continues to expand and intensify at an alarming rate (Fullan, 2018). The problem of practice (Ma et al., 2018) faced by SBLs is a worthy topic based on multiple compelling sources, such as, but not limited to, answering the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action and the six imperatives described in the IS policy. Accomplishing the IS policy goals is one of many required steps for reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, for Tâpwêwin (Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000), and to actualize the three principles on which treaties were signed. As a professional teacher who has held several different prior educational leadership roles, and as a treaty person who was born, raised, and now raises his own family in Treaty 6 territory, I can attest to the urgency, importance, and complexity of making progress on the IS policy goals. For the provincial government, success on the policy goals is of significant importance and described by the six imperatives included in the policy. This organizational improvement plan seeks to influence the Saskatchewan policy chain which includes the Government of Saskatchewan's policymakers, school boards' policymakers (Ontario Education Services Corporation, 2019; Saskatchewan School Boards Association, 2016) and educational leaders (Fullan, 2014, 2018) by gathering the voices of Treaty 6 school leaders to understand how they engage with educational policy and implement the IS policy to support the improvement of educational outcomes of Indigenous children learning in Treaty 6 territory and contribute to Wîtaskêwin.

1.1.2 Purpose and Research Questions –

In response to the urgent need to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students in Saskatchewan and the scholarly evidence available, the inquiry question for the study is: How do school-based leaders engage with educational policy and implement the IS policy to support the

improvement of educational outcomes of Indigenous children learning in Treaty 6 territory and contribute to Wîtaskêwin?

To answer the inquiry question, primary research questions include:

- How do leadership actions, beliefs, and processes lead to policy success in public schools in Treaty 6 territory?
- How do barriers persist despite leadership actions, beliefs, and processes and limit policy success in public schools in Treaty 6 territory?
- Is the Inspiring Success educational policy a well-crafted remedy or a roadblock to the improvement of Indigenous learning rates and the treaty relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Saskatchewan?

1.1.3 **Relevance or Significance to Educational Leadership -**

School-based leaders in Saskatchewan are professionals who are part of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation and hold middle manager supervisory duties over their school staff. They are required to have professional teaching certificates issued by the Saskatchewan Professional Teachers' Regulatory Board, often have additional training and certification, and have been selected by the school board to act as the leader of a given school. They are men and women, predominantly settlers, and members of the dominant white majority who have years of teaching experience. They are entrusted with the safety and security of all who attend or visit the school, with ensuring that professional standards for instruction, assessment, and conduct are upheld by all members of the teaching staff, and with interpreting and implementing multiple layers of educational policy. These professionals carry out numerous leadership actions such as establishing vision, beliefs, and local strategic plans, managing school improvement and continuous improvement, monitoring student progress through data processes, determining and allocating human and financial resources, and carrying out strategic decision-making, to name a few. I can attest from my own professional experiences as a SBL that the role and demands are significant and that training programs and division-based professional development do not adequately prepare professionals for the role, especially when the additional training is not focused on educational leadership.

In 2018, the provincial government of Saskatchewan released the IS policy, the most recent equity-based educational policy that seeks to change the education sector to address the educational achievement rates of Indigenous students and to reconcile the relationship between

Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. The provincial government allocated few policy instruments to support this policy and school divisions were required to implement the policy with their existing funding. Despite my role, I was largely unaware of the new policy and related strategies or initiatives that would influence or change my professional and personal ways of knowing, being, and doing as a result of the policy's implementation.

This instrumental case study contributes to the field of educational leadership and sheds light on professional practices and leadership through educational policy by investigating the efforts of SBLs who laboured to implement the IS policy in Treaty 6 territory. School-based leaders; principals, vice-principals, and assistant principals must implement educational policy as middle managers (Flessa, 2012). The IS policy seeks to undo the Canadian legacy of cultural and physical genocide (Calderon, 2014; Gibbons, 2018; Madden, 2019a; Masta, 2019; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013; Patzer, 2014; Powell & Peristerakis, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Tupper, 2012; Wallin & Tunison, 2022; Zembylas & Matias, 2023), to undo the settler colonial project (Veracini, 2011), to overcome significant socioeconomic realities (Cottrell & Orłowski, 2015; Jutras, 2022; Orłowski, 2015), and to reset the treaty relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples through shared management of the education sector and further meeting the crown's treaty obligations (Office of the Treaty Commissioner, 2008). In this organizational position, they are highly vulnerable to failure (Crane, 2022; Kotter, 1995; Leong & Howlett, 2022; Miller, 2020). The provincial auditor's report (2023) indicated that the efforts of the education sector and SBLs have not yet produced the desired outcomes nor the needed changes in the education sector. There are multiple historical root causes for the graduation rate gap including the dismantling and outlawing of Indigenous governance and authority (Peach, 2011; Patzer, 2014; Powell & Peristerakis, 2014; Sloan & Castleden, 2019; Veracini, 2011), the impacts and trauma from the Indian Residential Schools, and the cultural and physical genocide of Indigenous peoples (Calderon, 2014; Gibbons, 2018; Madden, 2019a; Masta, 2019; Patzer, 2014; Powell & Peristerakis, 2014; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Tupper, 2012; Zembylas & Matias, 2023), to name a few. These are further compounded by contemporary significant socioeconomic realities faced by Indigenous peoples (Cottrell & Orłowski, 2015; Jutras, 2022), the systematic underfunding of Indigenous education (Orłowski & Cottrell, 2019), and white ignorance and supremacy (Mills, 2007) among others.

This study is an in-depth investigation of seven SBLs' journey and efforts in implementing Saskatchewan's IS educational policy. It offers a rich description of their accounts, the policy context, and the conceptualization of school-based leadership that seeks to be responsive to and actualize the goals of the IS policy. Results of the study add to the limited empirical findings on Saskatchewan's SBLs' experiences and offers insights into educational policy implementation. The results of the study provide noteworthy insights into a topic that has received little attention and in which a deeper understanding is required if policy success is to be achieved and Wítaskêwin is to be fulfilled.

This study provides much needed insight into how to better implement educational policy, the required resources, and contributes to repairing the broken treaty relationship by advocating for equitable learning opportunities for Indigenous students which would allow for greater independence, mastery, Pimâcihowin (making a living) (Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000; Office of the Treaty Commissioner, 2008), and the reduction and elimination of endemic socioeconomic factors (Cottrell et al., 2012; Cottrell & Orłowski, 2015; Jutras, 2022) as a result of greater educational success. SBLs are entrusted and required to fulfill the expectations placed on them by the provincial government, their local school divisions, and their local communities (Daly & Chrispeels, 2008). These expectations do not recognize the various contexts, levels of readiness and professional competence of school and division staffs, as well as the communities and various racial and cultural populations they serve (Folkman, 2015; McLaughlin, 2006).

The province has a continued lack of impact on the Indigenous graduation rate gap and ongoing inequitable Indigenous success (Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, 2019). After four years, the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan has reported that leaders and teachers are not prepared to teach the Indigenous students they serve, that schools lack resources to achieve the policy goals, that Indigenous educational outcomes are profoundly impacted by the legacy and lasting harms of the residential schools, and that there are few noted impacts on increasing equitable outcomes for Indigenous students in the province (Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, 2023). The findings shed light on the efforts to successfully implement the IS policy to date, the barriers encountered, and the nature of the policy; roadblock or remedy.

The challenges faced by SBLs when implementing educational policy aligns itself to the empirical evidence. Professional educational leadership supports are needed in school divisions such as targeted professional on leadership development, the creation of new or the

reconfiguration of strategic partnerships between schools and outside Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations, robust structures, the deployment of strategic policy instruments, and the refinement of leadership development programs in universities. Any of the much-needed supports mentioned above would be well received by SBLs and the education sector.

1.2 Stipulative Definitions -

Case study is explained by Baxter and Jack (2008) to allow researchers to explore phenomenon in context while relying on a variety of data sources. Individuals, organizations, interventions, relationships, communities and programs can be explored, deconstructed, and reconstructed as phenomena. This methodology is flexible and rigorous.

Class warfare is explained by Peterson (1997) as open conflict between classes of people in society over the distribution of wealth and income. Each class struggles to protect, gain, and to avoid losses to other classes through the government and the private marketplace.

Colonialism is defined by Veracini (2011) as exogenous domination of a foreign group on an Indigenous group through original displacement and unequal relations. Tupper and Mitchell (2022) add that it is the process that produces inequitable relations through the lack of reciprocity, disequilibrium of power, the use of force and the interruption of social, economic and institutional development that intends to maintain unequal relations through the domination of one group over another through dispossession, occupation, and unequal relations.

Continuous Improvement is explained by Singh and Singh (2015) as small incremental changes in productive processes or work that demonstrate improvement on indicators of performance through participation.

Culturally responsive practices are explained by Papp and Cottrell (2021) as embracing Indigenous peoples' worldview, social structures, and pedagogy as a valid base on which to build new meaning and knowledge with Western knowledges and ways of knowing.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy is explained by Paris (2017) as teaching and learning that seeks to extend and grow a democratic project that has literacy, languages, and cultural pluralism at its heart to address noted demographic and social change.

Decolonization is explained by Madden (2019a) as the interconnect and recursive processes of deconstructing and reconstructing the pervasive colonial systems that generate inequities in the material distribution of resources that is deeply entrenched between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

Equitable distribution of wealth is explained by Cottrell and Orlowski (2015) as the equitable and ethical distribution of wealth in society using the wider resources of the state to achieve a prosperous, shared, and harmonious future according to the treaty relationship as the basis for cultural cohabitation.

Equity in education is explained by Galloway and Ishimaru (2015) to counter oppressive systems, policies, structures, and practices that create or extend disparities in education for nondominant students.

Incrementalism is explained by Howlett et al. (2020) as rapid small steps in policy used by experts to accomplish drastic change without creating antagonisms or paralyzing schisms.

Innovation in education is explained by Breakspear (2010a) to be creative approaches to finding new more effective ways to perform tasks and solve problems.

Instrumental Case Study is explained by Baxter and Jack (2008) as a specific type of case study used to provide insights into an issue or to help refine a theory as the case, being typical or not, plays a supportive role in understanding something else that is of secondary interest. To fully uncover the external interest, the context and activities are scrutinized, detailed, and explored in depth.

Policy is explained by Howlett et al. (2020) as formal records of decisions of authorities on specific issues that are communicated to stakeholders.

Policy instruments are explained by Cohen et al. (2007), Datnow and Park (2009), and Hettiarachchi and Kshourad (2019) as techniques used by authorities to move policy goals into action, inform stakeholders, change contexts or practices, and more with grants, guarantees, funding sources, incentives, sanctions, rules, permissions, or technical assistance to end users.

Relationality is explained by Wildcat and Voth (2023) as being context specific, shared, and can be found when different nations or peoples from diverse communities create shared spaces while maintaining their distinct traditions. It is connected closely to languages and traditions, global, exists as a concept beyond any given context, and is created through connections.

Racism discourse is explained by Schick and St Denis (2003) as exchanges that include truth and claims or representations that draw their value from traditions, conventions, institutions, and inferred modes of mutual understanding for commonsense and in which inequality is justified.

Settler colonialism is defined by Veracini (2011) and is similar to colonialism adding the desire for labour from, the disavowal of the presence, the management of ethnic diversity, the permanent subordination of the colonized, and the departure of or persistence and survival of the Indigenous population to end.

Social justice is explained in an educational context by Lupton (2005) as the minimum standard that all students should have access to school that is the same quality that in turn offer school processes and standards of teaching to students from disadvantaged backgrounds that are at least the same quality as their more advantaged peers.

Stakeholders according to Mitchell et al. (1997) are people, groups, neighbourhoods, organizations, institutions, societies, and the natural environment who each exert varying amounts of power, legitimacy, and urgency.

White fragility is explained by DiAngelo (2018) as a state in which racial stress, however little, becomes intolerable and unleashes a range of defensive behaviour. Parasram (2019) links white fragility to white supremacy.

White ignorance is explained by Mills (2007) as the false belief, and the absence of true belief, which causes the spread of misinformation and error in social clusters of whites by social practices that encourage it.

White supremacy is explained by Gibbons (2018) as a global political, economic, and cultural system that resists racial progress and perpetuates obvious injustices against others who are non-white.

1.3 Limitations and Delimitations -

There are known limitations to my study:

- This study is my first formal academic research project. I recognize that I am a novice researcher and that I continue to grow my depth of knowledge, skills, and disposition over time. In the future, I will be better suited to tailor, adjust, and finalize my research processes.
- I am limited by my experiences, perspectives, human body, and spirit to fully understand, interpret, and learn from the generous gifts that research participants share with me (Kovach, 2021). I recognize that participants' data and participation in academic research is another form of Tâpwêwin (speaking the truth or speaking with precision and accuracy) and Wîtaskêwin (Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000).

- This study is purposefully situated within a targeted context; schools within Treaty 6 territory of Saskatchewan. Given the narrow research context, the findings of the study are not suggested to be widely generalizable as universal truths. However, the value of the case and the relevance are suggested to extend beyond the case. The reader is invited to analyze and apply the findings as appropriate or relevant to their own unique context. The contexts and experiences of schools, including the SBL who serve within them are recognized as being unique but not unlike other educational contexts in the province or country.
- This study is concerned with the gap between ministerial policy and goals and Indigenous educational outcomes in Saskatchewan and is ultimately about Indigenous children and communities. This study was not guided by an Indigenous advisor council or group and has not had significant Indigenous input. The provincial educational system is colonial and lacks the balance of thought worlds described by Ermine (2007) and the same should be said about this study.

The following delimitations were imposed on my study to make it more relevant to the research goal and manageable to conduct:

- I first declare outright that I am not an Indigenous person and that I selected non-Indigenous research methodology and methods to ensure that I do not cause harm by unjustly appropriating or inappropriately using ways of knowing, being, and doing from Indigenous scholars. Due to the limitations of the Education Doctorate program, the urgency of completing this study, and the scope of research, this study doesn't feature Indigenous methodologies. This research design choice limits the richness and the findings of the study but since I lack the knowledge and the people to guide me in this approach, selecting alternate methodologies allowed me to conduct the study ethically. My research intent was to work alongside Indigenous people and to ensure that their children, communities, and rights are known, respected, and upheld. Success in this pursuit, I would hope, would allow me to be accepted in my community as a responsible treaty person.
- I focused my study exclusively in Treaty 6 territory because it is my birth land, it gives my family and I the gifts, rights, and responsibilities that have allowed us to grow, prosper, benefit, and to become the people we are today.

- I focused my study exclusively on SBLs because at the time of writing, I serve my community in this role, I am a colleague to others, and it is an important and complex role that despite having a significant amount of research and empirical evidence, is conceptualized, undertaken, and lived out in countless different ways. SBLs are tasked with understanding the formative school years of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, to overcome institutional and societal barriers, and to ensure their academic success through leadership actions, beliefs, and processes. SBLs are continually faced with new trends, realities, and pressures, and more needs to be known about this important role and its evolving reality, directly from their accounts.
 - While the purpose of the study is to better understand SBLs' leadership actions, beliefs, and processes, when interpreting and implementing policy, they influence, support, and work directly with numerous teachers. By interviewing SBLs, I had hoped to collect proximal data about those who have the greatest direct impact on Indigenous students' learning, teachers. Unfortunately, this wasn't presented by research participants during the semi-structured interviews and is not included in this study.
 - I selected SBLs as research participants because of their roles, responsibilities, and the awareness they have of multiple teachers' practices and experiences with Indigenous students. This group has also been selected because of the direct link between the role and the University of Saskatchewan's Education Doctorate program's focus on educational leadership. I have excluded division-based leaders from my study because I feel their data would be distal and lacking the tangible rich accounts of educational policy implementation practice, and would lack the conversations, observations, and products of actual teacher practice that are known by SBLs.
- I collected the voices, perspectives, and experiences of a small number of SBLs to ensure that the volume of data is large enough to find patterns, trends, and themes but not so large that I it couldn't be complete independently.
- I focused my study on the Inspiring Success educational policy because it is the current equity-based educational policy in effect in Saskatchewan. It seeks to undo past harms, ensure mutual benefit and well-being for all treaty people.

- I designed, controlled, and executed this study with a sense of urgency to comply to the program’s timelines and requirements. This dissertation is a compromise of what I wanted to investigate, how I wanted to give back from my opportunity to learn, and the type of change I wish to create in the educational leadership landscape and educational sector with my community. This investigation has been completed as a part-time human growth experience.

1.4 Assumptions -

The following assumptions have been made about my study:

- The above-noted limitations and delimitations sufficiently frame me as a researcher and my study to the reader.
- Success in education is crucial for graduating from high school. If a student is not successful in learning, they are much more likely to drop out and leave the public education system and experience harder living conditions, well-being, and joy than if they had been successful. Success is individually and culturally defined (Miller, 2020; Street et al., 2020) and I suggest no single global definition. The definition of the IS educational policy and the provincial auditor are explored in this dissertation.
- School-based leaders will be knowledgeable about the Inspiring Success educational policy and will be able and willing to answer questions about their professional efforts in interpreting and implementing this policy in their school(s).
- There will be sufficient confidence and trust between research participants and me to talk about their efforts in leading equity-based policy change efforts, something noted in research to be very complex, challenging to accomplish, and often fraught with problems and limited success.
- The personal preparation I undertook was adequate and that this work was conceived, designed, conducted, and completed with a good heart and that it is a worthy gift of giving back for all that I have received. Beyond this, I trust that it will be accepted in this way by the reader and my community.
- That this dissertation will begin to be a part of a larger solution and bring about positive change in my community.

1.5 Philosophical and Theoretical Frameworks -

My study seeks to investigate the problem of practice faced by SBLs in Saskatchewan which is the gap between ministerial policy and goals and Indigenous educational outcomes in Saskatchewan. This problem of practice can be made more comprehensible by understanding it related to theoretical frameworks that help to explain the context, elements, and factors at play with this problem of practice. Systems leadership and systems theory (Meadows, 2008; Senge, 2003; Senge et al., 2007; Senge & von Ameln, 2019) allows various leaders to begin to understand how systems work, their results, and their patterns once the relationships between the structure and the behaviours are understood. Systems thinking warns us against the fallacy of expecting large scale or second-order change from changing the parameters and/or variables in a system. As such, these changes rarely bring about large scale or second-order change. Critical race theory (Baker, 2006; Gillborn, 2015; Held, 2019; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015; Park & Bahia, 2022; Sleeter, 2017; Sablan, 2019; Su, 2017) allows us to understand the socially constructed nature of race in societies through time and how our society gives unequal access to rights and privileges to certain members. The settler-colonial project (Dei & Kempt, 2006; Elliott-Groves & Fryberg, 2019; Masta, 2019; Tupper, 2013; Veracini, 2008) claims that certain peoples can be stripped of their humanity and claims to their ancestral lands because of the claims and logics of a dominant foreign group. The foreign group then claims the land and resources for their own use through perceived superiority and entitlement. Fixed-pie or zero-sum schema (Eibach & Keegan, 2006) explains that in contemporary governments and societies, changes to support equity, the marginalized, and undue historic wrongs or harms requiring significant money and public resources cannot be considered nor pursued because of alleged resource scarcity and that they are more needed elsewhere for worthier causes. Class warfare (Peterson, 1997) is an ongoing and open conflict between classes or groups of people in society over the distribution of wealth and income. In the pursuit of the protection of perceived self-interest and limited government social funds, each class struggles, wages open hostility and conflict, and attacks others to protect, gain, and to avoid losses to other classes through governments and the private marketplace (Barlow & Robertson, 1994; McMurtry, 1998, 2002; Orłowski, 2015). This logic is often applied and espoused by elites to public sector expenditures where the prevalent belief is that more must be done with less and cuts to expenses are continuously sought despite their harmful effects on the quality of service and the sector specific impacts that will occur. This results in a vicious cycle where underfunding

and cutting of budgets are sought but the impacts and the limited results are ignored. The resulting lack of improvement is suggested to be a sector failure and the reason why greater governmental control and privatization are prescribed and legislated (Orlowski, 2015).

1.6 Organization of the Dissertation -

This organizational improvement plan dissertation is organized into five papers.

The first paper introduces my prior experiences and me, the problem of practice, and the main framing of the study to the reader. Presented were the purpose, relevance, definitions, the inquiry question and main research questions, limitations and delimitations, assumptions, and frameworks.

The second paper presents the most relevant literature, empirical and non-empirical evidence, to the study. This information was reviewed, explored, and shared with the reader to present the complexity of the topic and of relevant information that should be considered. The literature review focuses on four main areas of research. The treaty legacy and relationship with Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island which is a history of broken promises, harm, and oppression inflicted by settlers and a resulting debt owed to Indigenous peoples. The current societal context in which educational policy must thrive, which is the underlying societal and economic realities impacting the people, places, and policies in public education including the persistence of white supremacy and ongoing systemic and individual racism common in North American communities. Principals, who are educational policy leaders, are examined and their leadership styles, actions, dispositions, and needs are noted. The public education sector and educational policy identify the complex role held by SBLs, the landscape, and the essential processes of making sense and implementing educational policy.

The third paper presents my research choices in designing the study. Included in the paper are my strategic and critical decisions, the case study methodology, semi-structured interview methods, participant selection, data collection process and tools, data analysis process, measures taken for validity and reliability, and my ethical considerations.

The fourth paper presents my research data and findings. Participants are briefly presented, and research findings are shared in depth.

Paper five summarizes the findings, engages in discussion, and makes concluding statements. Also included are implications for practice, theory, and future research pathways.

1.7 Paper One Summary

In this paper, I presented myself as a researcher, my selected problem of practice related to SBLs in Saskatchewan, the inquiry question guiding my study, the main research questions, and the Treaty 6 context. I presented the limitations and delimitations as well as additional assumptions about my study. An overview of the artifact, an organizational improvement plan, and its structure was shared.

Paper 2: Review of the Literature and Background to Problem of Practice

Saskatchewan's PreK-12 public education system continues to produce persistent disparity between the graduation rates and reading levels of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, 2019, 2021, 2023). Educational leaders, including school-based leaders (SBLs) are tasked with closing the achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students through educational policy (EP) and are largely bound by the funding provided by the provincial government. School-based leaders (SBLs) in various school boards in Treaty 6 territory have made their best attempt to achieve the policy goals and to close the achievement gap; however, these efforts have made little impact (Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, 2023). I wish to investigate Saskatchewan's educational leadership problem of practice (PoP) which is the gap between ministerial policy and goals and Indigenous educational outcomes in Saskatchewan. To better understand the existing research base and area of inquiry that could solve this PoP, I conducted a review of the literature on the relevant topics and grouped it into four themes. Prior research is informative; however, it doesn't provide the comprehensive information needed for SBLs and the policy chain to solve the PoP.

2.1 **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to share the findings of my review of the literature on relevant topics that impact the PoP and the area of inquiry in Treaty 6 territory. To better understand the factors that impact how SBLs engage with educational policy, I reviewed past course materials from the Doctorate of Education program at the University of Saskatchewan and later completed multiple searches with ERIC (Ovid) for peer-reviewed journal articles using several different search terms with *ERIC full text, year 2000 to current*, and *peer reviewed* as limits on a range of topics including public policy, EP, policy implementation (PI), educational policy implementation, systems leadership, culturally responsive practices, culturally sustaining practices, cultural humility, educational equity, educational accountability, continuous improvement, educational racism, white supremacy, institutional racism, and more. My search results were often very large, into the thousands, and other times they would be very small and below 100. For each topic searched, I would review the first 50 results, or so, assess if access to the article would be possible and read the title, abstract, and keywords to consider whether to include or exclude the publication in the literature review. When relevant material was found, I would access and read them in their entirety. Afterwards, a snowball approach was typically used

to review the references to better understand the article's research base and its applicability for my own study. I gathered journal articles, peer reviewed and not, book chapters, policy documents, auditor reports, and organizational information documents for my literature review. In the end, I read approximately 16 texts on equity, accountability, and social justice in educational outcomes, 16 texts on white supremacy, white ignorance, white fragility, educational racism, and racism, I read 6 texts on culturally responsive/sustaining practices, 26 texts on colonization/decolonization, colonialism, and the settler colonial project, 20 texts on policy implementation, EP, public policy, and sense making in public/EP, and 6 texts on the Indian Residential School system, Indigenous governance, Indigenous success, and Indigenous knowledge, and others not listed here. These paper materials, once read and annotated were organized into topics and themes and kept filed in a large filing cabinet. Digital copies were kept using a similar filing structure on my secure laptop. An Excel document created to manage important information about the digital documents was again kept on my secure laptop. The culmination of this work, condensed into four themes, is presented in this paper.

2.2 Background to Problem of Practice and Brief Foreshadowing of Themes

I investigated the Saskatchewan educational leadership PoP faced by school-based leaders in Treaty 6 territory in Saskatchewan which is the gap between ministerial policy and goals and Indigenous educational outcomes in Saskatchewan. SBLs are at the end of the EP chain and are responsible for crucial leadership tasks such as interpreting policy, determining change readiness, sense making, implementing policies, measuring impacts, and making changes to meet organizational goals, among many others. Through my investigation of the literature and course materials on EP, SBLs leadership, and EP driven equity, better understand the boundaries of what is already known in international and comparative research and what remains unknown, the contextual factors that impact the work of SBLs with EP, and how SBLs successfully implemented policy to support the improvement of educational outcomes of Indigenous children learning in Treaty 6 territory. The research and information reviewed was leveraged to help me frame my study and questions.

There are many groups focused on equity-based educational policy (Darling-Hammond & Hill, 2015; Leithwood et al., 2020; OECD, 2016), often through accountability and continuous improvement processes (Adelman & Taylor, 2017; Braun et al., 2021; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Hallinger & Heck, 2011; Michela et al., 1996; Ming, 2023; Park et al., 2013; Shakman et

al., 2020). I wish to investigate principals, vice principals, and assistant principals, as the people with positional authority, whose conduct, values, and dispositions are essential to equity and ethical conduct in educational leadership, and that must also compel subordinates to bring about change for oppressed racial and minority groups and the greater good of the provincial community (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015), often, against significant racial tension (Briscoe & McIntosh, 2023; Gunn et al., 2011; Orłowski, 2008). I am confident that this study is compelling and timely as it seeks answers to questions that challenge and confound the public (Ladson-Billings, 2016) and is a current provincial EP target. In Saskatchewan, creating accountability focused standardized testing has a history of controversy with parents and stakeholders and was quickly abandoned when last suggested (Spooner & Orłowski, 2013). I recognize that this knowledge and topic are inherently political because the system maintains the subordination of those with limited power (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015). Since its original inception in 1989 (Bouvier & Karlenzig, 2006), the Ministry of Education of Saskatchewan has created a sector-wide framework to focus on improvement (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2011) and later, the provincial government, the Ministry of Education, and the Provincial Auditor have used Lean, a continuous improvement methodology (Singh & Singh, 2015), to seek sector efficiencies and reductions, to maintain the focus (Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, 2019, Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, 2021), and to increase equitable outcomes for Indigenous students (Braun et al., 2021).

In my search for evidence, I first looked back in time at the literature relevant to the treaty legacy and relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island. This exploration uncovered a history of broken promises, harm, and oppression inflicted by non-Indigenous settlers and a resulting debt owed to Indigenous peoples. Next, the review explored the current societal context in which the provincial EP must thrive. This uncovered the underlying societal and economic realities impacting the people, places, and policies in PE including the search for continuous improvement despite the persistence of neoliberal economic policy and fiscal conservatism, class warfare, white supremacy, and ongoing systemic and individualized racism which is common in North American communities. Afterwards, SBLs as EP leaders are explored and their noted leadership styles, actions, dispositions, and needs are presented. Finally, the literature review investigated the public education (PE) sector and EP and

highlighted the intensity and complexity found in their context, the professional educational leadership landscape, and the demands they face when leading their schools and communities.

In the EP research, most researchers referred to principals. As such, I will maintain this language standard and refer to SBLs, which includes principals, vice-principals, and assistant principals as principals. Furthermore, in alignment with Khalifa et al. (2019), when I refer to Indigenous peoples, I will be referring to non-white, non-Western First Nations peoples who are the original peoples of Canada as well as the Métis, a distinct people who emerged on Turtle Island as a result of the contact between western and Indigenous peoples. I sought information specific to Indigenous people whenever possible. It cannot be assured that Indigenous peoples are included when I refer to research findings that make reference to nondominant and marginalized people, terms used by the cited researcher, even if they might be considered to share the attributes and conditions faced by Indigenous peoples in Treaty 6 territory. When Indigenous peoples are identified specifically in the literature, even if by other names such as Native Americans, or First Nations, I have referred to them here as Indigenous.

This literature review further explores the themes and personal experiences I have presented in paper 1 but grounds them in empirical and non-empirical research. I wish to note that the ethical space between Indigenous and western peoples thought worlds (Ermine, 2007) and the research I was able to find on these topics was dominated by the western perspective, way of being, doing, and knowing. As a researcher, I fully accept the possibility that my efforts to uncover this information was flawed. I am aware of this bias in my literature review and welcome future additions to this knowledge base from Indigenous perspective now and in the future.

2.3 Theme One Literature Review

The first theme explored is the treaty legacy and historic relationship with Indigenous peoples in Treaty 6 territory. Research findings indicate that a legacy of hardship and suffering has been inflicted on Indigenous peoples by non-Indigenous peoples in the pursuit of the settler colonial project.

2.3.1 The Treaty Legacy and Historic Relationship with Indigenous Peoples on Turtle Island, in Canada, and in Saskatchewan

Indigenous people experienced continuous significant change since the arrival of non-Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island (Deer, 2011). Part of this experience included the signing of

treaties between Indigenous people and the British Crown, which were based on Plains Cree principles of ““Miyo-wîcêhtowin” (“Living together on the land”), “Wîtaskêwin” (“Getting along with others”), and “Pimâcihowin” (“Making a living”)” (Office of the Treaty Commissioner, 2008, p. 9), which would later become the building blocks for Canada. After welcoming non-Indigenous newcomers to their lands and signing treaties with them, the federal government began inflicting what has been determined to be a long legacy of oppression and hardship (Green, 2006; Canadianart, 2017). This was a concerted effort called the settler colonial project (Veracini, 2011) and it was paired with colonialism and supporting colonial policies (Veracini, 2018) such as the displacement of Indigenous peoples against their will by authorities for specific purposes, and the attempt to carry out various types of genocide on Indigenous peoples (Calderon, 2014; Gibbons, 2018; Madden, 2019a; Masta, 2019; Patzer, 2014; Powell & Peristerakis, 2014; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Tupper, 2012; Zembylas & Matias, 2023). This locally experienced reality was part of a wider European settler colonial project being carried out by various groups and entities at the birth of capitalist modernity (Dirlik, 2003, 2005, 2014; Persky, 1995; Veracini, 2008, 2011). Social engineering attempts and the elimination of traditional governance and self-determination of Indigenous peoples were pursued strategically with policy instruments (Patzer, 2014; Peach, 2011; Sloan & Castleden, 2019; Veracini, 2011).

Since signing the treaties, unlike Indigenous peoples, non-indigenous peoples gained privilege and benefit through economic and social exclusion. Non-Indigenous peoples have demonstrated perceived superiority and entitlement which has been engrained in Canadian society, reinforced, and normalized (Parasram, 2019; Tupper, 2013) and built communities founded on settler colonial assumptions of white privilege (Wallin & Tunison, 2022). Land acquisition (Morgan et al., 2019) and attempts to erase Indigeneity (Sloan & Castleden, 2019) were central to the settler colonial project to establish control in new lands on new peoples. Shortly after the Canadian treaties were negotiated between the British Crown and Indigenous peoples, the government implemented the Indian Act in 1876 rendering the Crown’s promises meaningless (Orlowski & Cottrell, 2019), and left Indigenous peoples disempowered, dispossessed, and with a loss of self-determination through targeted decisions and actions, from the time of initial contact to the present day (Patzer, 2014). The implementation of this significant policy affected Indigenous peoples’ ability to deliver good governance and effective

administration, including educational contexts, because it gave control and authority over Indigenous peoples to the federal government (Stewart, 2006) through targeted acts of colonialism (Needham, 2021; Veracini, 2018). Colonialism is linked to oppression and the source of hatred towards Indigenous peoples based on the colonial relationship. Racism exists in the presence of privilege, which relies on economic and political exploitation (Green, 2006). The lasting impacts on Indigenous peoples are the loss of language, culture, as well as the need to survive in communities that blame the victims as opposed to supporting and healing the survivors (Donald et al., 2011) and marginalization and oppression on reservation land or in poor socioeconomic conditions (Jutras, 2022).

The Canadian state and churches sought the cultural transformation, assimilation, and the erasure of Indigenous communities and achieved this with formidable weapons (Cottrell et al., 2012), such as policy and laws that made the instruction of Indigenous languages illegal (Ladson-Bilings, 2016). The Canadian government has a documented history of strategically using policies as tools against Indigenous people to oppress and destroy them, as it was the case with the Indian Residential School system which subjugated, assimilated, and destroyed Indigenous peoples and gave the government control over all aspects of their education and lives (Assembly of First Nations, 2010). The government's federal education policy, saw more than 150,000 First Nations, Inuit and Métis children taken from their families to be *civilized* through church-run schools (Assembly of First Nations, 2010; Drummond & Kachuk Rosenbluth, 2013) producing tragic results for Indigenous peoples and the Canadian society (Anderson & Richards, 2016). These church-run schools operated in Canada from the 1870s to the 1990s (Union of the Ontario Indians, 2013) and is one of the greatest educational atrocities and exclusions because it forcibly removed innocent children from their families and homes, delivered low-level education in substandard conditions to a targeted racial group of Canada's society, and tried to erase the language and culture of Indigenous peoples so that they could become trained labour for the nation state (Veracini, 2011). Former chief commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Justice Murray Sinclair stated: "[e]ducation is what got us into this mess – the use of education at least in terms of residential schools – but education is the key to reconciliation" (Madden, 2019a, p. 292). The last Canadian residential school, located in what is now called Saskatchewan, closed in 1996 (Union of Ontario Indians, 2013), less than 30 years ago. Since its closure a period of poor sociodemographic realities have continued for Indigenous

peoples (Wallin & Tunison, 2022) despite calls for social cohesion based on new relationships and understanding (Green, 2006). Now, Indigenous peoples in Saskatchewan benefit the least from publicly funded schools, and as a group of peoples, consistently have the lowest educational outcomes (Cottrell et al., 2012; Cottrell & Hardie, 2019; Government of Saskatchewan, 2018; Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, 2023).

The above-mentioned policies are the source of Indigenous peoples struggle who must now free themselves from the systems of social and political control imposed by the Canadian state (Powell & Peristerakis, 2014). This history is often hidden by settler nationalism in Canada which claims innocence (Parasram, 2019), and the best of intentions (Battell Lowman & Barker, 2015). Despite the historical truth, the nation confidently exports its version of “enlightened modernity to the rest of the world through peacekeeping, development, and foreign policy” (p. 196). Collective amnesia is forgetting what was displeasing so that whites can live ignorantly and guilt free (Mills, 2007). What has been hidden and forgotten is also said to have been “sanitized, invisibilized, and excluded” (p. 587) from official accounts and common knowledge (Khalifa et al., 2019). Some truths and alternate knowledge can only be acquired through cultural relationality (Wildcat & Voth, 2023), are often missing in dominant white spaces, and could be acquired through appropriate stances (Donald et al., 2013).

In Saskatchewan, the cumulative effect of the legacy of oppressive policy is the commonality of Indigenous “unemployment, poverty, residence overcrowding, welfare dependency, incarceration, suicide, ill health, school dropout rates, and premature mortality at rates far higher than the general Saskatchewan or Canadian population” (Cottrell et al., 2012, p. 248). Poverty in the province is a racialized phenomenon (Cottrell and Orlowski, 2015; Spooner, 2015). Colonialism, white supremacy, and all levels of federalist government in Canada (Robinson, 2014) continue to normalize the culture of daily accumulation and dispossession by claiming to respect Indigenous rights while ignoring and contravening Indigenous leaders, maintaining structural racism (Parasram, 2019), and oppressive policy (Dunstan, 2017). For Indigenous peoples, cultural survival, as well as the achievement of important educational objectives and outcomes, such as student learning and successful high school graduation, have been strategically jeopardized (Restoule, 2008). There are many available statistics that indicate that Indigenous communities continue to suffer because of broken treaty promises, repressive policy that impedes the efficient delivery of service, pervasive disadvantage, and normative

widespread and systemic deprivation (Cottrell et al., 2012; Dunstan, 2017). Individual acts of racism are typically condemned by members of a community, but the same consensus is lacking for historical acts and the existence of systemic racism. Beyond incompetence and neglect, and approaching inexcusable, dominance and subordination exist and implicates all members of a community, but due to the belief of renewed relationships and understanding, general responsibility from whites is refused (Green, 2006). In Saskatchewan's education context specifically, Indigenous students score the lowest on all measures (Cottrell et al., 2012; Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, 2023). "Perhaps our largest moral debt is to the Indigenous peoples whose presence was all but eradicated from the nation" (Ladson-Billing, 2016, p. 8) and a legacy of underfunding that constitutes an educational debt owed to these same peoples (Orlowski & Cottrell, 2019).

The Indian Act remains in effect in Canada and its effects are still being felt by Indigenous learners (Needham, 2021), particularly regarding opportunities to learn and general educational achievement (Orlowski & Cottrell, 2019) resulting in low learning rates and graduation rates significantly below those of non-Indigenous students (Anderson & Richards, 2016; Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, 2023). This alone demonstrates inequitable societal conditions created and inflicted through Canadian government policy. The history and scope of recent federal policy affecting Indigenous people in Canada demonstrate the true intentions behind the treaty promises and government policies; oppression, assimilation, and destruction of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing (Mills et al., 2010).

There is a great need to undo the harm inflicted upon Indigenous peoples and to enable them to prosper like other citizens through educational opportunities, including language and culture revitalization (Stewart, 2006; Government of Saskatchewan, 2018). Once accomplished, *Wîtaskêwin* could be achieved through truth and reconciliation. *Tâpwêwin* (Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000) and being left to feel uncomfortable is a good thing (Gill, 2020) and white settlers should move to action without hiding behind scientific rigour, especially against institutional racism and oppression. Indigenous peoples and settlers, as demonstrated by Justice Murray Sinclair and the Saskatchewan provincial government, believe that education, which was once a tool of oppression, can now be the tool that liberates (Abele, 2007; Anderson & Fleming, 2014; Assembly of First Nations, 2010; Madden, 2019a; Sefa Dei & Restoule, 2019; Simeone, 2014).

2.4 Theme Two Literature Review

The second theme explored the origins of the non-Indigenous community in Saskatchewan, the settler colonial project, the societal context in which educational policy must thrive, societal problems and open opposition from whites, racial realities and the current state for Indigenous peoples, and recent educational funding as system underfunding through fiscal conservatism.

2.4.1 Societal Context in Which Educational Policy Must Thrive

When engaging in reform through PI, such as addressing the harms perpetrated by policy and school systems that hold a legacy of systemic racism and genocide perpetuated through the settler colonial project by federal and provincial governments (Cottrell & Orłowski, 2015; Patzer, 2014; Powell & Peristerakis, 2014; Wallin & Tunison, 2022), significant resistance is typically believed to be an indication that something is wrong or flawed with the change or that the pace and nature are somehow inappropriate (Amis et al., 2004, p. 26). Predictable and universal sources of resistance can be anticipated, considered, and countered through strategic processes that reduce the intensity and volume of resistance to the change (Kanter, 2012). In Canada, there exists a legacy of racially based tensions that are clearly noted in the systemic marginalization of Indigenous peoples and the opposition to reconciliation and settlement claims for past wrong (Wallin & Tunison, 2022). This is also noted for those trying to address systemic racism and faced personal hardship and refusal for their efforts from whites while being honoured by Indigenous peoples (Green, 2006). These noted sources of resistance are not unique as North American society is defined and permeated by racial realities (Baker, 2006) and class warfare (Orłowski, 2015; Peterson, 1997; Barlow & Robertson, 1994).

Saskatchewan, as a province and as a community of humans, holds no immunity to significant racial tension and issues as most of the immigrant residents who settled in this region accepted cultural conformity, abandoned their mother tongues and cultures, and adopted the white notions of isolated social harmony and cooperation (Cottrell et al., 2012). Becoming white and gaining acceptance to the white dominant group was possible for some because of changes to racial definitions (Baker, 2006; Mills, 2007) which allowed them to be part of the dominant majority (Baker, 2006). Through competitive exclusion, non-Indigenous peoples have used their accumulated wealth, privileges, and special accesses to maintain and grow their power, privilege, and wealth while excluding Indigenous peoples from these same possibilities (Bialik et al., 2018;

Cottrell et al., 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2016; Zembylas & Matias, 2023). These white privileges are the result of racism and juxtaposed against Indigenous trauma and suffering (Green, 2006). Canada and Saskatchewan are settler states that seek cohesion, cross-cultural harmony, state legitimization, and reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and the descendants of European settlers (Tupper, 2014) through formal apology, official recognition of Indigenous cultures and languages and material redistribution (Cottrell et al., 2012). These recent actions seek to maintain the myth of Canadian tolerance, national benevolence, and the false belief that racism exists elsewhere but not in Canada (Mills et al., 2010). Since, the material distribution from settlers to Indigenous peoples does not seem to have maintained itself and erosion has been noted.

Racism, ignorance, delusion, sexism, patriarchy, and supremacy, driven by the white dominant majority are normative and universal in North American societies (Mills, 2007) and make implementing equity-based policies very difficult. Whiteness is normalized, the race and position are taken for granted, and “racism is complex, subtle, and systematic” (Taylor, 2017 p. 71). Persisting racial inequalities for minorities are the result of social stability and security for whites, better understood to be the privileging of one group at the expense of another. Funding equity-based policies requires financial resources, however, zero sum and fixed-pie logics are suggested as reasons why financial austerity is needed despite the fact that additional resources can be applied to create greater equity, without this being perceived, or being a loss for whites (Eibach and Keegan, 2006). Strong positions and beliefs, maintained by whites through white supremacy, allow them to maintain control, dominance, and the subjugation of all others by refusing their humanity, refusing to listen to or acknowledge their experience, refusing to confront a long and violent history and ongoing legacy of injustice from white domination, refusing to share physical space resulting in visible segregation, and finally refusing to face structural causes which leaves little room for positive equitable change to take root (Gibbons, 2018).

The lack of support and negative views of whites towards inclusive ideology and true multiculturalism are attributed to their aversion to losing their own privileges (Plaut et al., 2011). Race is a socially constructed concept, and racial superiority was purposively built and proven with loose science resulting in ongoing outward violence and domination from whites, which defined the past (Baker, 2006; Gibbons, 2018), “continue[s] to shape injustice into the present” (Mills, 1997, p. 729). The impacts of race are also noted in education, curricular content, and

multicultural perspectives that impede progress for Indigenous learners in Saskatchewan (St Denis, 2007, 2011). The five refusals of white supremacy; centring humanity, experience, history, geographies, and structures systematically benefit whites (Mills, 1997). Indigenous students' race, class and gender influence educational choices made for and about them and has led to their discrimination and negative impacts on their future employment and financial well-being, which makes addressing professional beliefs and eliminating biased decision-making in education through policy greatly important (Riley and Ungerleider, 2012). White parents are known to fear, oppose, and critique diversity and equity initiatives that they felt compromised their racial privilege (Henry et al., 2021; Theoharis et al., 2023; Toure & Dorsey, 2018). Saskatchewan, is a space where poverty, including childhood poverty, is an accepted racialized reality driven by inequity and maintained by genetic-deficit discourse, racist belief, and a logic of blaming the victims even if greater societal equity can be achieved through public expenditures and distribution of wealth (Cottrell & Orłowski, 2015; Spooner, 2015). The culture and ways of being of leaders influences the way they carry out change for their community and the impact they achieve (Gambrell, 2016). Interest convergence is suggested to be viable and more effective than privilege-based approaches in creating change, pathways forward, and equitable opportunities for minorities while avoiding backlash from whites by ensuring that policies and initiatives benefit white children as well as poor children of colour (Kafka & Wilson, 2023; Park & Liu, 2014; Pierce, 2016; Pierson-Brown, 2022).

Race, as a social construct, is infused with different privileges for whites, seeking supremacy over all others, through racialized sociopolitical power structures that are not offered to people of colour (Zembylas & Matias, 2023). The Indian Act, a Canadian federal policy, continues to openly discriminate against a single group, bars societal equity, and creates barriers to every foundational element of life for Indigenous people (Dunstan, 2017). Critical Race Theory (Gillborn, 2015; Held, 2019; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015; Park & Bahia, 2022; Sleeter, 2017; Sablan, 2019; Su, 2017) posits that society is deeply impacted by racial constructs. Race and racism are engrained in society (Tupper, 2013), the reality of unequal access to rights and privileges exist for Indigenous people, and educational policy is dominated by mechanisms of white supremacy (Su, 2017). This disrupts various forms of development, lacks reciprocity, requires unequal power, and employs force to maintain inequality (Pratt, 2004). Racial constructs intertwined with the colonial settler project strive to maintain inequity and privileges (Tupper &

Mitchell, 2022), normalize and legitimize displacement and unequal relations, and exist as a form of domination (Veracini, 2011). Seeking equality in our community is highly challenging because of existing entrenched interests, allegiances, and advantages (DiAngelo, 2018; Valasco & Sansone, 2019) and those in the education sector are not immune to racist ways of knowing and being (Tupper, 2013). Attitudes and dispositions toward change can be demonstrated in active and passive forms (Valasco & Sansone, 2019) and strategic ignorance which opposes reconciliation efforts with Indigenous peoples and equity-based policy goals (Tupper, 2013). Teachers and leaders are susceptible to white ignorance, and some use it to protect and divest themselves of meaningful engagement and meeting professional responsibilities causing lasting negative impacts on students (Tupper, 2013).

For Indigenous peoples in Canada, according to the Indigenous affairs minister and United Nations officials, their situation is a humanitarian crisis, meanwhile, the white dominant majority, who are their treaty partners, see them as underserving of assistance and deserving of their condition (Parasram, 2019). It is unrealistic to believe that oppressed peoples, who have been only recently set free, will be successful without any assistance in a hostile and racist social and economic struggle against the perpetrators of the prior violence, and in an educational context, PMs and educational leaders that expect that the educational gap between dominant and oppressed groups will narrow without significant interventions and supports is wishful thinking at best (Ladson-Billings, 2016). Indigenous families are considered deficient, deviant, or uncaring when they do not uphold settler-colonial agendas (Washington and Johnson, 2023). The landscape and the persistence of inequity (Patuawa et al., 2023) needs to be better understood and described through frameworks for leaders so that they may in turn understand the impact of white supremacy in educational policy and practice (Galloway and Ishimaru, 2015).

Racism and whiteness reproduce themselves through generations and countering the above-noted societal problems through teacher education efforts to produce racially just educational contexts has had limited success (Zembylas & Matias, 2023). Significant changes in a system require multiple generations to achieve (Meadows, 2008). School leaders have and continue to perpetrate and benefit from Indigenous elimination (Washington & Johnson, 2023). Leaders and teachers are not prepared to teach Indigenous students, they lack resources, and Indigenous educational outcomes are profoundly impacted by the legacy and lasting harms of the residential schools (Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, 2023).

Educational Funding

Underfunding Indigenous education federally is a form of economic exclusion and was one of the most significant embodiments of colonialism in Canada (Gauthier et al., 2020). Counter-pressures to public funding of education are neoliberal economics and class warfare (Dabscheck, 2018; McMurtry, 1998; McMurtry, 2002; Orłowski, 2015; Peterson, 1997; Schiller, 2008; Sumner, 2007). The current achievement gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students legitimate colonial myths rather than identify debts owed to Indigenous peoples for a century of colonization (Needham, 2021; Orłowski & Cottrell, 2019). The economic and social survival of Indigenous peoples and the undoing of cultural genocide depend on a tradition of oral transmission of large amounts of spiritual and practical knowledge, which is vulnerable to the impacts of underfunding (Patzner, 2014; Powell & Peristerakis, 2014; Rae, 2009). This transmission is dependent on quality educational contexts and experiences that are made possible through well-funded education (Lupton, 2005). At the heart of the concerns for adequate funding is ensuring that students have high-quality teachers and supports which are known to be the limiting factor that affects the objectives and quality of an education system (Anderson & Richards, 2016; Assembly of First Nations, 2010; Carr-Stewart, 2006; Drummond & Kachuk Rosenbluth, 2013; Shizha, 2017). Designing policy and pairing it with adequate policy instruments to immediately address the chronic underfunding of education must be the starting point so that the ongoing low educational results may be addressed, and the impacts of modern colonialism may begin to diminish (Rae, 2009). Questions of quality in teaching and management, according to Lupton (2005) are problems of inadequate resources.

It is unclear if increased educational spending will solve education's problem in reaching its goal of educating all youth (Grubb, 2009; Hyman, 2017) as funding beyond a certain level lacks impact and despite massive increases in funding, the average achievement hasn't improved over past decades (Hattie, 2015a). More money could be spent without ever creating positive outcomes as the most effective educational resources cannot be bought and schools are encouraged to develop their capacity to respond to their existing incentives, to seek reductions in waste, and to undertake audits rather than to seek additional funding to seek improvements (Grubb, 2009). PMs are also cautioned not to expect gains in student achievement from adjusting annual funding rates (Hattie, 2015a). Counter claims emphasize the importance of understanding

the effects of spending and indicated that increases in educational expenditures can have many positive desirable impacts (Hyman, 2017; Kang, 2021).

Lower levels of funding have been identified as the cause of failing public schools in the United States (Kang, 2021). Funding is dependent on a viable tax base which provides funds and can be affected by multiple factors and crises (Cerniglia & Longaretti, 2012; Derisma, 2013; Driscoll et al., 2014; Robinson, 2004). There are two common competing views about how to address these: fiscal conservatism that reduces costs and expenditures or robust PE expenditures that increase competitiveness, productivity, and economic growth (Driscoll et al., 2014). In the case of fiscal conservatism, multiple rounds of detrimental cuts to PE created a lack of funding for educational services and impacts the overall quality of the system. These are often selected despite the lack of evidence for enhanced productivity through low-tax policies (Driscoll et al., 2014; Robinson, 2014). There has always been public resistance to paying taxes, often driven by class warfare (Orlowski, 2015), but citizens view paying property tax to support PE as a matter of great importance, and as a result, have greater levels of engagement (Derisma, 2013). It should be noted that it is nearly impossible to maintain the status quo when recessions and funding cuts occur due to the erosion of the tax base (Robinson, 2014). Budget cuts caused by fiscal conservatism have numerous noted detrimental effects in education (Grubb, 2009; Robinson, 2014) and limit the impacts of educational leadership (Saskatchewan School Boards, Association, n.d.).

In Saskatchewan, educational funding and the funding model are complex (Saskatchewan, 2017, p. 15) and the principle of funding stability has proven to be a perpetual challenge (Robinson, 2014) as the economic environment continues to be increasingly volatile (Driscoll et al., 2014; Self & Schraeder, 2009). Concerns with the new provincial model triggered a review focused on equity of funding in 2015, two years after changes were made, without addressing sufficiency (Perrins, 2017) nor the socioeconomic realities of students in the province (Labaree, 2018). There are many possible ways to apply fiscal concepts (Driscoll et al., 2014) to the funding of K-12 PE in Saskatchewan to “establish and maintain appropriate support of PE that is stable enough to withstand the financial stresses while inextricably being a part of cyclical economic behaviour, especially economic downturns, and management during periods of greater economic exigency” (Robinson, 2014, p. 554). Otherwise, education in Saskatchewan could become unsustainable due to a lack of funding predictability (Robinson, 2014) and could

compromise the success of the province and its citizens (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018; Ministry of Education, 2010; Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, 2023). It is worthy to note that multiple definitions of success exist (Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, 2023; Schick & St Denis, 2003; Street et al., 2020; Tunison, 2018) which requires strategic sense making (Ancona, 2011). More recent provincial funding has been tied and capped directly to rates of inflation ensuring that educational funding is maintained only in the strictest economic sense and not based on the costs of addressing the needs or educating the students enrolled in Saskatchewan's public education schools (Labaree, 2018; Perrins, 2017; Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, 2023; Robinson, 2014; Saskatchewan, 2012).

Societal Crisis and Its Impacts on Education

Low quality, interrupted, and negatively impacted learning opportunities and amplified or exacerbated prior gaps in student learning during the COVID-19 pandemic created a crisis in education (Contini et al., 2021; Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Sahlberg, 2020; Washington & Johnson, 2023), which if unaddressed, could later become a larger societal crisis (Gallagher-Mackay, 2020; Khan & Ahmed, 2021). Some impacts on learning are expected to be short-term, while others are expected to be longer lasting (Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Sahlberg, 2020). A strong concerted response would be composed of a combination of the right policy and leadership stance that supports student learning, while being efficient, collaborative, and ethical. There is a great need to undo the harm done upon Indigenous peoples, to revitalize their language and culture, and to enable them to prosper like other citizens through educational opportunities which would contribute to Wítaskêwin (Carr-Stewart, 2006).

2.5 Theme Three Literature Review

The third theme explored is principals as educational policy leaders including leadership roles, styles, actions, dispositions, and needs.

2.5.1 Principals as Educational Policy Leaders

An organization's ability to adapt, improve, and change is connected to its ability to learn and is driven by leadership (Breakspear, 2010a, 2010b; Senge, 2003). Leaders have a responsibility to treat followers with dignity and respect, to recognize their identities and needs, and to support them to accomplish mutual goals (Northouse, 2016). Principals who want to drive change can encounter open and passive resistance such as comfortable stagnation, where the staff can stifle efforts by resisting change and maintaining the existing educational and professional culture (Breakspear, 2010a). There are many commonly studied and used educational leadership styles (Alimo-Metcalf, 2013; Nelson & Squires, 2017). Of significance to this study are systems leadership, transformational leadership, instructional leadership, and culturally responsive/culturally sustaining leadership. Leadership styles are a set of skills and capacities that can be used for strategic purpose (Alimo-Metcalf, 2013) and could be ideals that professionals strive towards (Wallin et al., 2019). Principals are critical levers in addressing racial and group-based disparities in public schools (Galloway and Ishimaru, 2015). They play a central reform role and introduce innovations, shape organizational culture, and maintain relationships with key stakeholders (Marks & Printy, 2003; Martell, 2008).

Noted Relevant Educational Leadership Styles

Systems leadership, by individuals or organizations, focuses on creating the conditions for, enabling, and sustaining system-level change (Hopkins, 2013; Hopkins et al., 2014; Leithwood et al., 2020; Meadows, 2008; Sumaira & Shahbaz, 2021; Senge, 1997; Senge, 2003; Senge et al., 2007; Senge et al., 2015). The connections, interrelations, and influences of systems are important factors for educational leaders carrying out educational and societal change (Rittel & Webber, 1993). This leadership style is rooted in general systems theory from the mid 1950s where there was a focus on input/output transfers and feedback loops that later evolved to significantly more complex models that aimed to accurately capture all the elements of systems (Freedman, 2013). The impacts of systems are visible in the form of who is successful in

schools, who is selected to become educators and leaders, and their respective impacts on student learning and achievement (Hopkins, 2013).

Transformational principals rally organizations, cultures, and people towards a common moral purpose (Nelson & Squires, 2017). They influence, motivate, stimulate, consider, describe points of view, actualize missions and visions, attain higher levels, and look beyond themselves for others (Alimo-Metcalfe, 2013). Transformational leadership is essential in building the commitment of teachers through shared leadership functions who can better handle times of crisis thanks to the adaptive organizational cultures they develop, and the focus on the quality of teaching and learning in a school (Marks & Printy, 2003). Principals that are instructional leaders bring about the enrichment of curriculum delivery and ensure the availability of teaching and learning resources by defining, managing, and promoting (Chabalala & Naidoo, 2021). Transformational and instructional school leaders are guiding lights for school values (Papp & Cottrell, 2021).

Culturally responsive and sustaining (CRS) leaders decentre the white, middle-class, monolingual norm and build on decades of asset-based pedagogical research (Paris, 2017; Paris & Alim, 2014). These leaders create inclusive learning environments for ethnically, racially, and culturally diverse students when they focus on increasing student achievement and decreasing dropout rates while affirming home cultures through curricular incorporation of students' histories, values, and cultural knowledge (Washington & Johnson, 2023). CRS leaders question structural inequalities, racism, and society's injustices and demonstrate an understanding of the systemic nature of inequalities, the role that education plays in the process, the role played by deficit approaches, the improvements made possible by critical asset approaches, and the fundamental nature of humanizing relationships and their impacts on learning (Paris, 2017). These principals work with communities to challenge and transform unequal power relations and legacies of colonization and strive towards re-establishing Indigenous sovereignty and governance (Washington & Johnson, 2023).

Noted Important Principal Actions

Principals are important leaders in schools who challenge others through coaching and criticism, meet obligations through duty, set visions and agendas, influence school culture, transform policy, and make sense of policy for themselves, others and their context (Mizrahi-Shtelman, 2021). Principals' talk transfers project messages to internal stakeholders while

relying on the support of multiple communicators to ensure adequacy in PI (Timperley & Parr, 2009). There are cultural, economic, and contextual factors that influence or restrict the leadership actions, practices, and behaviours of principals and causes them to be responsive to their contexts and to apply appropriate practices (Leithwood et al., 2020). Multiple pressures are placed on SBLs (Thompson & Brezicha, 2022) which can cause them to be inactive and lack cultural responsiveness, which is problematic as these are needed in schools and classrooms (Briscoe & McIntosh, 2023; Scribner et al., 2021). They are guided by professional ethics, promote positive accountability for the greater good, influence others, navigate changes, talk with structure, and rely on professional knowledge, expertise, morals, common sense, and emotions to implement policy (Lowenhaupt et al., 2016). Principals keep children's best interests at heart (Lowenhaupt et al., 2016).

Principals who learn, act against systemic and structural roots, and self-reflect can address and remedy students' inequitable learning experiences (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015) and carryout school restructuring for strategic outcomes (Marks & Printy, 2003). Regarding student learning, principals address student inequities through resource deployment and establish system-level structures (Hands & Freckelton, 2019; Hopkins, 2013). They pursue improvement through ongoing collaborative inquiry and seek to mitigate inequities in schools (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015). Balancing the needs and interests of all by basing themselves on their expertise and interactions with others is a significant leadership action for principals, something they do while leading with specific purpose-based strategic groupings (Hands & Freckelton, 2019; Leithwood et al., 2020). Principals rightfully question dominant norms, understand them, and remedy the educational debt owed to nondominant students (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Principals are change agents who make sense of new initiatives and policies for various stakeholders, communicate vision, and link accountability to professionalism and autonomy (Lowenhaupt et al., 2016). Principals demonstrate their role identities, influence the actions and behaviours of others, execute tasks, and make strategic decisions about which policies are followed and upheld and which are ignored in their context (Mizrahi-Shtelman, 2021). The principal is a politicized role that must negotiate reform-based conflicts (Lowenhaupt et al., 2016). Responding to inequities according to a shared or espoused vision, modelling the continuous pursuit of equity, and advocating for and ensuring equitable and socially-just PI are important noted leadership actions (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015). Principals must provide

opportunities to engage with ideas and practices, sometimes beyond their individual school, and configure the organization so that it can respond to change, foster creative thinking, and design innovations when dealing with the novel problems (Breakspear, 2010a, 2010b). Other times, they must enact practices by showing others how to do things, measure impact, and re-evaluate what is known (Leithwood et al., 2020). They must also attend to the school's culture, collective beliefs, values, and traditions and ensure that these contribute to successful PI (Hands & Freckelton, 2019). Constructivist leadership creates the possibility for all to engage in acts of leadership, which in turn builds organizational capacity and leverages the power of the group to strategize and to take action (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015). This type of leadership approach enables change that decreases disparities, addresses structural roots collaboratively, and represents collaborative culture and ownership that seeks change beyond what the principal is able to accomplish individually (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015).

Leadership Dispositions

Principals are professionals but they are not immune to common problems such as racism, discrimination, oppression, implicit bias, and anti-blackness as white supremacy has mutated itself into deficit narratives and anti-racial caste system that underpin tiered privileges (Haite, 2021). Common discourses based on ideological assumptions espousing the importance of getting along, the inconsequential of race, culture and meritocracy as the only matters of importance, claims of innocence, and individuals being good by nature try to paint over the racial and discriminatory realities faced by Indigenous students in schools (Shick & St Denis, 2003). The ongoing presence of meritocracy as a colonial logic causes unacceptable Indigenous suffering which is excused as racial and cultural inadequacy (Green, 2006). Oppression is a continuous strand woven throughout the education sector with multiple manifestations and should compel the sector to self-assess itself through a critical lens, identify, and address these foundational issues (Haite, 2021).

Principals work in challenging contexts that have intensified significantly, now retire earlier, and fewer outsiders are interested in the role (Fullan, 2000). A highly demanding job, climate, and context as well as challenging situations affect individuals holistically and create underperformance, chronic stress, burnout, and even suicide (Hunter & Chaskalson, 2013)

Leadership Needs

Navigating policies and politics is not a new leadership role for principals, but it does require problem-solving skills, policy translating skills, policy shaping skills, discourse skills, and the ability to garner the support and trust of others (Werts et al., 2013). Being able to establish community alliances, to seek out partnerships, to develop inclusive programs, and to provide professional development all lead to workload intensification, increased work volume, and extended workdays for principals (Hauseman et al., 2017; Patfield et al., 2023). To support their dispositional growth, principals need supports to reflect, interrogate, self-examine, and develop awareness so that they can lead for equity through a culturally responsive stance (Haite, 2021).

Leadership training must address principals need to understand, articulate, and to be able to execute their roles (Chabalala & Naidoo, 2021). Training in argumentation that leverages background information about context, educational principles, and professional ethics allow principals to be properly equipped for advocating for reform efforts (Lowenhaupt et al., 2016). Successful principals are open-minded and ready to learn, they demonstrate flexible thinking within core values, they are persistent in their pursuit, resilient, and optimistic (Leithwood et al., 2020). Principals need opportunities to discuss commonly faced problems, clarity about specific elements to compel them to fully implement policies (Thajane & Masitsa, 2021), and skills and knowledge about PI to be successful (Hands & Freckelton, 2019). In some cases, principals understand the essence of a policy but become unsure how to overcome the competing demands they produce when combined with others (Timperley & Parr, 2009). Leaders face a tremendous pressure to be successful in their pursuits and frequent succession can be a counterforce that decreases the likelihood of their success (Leithwood et al., 2020). As such, leaders need time to know the people, places, and policies they must implement and the opportunity to work toward success as this pursuit and leadership effectiveness is complex, affected by many variables, and is rare in the field (Gilley et al., 2008).

2.6 Theme Four Literature Review

The final theme explored is public education and educational policy including the current state, nature and elements of educational policy, purpose and perspectives, relevant contexts, accountability as educational policy, realities, measures and measurement, implementation, and sense making (SM).

2.6.1 Public Education and Educational Policy

Education is an enduring structure of the settler colonial project that maintains, reinforces, and replicates oppressive ideologies through curriculum, policies, and practices that teachers universally deliver to students (Masta, 2019). PE is also a societal means of ensuring a basic level of education for all citizens and a wealth redistribution strategy driven by the collection and distribution of tax revenue through intergovernmental financial aid described as spending per student (Arcalean & Schiopu, 2015; Glomm, 2004; Kang, 2021). Redistribution occurs through majority voting (Glomm, 2004) and can address rising inequality, create equality, and contribute to higher growth rates but is limited by policy parameters and rising inequality (Arcalean & Schiopu, 2015; Glomm, 2004). Although education is a public good that benefits all members of a community, it is less seen as “a cooperative effort in nation building or a collective investment” (Labaree, 2008, p. 11) which has severe consequences for schools and society.

PMs are members of government authorities that use a range of policy tools and instruments to achieve or avoid social change through public policy (Pal, 2006). Primitive emotional responses to change initiatives could overwhelm otherwise reasonable and rational PMs and citizens and result in short-term protection and long-term dysfunction (Leonard, 2013). These emotions could also lead to active and passive resistance towards change initiatives (Self & Schraeder, 2009) which could be addressed by successfully applying change models that support others in recognizing the need for change and then cooperatively implementing the change with stakeholders (Armenakis et al., 1999). Common in leading change processes is an overfocus on what to change and a lack of attention to how change will take place (Rowland et al., 2023). Policies focus on creating change over short or a longer term which each have unique implementation timelines and requirements (Honig, 2006), equally noted in systems leadership literature (Meadows, 2008). To facilitate change, teaching, learning, and policy need to be continuously reconstructed, which creates responsiveness to a society that is continuously changing (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015). Changes in schools are driven by PMs by their policies

but they can't mandate what matters, and as such, rather than mandates, they should consider complementary policy supports (Flessa, 2012).

Public policy in Canada is routine and repetitive decision-making that deals with problems large and small by the cabinet and bureaucracy (Howlett et al., 2020). The three possible policy choices: negative -- where the status quo is maintained, positive -- where the status quo is addressed, and non-decisions -- where choices to divert from the status quo are avoided. The recent prevalence of governmental fiscal restraint and funding drops have direct impacts on policy approaches and the tools selected, have created a need to reassess priorities, reduce spending, downsize, or select less expensive regulatory instruments, and to demonstrate results while trying to achieve the same or more, with less as 70% of provincial budgets in Canada are invested into health, education, and social services which are aligned to the public interest and the common problems of citizens (Pal, 2006). Considering the policy landscape, "governments, so the argument runs, should steer, not row, and this draws them toward regulatory instruments that focus more on frameworks and outcomes than minute rules" (p. 171) and "increasingly find themselves with less money, and greater reliance on partners for the delivery of programs" (p. 176) so that their "primary role is to provide critical information, help circulate it, and encourage policy learning" (p. 176). Simply put, the "role of government is to facilitate and empower rather than to deliver and direct" (p. 177). These types of policy decisions "make sense only if organizations and individuals are granted high levels of autonomy and legitimacy as policy actors in their own right, not merely as recipients of government programs" (Pal, 2006, p. 177).

Goals of and Influences on Public Education

Schools played an important role in societies as learning organizations that strive for excellence and have a desire and willingness to change with the society they serve (Sumaira & Shahbaz, 2021). Governments and schools foster development for communities and economies (Williams, 2021) as the backbone of North American societies (Hogan et al., 2020). The Ministry of Education is responsible for leadership and direction, as well as "the preparation of goals, objections, and educational planning for the present and future growth and development of the education system" (Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, 2019, p. 243). Schools help students develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that will later allow them to lead fulfilling lives and to contribute to their communities and the overall society (Khan & Ahmed, 2021). PE has many goals, multiple competing demands from various internal and external stakeholders, and

definitions of success that can and should be viewed through various lenses (Tunison, 2018), including hegemonic, imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal values represented in media (Mercado, 2019). In recognition of the contemporary demands facing PE, it is relevant to stop and ask, “What are we doing? Is it working? For whom? Where? When? How? And, why?” (Century & Cassata, 2016, p. 169). The goals of PE in Saskatchewan are that students will know what they need for their future, that they feel safe and supported, that they feel they belong, are valued, and can be themselves (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2019). The enormity of this work cannot be understated, especially as there is no room for error or for these planners to be wrong (Rittel & Webber, 1973). In Saskatchewan, the provincial education system is visioned to ensure equitable and inclusive benefits to all learners (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018) and is noted to have the greatest capacity and responsibility to foster understanding, respect, and to promote harmony (Cottrell et al., 2012).

Education holds great societal importance in Saskatchewan and the rest of the world because its success is closely linked with rates of employment, health, and other well-being indicators and can positively affect other important societal contexts (Cottrell et al., 2012; Jutras, 2022). Despite the good and positive change PE is supposed to bring, the historical record of education is best understood as one defined by exclusion inflicted on nondominant students (Baker, 2006; Galloway and Ishimaru, 2015).

Current State for Societies

The closure of the last residential school occurred shortly before the Saskatchewan government changed course and expected improvements to the educational outcomes of Indigenous students despite the settler colonial program’s the maintenance of unequal relationships (Veracini, 2011; Veracini, 2018). The government and non-Indigenous peoples are comfortable maintaining their privileges through access to captured land and resources while continuing to have Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations shaped by ongoing white settler dominance which maintains the status quo (Green, 2006; Mills, 2007; Tupper & Mitchell, 2022; Veracini, 2011; Veracini, 2014; Veracini, 2018). Social cohesion enables healthy citizenship and cannot exist without directly addressing racism, which causes social stresses and harms the province’s economic and social viability (Green, 2006). Education is driving change in Saskatchewan through school organization, educational outcomes, material improvements for

Indigenous peoples, and contributions from a greater number of provincial citizens creating greater benefits (Cottrell et al., 2012).

“Those responsible for spending public money have become insistent on measuring outcomes in an effort to identify returns on educational investment” (Timperley & Parr, 2009, p. 151). As a result of prevalent audit culture (Spooner & Orłowski, 2013), the Saskatchewan Ministry has made changes and implemented suggestions from auditors in hopes of creating greater alignment to increase the chances of goal success (Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, 2019) and collaboration with educational partners to improve Indigenous student achievement and outcomes (Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, 2023). Graduation rates for Indigenous students, however, haven’t changed since 2018 when the latest equity and accountability policy was designed (Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, 2023). The auditor’s latest recommendations are to add additional measures and targets and to address the root causes of underperformance. The recommendations for further changes don’t account for those that aren’t immediately measurable such as changes that occur over generations (Meadow, 2008; Senge, 2003). Success should be measured over seven generations (Meadows, 2008) which would align the measurement timeline for rebuilding with the same one that was applied to destroying Indigenous communities in Canada through the Indian Residential School System (Office of the Treaty Commissioner, 2008; The National, 2015).

In studies from other regions, greater teaching and student performance have been noted thanks to increased collaboration and leadership relations between principals and teachers (Marks & Printy, 2003). Despite these, problems persist and unfortunately, the problems in the educational sector are difficult to address and remedy because they mutate over time and “defy once-and-for-all solutions” (McLaughlin, 2006, p. 211). The policy focus in Saskatchewan has framed policy targets (Timperley & Parr, 2009) with specific timeframes in a sector reliant on people-driven processes to remedy problems which results in conflicts surrounding means and ends and create new issues in educational contexts where governance, voice, and authority are contested (McLaughlin, 2006). Educational improvement defined as student and teacher learning cannot be a uniform solution (Honig, 2006). Principals face complex and ambiguous problems that aren’t easily quantified, and the education sector is vulnerable to distractions stemming from short-sighted policy goals which produce numbers that mislead others to think that these same problems are simple, countable, and easily defined (Flessa, 2012). Leadership that resists

domination maintains a steady focus on what counts, the leadership situation, and the power of one to bring about change (Zoller & Fairhurst, 2007). Politically attractive policies are known distractions from improved instruction that reduces variability in effectiveness between teachers (Tunison, 2018). Many pathways to educational improvement have been attempted and schools' local autonomy has been adapted by accountability measures (Lowenhaupt et al., 2016).

As it is now called, Canada, is an ethnically diverse multicultural and a pluralistic country where there are two thought worlds in continuous contact: the Indigenous and the Western (Ermine, 2007). These worlds are at odds and often in conflict. In a western provincial region of Canada named Saskatchewan, the provincial government produced the Inspiring Success First Nations and Métis PreK-12 Education Policy Framework (IS) to achieve goals of fostering and increasing cross-cultural harmony, social cohesion, labour market participation, and long-term economic sustainability (Cottrell et al., 2012; Cottrell & Orłowski, 2015) and to respond to six imperatives (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018). The policy espouses valuing and supporting Indigenous languages and cultures, equitable opportunities defined as success in on-time 3 year high school graduation, reconciling the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, and by improving the otherwise stagnant and inequitable achievement and educational experiences of Indigenous students (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018). This policy framing is conforming to the hegemonic presence of whiteness and represents normative isomorphism (Austin & Jones, 2016; Spooner & Orłowski, 2013; Zembylas & Matias, 2023). Postcolonial policy seeks to achieve its goals and end the disruptive and deleterious effects on Indigenous communities (Khalifa et al., 2019). The policy imperatives could be understood as moral panic where the stated threat overshadows the real threat (Ladson-Billings, 2016). Policy that seeks narrowly described educational improvement through successfully completing high school, preferably in three years, and meaningful employment in the provincial economy is hegemonic (Mercado, 2019). There is uncertainty about the specific knowledge needed to design an appropriate policy response (Howlett et al., 2020) that can successfully undo generations of genocide, oppression, and hardship (Calderon, 2014; Patzer, 2014; Powell & Peristerakis, 2014). The pathway forward to Wîtaskêwin must be made through well-measured, sequential government policies that recognize Indigenous peoples' inherent rights to self-govern and that remove the barriers placed by prior policies and institutional racism (Gill, 2020; Green, 2006; Patel, 2022; Tupper, 2013). Despite the hierarchy in education, it is a public service where

stakeholders should have significant ongoing input (Alexander et al., 2020; Comstock et al., 2022; Hands & Freckelton, 2019; Lowenhaupt et al., 2016; Martell, 2008). Little has changed since Rittel and Webber (1973) stated that the system, and modern government, “is seen as the evil source of misery and suffering” (p. 158). Our society suggests through logics and policies that we cannot afford liberty and equity for those without it; therefore, they should be satisfied by efficiency mandates combined with a high priority on ensuring the lowest possible inputs of resources and a continuous focus on reducing resources that would only be shifted in response to push back from constituents (Coburn et al., 2016). The prior logic originates from neoliberal ideology and fuels misguided class warfare between various groups in the community (Orlowski, 2015).

Nature and Elements of Educational Policy

Public policy is a formal record that expresses the goals, decisions, and actions made by authorities and governments with power and authority (Abele, 2007; Reyes et al., 2014). The work carried out by governments on behalf of its citizens often takes the form of policy instruments. Policies inevitably create winners and losers (Howlett et al., 2020). Policy instruments are techniques used by authorities to move goals into action, achieve goals, inform stakeholders, change contexts or practices, and more, such as grants, guarantees, and funding sources (Cohen et al., 2007; Hettiarachchi & Kshourad, 2019). These can also include incentives, sanctions, rules, permissions, or technical assistance to end users, among others (Datnow & Park, 2009).

Stakeholders are people, groups, neighbourhoods, organizations, institutions, societies, and the natural environment who each exert varying amounts of power, legitimacy, and urgency (Mitchell et al., 1997) and influence each other downward, upward, and laterally (Elias, 2008). Stakeholders are important regardless of their level of power, legitimacy, and urgency or their level of influence, cooperation, and loyalty (Mitchell et al., 1997). In a hierarchical form, the largest concentration of power and influence in stakeholders can be found in the highest group which often has the smallest membership of the policy chain, and the lowest concentration is found in the lowest group which most often has the largest membership (Stone, 2002). The modern period and the nation state are complex and dynamic, more so than any other previous iteration and lacks certainty, encompasses discontinued social relations, reinforces a global monoculture centred on consumption, and produces and sustains hegemony and subordination of

those with power over those without (Cottrell et al., 2021). Lack of control and uncertainty are also noted to be prevalent in organizations and change management processes (Senge & von Ameln, 2019). In Saskatchewan, government and school divisions deliver educational governance from the top of hierarchical organization downward (Alexander et al., 2020; Jónasson, 2016). The establishment, administration, and management of education systems and their unique circumstances are the responsibility of the Minister of Education and the state that set policy to guide the education sector and to ensure the provision of education in all regions (Thajane & Masitsa, 2021). Governments are responsible for educational interventions and policies which can include detailed or comparatively ambiguous instructions for end users who must consider and respond to local contexts while operationalizing (Century & Cassata, 2016).

Typically, only small or incremental steps are possible in policy making (Lindblom, 1979) which stresses the importance of having a robust consultative process that incorporates the views of stakeholders (Anderson & Richards, 2016). The incrementalism processes occurs when small steps are made quickly by experts to counter slow politics and to accomplish drastic change manageably without stirring up great antagonisms or paralyzing schisms (Howlett et al., 2020). The strategy allows for the manipulation of outcomes while avoiding significant changes (Kingdon, 2003). Although there are several, the actual model of decision-making in government is incremental and decisions are marginally different than the status quo (Howlett et al., 2020) because the redistribution of limited resources needs to be negotiated, bureaucracies are penchant towards continuity, and decision-making must be systemized to learn from trial and error as opposed to random decisions. Incrementalism creates an environment where typically once “something is enacted, everybody concludes that it's not so bad, and that gets people ready for the next bite” (Kingdon, 2003, p. 83).

Purpose and Perspectives of Educational Policy

Educational systems are responsible for making decisions, establishing governance rules, monitoring people and educational policy that signal ideals adopted by authorities, the careful conduct of affairs, plans of action, guidelines for processes, and binding management instructions between officials (Thajane & Masitsa, 2021). Change theories have long exerted influence on organizations (Sheldon, 1980). Systemic perspectives and reductionist assumptions have been noted and must be considered by leaders as they influence perspectives and actions through organizational change (Freedman, 2013). In the change literature, concepts and practices

from organizational development and change are common (Burnes, 2013) and are supported by theories (Sheldon, 1980). Strategic planning and organizational responses in education are expected and should have common processes (Hambricht & Diamantes, 2004a) and have benefits and face barriers (Hambricht & Diamantes, 2004b). A policy's purpose is to prepare children for their future careers (Werts et al., 2013). Some policies have ambitious targets and aim to create sustained change in practice and cultures while others seek momentary attention to create sudden and abrupt policies effects from endless types of educational policies (McLaughlin, 2006). Ambitious policy typically has loosely defined implementation boundaries which takes multiple years to accomplish (Coburn et al., 2016).

Formal change in education through planned change models create “incremental change that pays careful attention to system factors that resist change and is a more effective approach than trying to create change by pressuring or threatening stakeholders” (Leonard, 2013, p. 242). Change can be driven top-down, a characteristic of colonial practices and schools or bottom-up (Khalifa et al., 2019). It can also be understood through behavioural science as a function of people in their environment (Leonard, 2013). Two types of change; first-order which includes maintaining concepts of how systems work and applying solutions that worked in the past, and second-order which includes applying novel thinking and changes in conceptual frames to new problems are common (Leonard, 2013). Regarding organizational learning about change, single-loop learning is focused on discrepancies between expected and actual outcomes and double-loop targets governing variables, operating assumptions, goals, and values. “While single-loop inquiry asks whether we are doing things right, double-loop inquiry asks whether we are doing the right things” (Leonard, 2013, p. 254). Principals are change acceptors and key to second-order change and double-loop learning (Bialik et al., 2018). They need to use strategic approaches to change to create long-term success which is uncommon in a landscape where too much attention is paid to what should be changed and too little is paid to how change is created and sought (Rowland et al., 2023).

Education systems across the world face similar reform pressures on nearly every educational issue regardless of which governmental party is in power (Fullan, 2000). Policy reforms designed by governments, regardless of their scope or focus, are rarely implemented as written or planned, because those responsible for the implementation process, most often school principals, create a discrepancy between the directives and actual implementation (Mizrahi-

Shtelman, 2021). Principals work towards multiple aims, which aren't always aligned to stated policy, and rely on and use their agency, their professional knowledge, and their judgment, to impact their context as they deem appropriate (Lewis et al., 2022). Interpretation and implementation are negotiated according to what is appropriate for children in given circumstances (Century & Cassata, 2016).

When developing policies, PMs must make assumptions about the nature of the problem, attempt to determine the cause, and apply solutions according to their logics of action (Datnow & Park, 2009; Honig, 2006; McLaughlin, 2006). Preferred solutions define the target, the implements, the level of support, and regulatory structures and apply these to problems that arise (McLaughlin, 2006). PMs have made recommendations for compensatory measures to support student learning and avoid failure in education (Contini et al., 2020; Gallagher-Mackay, 2020; Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Hammerstein et al., 2021; Khan & Ahmed, 2021; Leong & Howlett, 2022). Policy problems can be understood as the perceived root causes of social issues, which have foundational implications for the design and implementation of policies (McLaughlin, 2006). The most compelling contemporary problems are wicked (Century & Cassata, 2016) similarly suggested more than 50 years ago (Rittel & Webber, 1973). The greatest challenge to the end users of educational policies is that problems and solutions are continuously evolving and the independent variables to wicked problems cannot be fully identified, grasped, and demonstrate inconsistent impact over time making analysis, planning, and accurate implementation very difficult (Century & Cassata, 2016).

Policies are crafted to create educational change; rational-scientifically which creates change by distributing new techniques to end users, politically which creates change through top-down policies, and culturally which makes change by influencing individual values (Century & Cassata, 2016). As a problem, educational improvement is complex and should not be interpreted as being “akin to a linear algorithm or technical fix” (Century & Cassata, 2016, p. 203) despite being a common approach in evidence-based movements. Differing influences may create multiple and competing viewpoints that require the examination of complex issues from various, competing, and possibly new angles (Nelson & Squires, 2017). The specifications of the problem being framed determine the pathway for policy and research and ultimately rules out competing solutions (McLaughlin, 2006). Another challenge in framing educational whole-system policies is that there is no “average teacher, school, district, or system” (Century & Cassata, 2016, p.

202). PMs and policies must be ambiguous to ensure they apply to all or be tailored to the specific and the level of guidance offered must be balanced between specific and vague depending on the target population which can have unintended consequences on the interpretation and implementation, and in some cases, acts as a barrier (Hands & Freckelton, 2019).

Context(s) Affecting Educational Policy

Human societies and governments are social hierarchies that exist as interrelated systems with five typical levels that affect policy outcomes starting from the national level and finishing with the local (McLaughlin, 2006). Educational funding represents a significant portion of the total public budget and is promised to act as systems that create meaningful change levers that serve all children and youth, and their policies are scrutinized for their feasibility and the value they add (Honig, 2006). Conflicts between policy and practice do arise stemming from competition between political, moral, and social agendas such as socioeconomic, neoliberal, and social-democratic (Bialik et al., 2018). In circumstances where there was a noted lack of federal or national policy, lower levels of government enacted it (McLoughlin et al., 2022) which influences the process of change through unique experiences (Century & Cassata, 2016; Lewis et al., 2022). Unfortunately, despite the presence of educational policy, noted barriers, such as the availability of time, administrative support, and policy implementation personnel, impede policy success (McLoughlin et al., 2022).

Educational policies and their directives must be interpreted and translated through the sense making (SM) process (Ancona, 2011) to the known needs in the context which is the root cause of incongruence between what was intended by the PMs and what ends up being implemented by the school principal (Mizrahi-Shtelman, 2021). Institutional contexts are defined by norms, rules, and policies and contribute to the definition of principals' institutional role according to archetypes that allow for the application or restriction of knowledge, actions, and beliefs (Mizrahi-Shtelman, 2021). Policies and politics are key drivers that shape political responses and success, and failures are connected to beliefs, efficacy, and the level of trust and engagement granted to politics (Leong & Howlett, 2022; Werts et al., 2013). When policies address social values such as equality or social responsibility, there are significant implications for the redistribution of power and resources (Bialik et al., 2018; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015). The policy messages delivered by principals have institutional and individual effects, but it is

ultimately the actions of policy end users that are the final results of what is made possible through the use of educational policy (Smylie & Evans, 2006).

In addition to having indirect influence on student learning, school-based leaders are noted to be significant and important influencers and contributors (Leithwood, 2020; Fullan, 2000). Institutionally, it is principals who are ultimately accountable for the academic success and well-being of students (Mizrahi-Shtelman, 2021). Teachers influence and impact student's learning directly through classroom-level interventions and are influenced by internal and external organization environmental factors (Century & Cassata, 2016). Educational policies are crafted through organizational control, authority, and responsibility which are delivered from the top of the organizational structure down to the smallest unit of the organization in a direct straight line and exist among organizational forces, structure, and authorities that are reflective of classical management theory (Datnow & Park, 2009) This type of structure and hierarchy is colonial and prioritizes control through planning, organization, and coordination and influences the assumptions and theories of action that underpin organizational policy design, implementation, and execution (Khalifa et al., 2019).

Accountability as Educational Policy

Accountability in education was framed with a race to the top logic and sought to improve policy strategies, to create new standards, and to raise student learning by manipulating teaching and learning (Coburn et al., 2016; Spooner & Orlowski, 2013). Common to accountability is an interest in what students are expected to learn, emphasizing prevention over remediation, and recognizing that whole change is most likely to be successful rather than small adjustments with disjointed efforts (Datnow & Park, 2009). Accountability and the prevalent culture of auditing use metrics to leverage and measure the performance of individuals and organizations (Lowenhaupt et al., 2016; Spooner & Orlowski, 2013). Equity as accountability can be investigated at the process level, structural level, and the learning conditions and outcomes level (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015).

The accountability movement started in the mid 90s and later intensified in the 2000s with unaligned standards, lack of supports to educational staff, and measures that exclusively targeted basic skills which created gains in some situations and unintended consequences in many others (Coborn et al., 2016). Since, organizational changes improved responsiveness to accountability policy and expanded data-driven decision-making in the sector, which has become

an expected process that requires dedicated knowledgeable staff who ensure that the work is impactful (Miller, 2010). Educational accountability policies are generally delivered with tools such as incentives and penalties to motivate implementation, compliance, and to keep non-adjustable external factors affecting student success in mind (Werts et al., 2013). In oppressive communities, monitoring student data ensures disparities are identified and eliminated (Carter Jr., 2021). In public policy, data-driven decision-making is infused in models but impacted by the highly conditional elements of systems and the unpredictability of human systems. Continuous improvement is another form of accountability and applied science (Education Resource Strategies, 2017) that seeks the improvement of the achievement of all students and the reduction of gaps between dominant and nondominant students (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2011) and holds expectations for ongoing progress and growth (Education Development Center, 2019). As a process, it relies on schools' ability to make data-driven decisions in improvement processes, despite the lack of training found in those required to carry out tasks (Datnow & Park, 2009; Education Resource Strategies, 2020). Continuous improvement is influenced by two forms of isomorphism; mimetic where organization voluntarily imitate others in the pursuit of improvement and normative isomorphism where professional-based pressure to conform and improve is applied to an organization (Austin & Jones, 2016; Spooner & Orlowski, 2013).

Professional's willingness to embrace reform is reliant on their worldview, their beliefs, their level of tolerance for iterations of short policies with little impact, and their level of trust/distrust in those designing policies (Moran et al., 2022). Different groups have initiated accountability systems in schools which have been suggested to contribute to the deskilling of the profession and substituting professional judgment for generalized measure espoused by authorities (Lewis et al., 2022). Achieving equity, requires the redistribution of power and resources to remedy "historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral "education debt" owed to nondominant students" (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015, p. 380). Testing and the accountability measures have limited effect on student achievement and have been noted to create a blame game where each group blamed another for failures to improve (Werts et al., 2013). Accountability and equity in learning are closely tied because those unsuccessful in learning often experience the greatest levels of inequity, the civil rights issue of our age (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015). Saskatchewan has been pursuing accountability policy for Indigenous peoples

since 1989 through iterations, adaptations, and incremental changes made through various policy formulations where accountability was nothing more than a job training instrument sought through narrow standards aligned to accountability as a standardized testing model, and where it was practiced, it faced a crisis of legitimacy (Bouvier & Karlenzig, 2006).

Realities Affecting Educational Policy

Policy must be comprehensible and understood by stakeholders, so that, end users can identify its essential dimensions, can conceive the desired end results, can design and engage in the implementation process, can monitor for impacts, and can identify the unintended consequences of a given policy (Bialik et al., 2018). There are several factors that impact policy implementation and limit its overall success, and therefore, expecting full implementation and success on all goals is unrealistic as partial implementation and success are common, which creates urgency for further research into which conditions allow educational policies to be implemented successfully (Honig, 2006). Educational policies have complex impacts, significant implications, and important effects on social welfare, social determinants, well-being for individuals, and the success of communities (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018). School divisions must demonstrate academic achievement improvements where they didn't historically, and as such, the educational policy that they must implement should be greatly scrutinized (Honig, 2006; Timperley & Parr, 2009) As a result, leaders have sought to create change and improvement in the education systems by seeking partners and partnerships for policy goals beyond the school system or individual school (Honig, 2006). Future research on successful policy as well as students' results in schools that account for the impacts of external factors such as the conditions in their neighbourhood, family, and peer groups are needed (Black et al., 2015; Ditton et al., 2019; Hancock et al., 2018; Honig, 2006; Pekrun, 2017; Ruiz et al., 2018; Vanbuel & Branden, 2022; Wagmiller, 2015).

Measures of and Measurement of Educational Policy

A common target of contemporary educational policy and change has been creating system accountability for student learning (Coburn et al., 2016; Education Development Center, 2019; Lowenhaupt et al., 2016; Michela et al., 1996; Miller, 2010; Park et al., 2013; Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, 2023; Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2011; Shakman et al., 2020; Singh & Singh, 2015; Tunison, 2016; Werts et al., 2013) and another has been ensuring equitable learning opportunities for students (Darling-Hammond & Hill, 2015; Daramola et al.,

2023; Education Resource Strategies, 2020; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Hands & Freckelton, 2019; Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Muñiz et al., 2023; OECD, 2012; Paris, 2017; Welborn, 2019). Throughout educational systems, leaders have attempted to determine policy progress and success by collecting and analyzing key metrics (Gillborn et al., 2018; Miller, 2010; Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, 2023; Tunison, 2016, 2018). Accountability is easily conceived as pursuits of “centralization, standardization, testing, measurement, inputs, and outputs” (Lowenhaupt et al., 2016, p. 802). The measurement of policy solutions should be defined and be a function of the planning and contextual variables as the measurement of policy problems is itself the wicked part, more important than the pursuit of the solution, and often left for last and lacking alignment to the goals (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Knowing if improvement is occurring is challenging because the overall target often isn’t clearly defined (Tunison, 2018).

Accountability has substantially impacted education and is a contemporary institutional logic that is external to educational organizations and part of the broader environment that provides a rational system based on specified measures, outcomes, and evaluation (Lowenhaupt et al., 2016). Researchers and PMs have used metrics and accountability systems to measure the performance of individuals and organizations, but sometimes no solution seems to be a universal best fit and measurements, means for making judgments, and meaningful changes require flexibility, experimentation, and capacity building to solve problems (Darling-Hammond & Hill, 2015; Lowenhaupt et al., 2016).

Educational leaders, such as school superintendents and principals, have important roles anticipating how policies will impact the goals of the organization, what gains to expect, and are responsible for policy implementation (PI), measurement of outcomes, and accountability in schools (Hands & Freckelton, 2019). One of their greatest challenges is converting raw data into useful information (Freedman, 2013). The relationship between teachers’ perception of their policy environments, how policy and its measure impact alignment between instruction and content, and which policy conditions are needed to change teachers’ instruction in a given situation has been studied in the United States (Comstock et al., 2022). Practitioners and researchers must remain committed to meaningful learning when carrying out change through policy related to the needs of students determined by long-term counterweight measures taken from multiple sources of evidence, and not be distracted by what is easiest to measure with standardized tests which can have unintended consequences and weaken global instruction and

student learning (Darlin-Hammond & Hill, 2015). Finally, school divisions engaged in accountability practices require additional unique roles to support schools and ensure they are successful in their improvement and accountability endeavours by determining the types and number of measurement tools used, their associated weight, and their value, which can be adjusted over time (Lowenhaupt et al., 2016). Caution is suggested regarding regularly changing measurement variables which can lead stakeholders to believe that a policy has had limited success because of frequent changes resulting in an inability to determine impact, erroneous stakeholder beliefs about the accuracy of measures, and the impacts of variables such as educational funding that affect the accuracy and the reliability of measurements and the ability to draw conclusions (Moran et al., 2022). Social infrastructures are also needed so that scaled data collection can be conducted efficiently and reliably and to ensure that training can be provided as needed (Ming, 2023). Policy problems need to be accompanied by layers of instruments including aspirational talk such as “all students can achieve high standards given the right time and the right supports. All teachers can teach to high standards given time and the right assistance” (Sharratt, 2019, p. 15).

Educational Policy Implementation

Context of implementation.

Policies, people, and places, the three factors that impact implementation, must come together so that policy goals can be achieved, and consideration can be given to the level of readiness and what could be achieved through policy implantation (Honig, 2006). The aim of policy is to be implemented and to bring about change, which is dependent on environments and internal factors (Thajane & Masitsa, 2021) as well as leader behaviours (Higgs & Rowland, 2011). However, one should not be confused or misled: “organizations do not act; people do” (McLaughlin, 2006, p. 214). Conceptually, PI can be interpreted as a chain (Datnow & Park, 2009) with responsibilities and actions flowing from the top of the chain, in nested systems, from elected officials to various public managers and finally to the bottom of the chain to school principals (Honig, 2006). The educational context is the complex interspace where policy prescription and implementation occur (Mizrahi-Shtelman, 2021). Although educational policy is commonly referred to as moving from conception or design, and eventually, being implemented it is rather negotiated and later appropriated by several people in a given environment resulting in policies rarely being implemented as written or planned (Bialik et al., 2018). PIs’ context and

agency have been noted to matter to educational PI (Honig, 2006). Structural, cultural, and agentic issues are contexts that must be considered if policy is to be implemented with fidelity and for it to create sustainable change in educational contexts (Hands & Freckelton, 2019).

Implementation of Policies by People in Places.

School principals are professionals responsible for the implementation of educational policies as end users in their schools. They have unique opportunities to translate and interpret policies for the staff, students, and communities, which has been identified as one of the root causes of the organizational heterogeneity that is created by the implementation process (Mizrahi-Shtelman, 2021). Each of the three PI processes; the technical rational, the mutual adaptive, and the SM/co-constructive have unique approaches to orientations and implementations (Datnow & Park, 2009). An intricate interpretation and application process must be carried out (Mizrahi-Shtelman, 2021). Implementing educational policy is complex and difficult because it takes place in complex spaces (Century & Cassata, 2016; Datnow & Park, 2009; Honig, 2006; Lewis et al., 2022; Mizrahi-Shtelman, 2021).

Professionals who implement policy need clear information that limits complexity and provides comprehensible and unambiguous processes to follow (Honig, 2006). There shouldn't be a uniform process or approach in implementing policy because it must respond to the complex and unique needs of heterogenous groups found in educational contexts (Hopkins, 2013). Policy goals and worthy aspirations are not in themselves effective strategies and key messages can easily be lost or misunderstood when translated or adjusted over time throughout a system because policy, people and places are interrelated influences that impact how implementation, which is often highly inconsistent, complex, and susceptible to variables, unfolds as a process (Timperley & Parr, 2009). Prescriptive policy may not be appropriate for heterogenous groups (Honig, 2006). The complexity of educational policies and the variation in responses are the results of broad application in administrative and institutional arrangements, which include authority, funding, and professionalization (McLaughlin, 2006). School divisions must support implementation directly through the dissemination of relevant information and the explanation of policies to stakeholders, which leads to implementation and overall policy success (Werts et al., 2013). Principals react to policy demands and create policy responses (Mizrahi-Shtelman, 2021). SM during the implementation phase leads them to adapt policies (Century and Cassata, 2016) and can result from or be influenced by knowledge bases, prior understanding, and starting,

personal, and professional beliefs and orientations (Honig, 2006; McLaughlin, 2006). Principals' ability to implement policy is limited by their skills and knowledge (Hands & Freckelton, 2019). PMs are encouraged to link policies to and to build upon the knowledge base of schools to improve the success rate of PI and carrying out change in educational contexts (Hopkins & Levin, 2000).

PI is the result of the processes and actions enacted by a pivotal group of people at the end of the policy chain in schools (Datnow & Park, 2009). Creating change in education is a "problem of the smallest unit, street-level bureaucrats' roles as the interpreters of and responders to policy" (McLaughlin, 2006, p. 214) created by those at the top of the chain. Principals' disposition and skills are set against the policy context which in turn causes them to adapt leadership or managerial behaviours when implementing policies (Flessa, 2012; Ruiz et al., 2011). Variable policy responses result from principals' process of filtration and is guided by unavoidable SM, interpretation, and learning that is carried out individually or in groups (Honig, 2006; Mizrahi-Shtelman, 2021; Thajane & Masitsa, 2021). Organizations with policy systems pay careful attention to organizational sense making and the horizontal and vertical connections that affect implementation as multilayered systems are impacted by intentions, resources, and regulatory frameworks (McLaughlin, 2006).

Factors That Influence Implementation.

The conditions in the various levels of systems all influence the efforts of implementers in complex and interactive ways (Datnow & Park, 2009). The history and cultures of organizations and government significantly impact and influence PI and the ability of the schools to respond to policy (Miller, 2010). There are multiple potential actors who could develop and implement equity and inclusion policies for schools (Hands & Freckelton, 2019) and leaders must fit their contexts for change to be possible and effectiveness to be achieved (Burns et al., 2013; Vassallo, 2022). Leading change, change management, and effectiveness are dependent on internal communication (Harkness, 2000). Policy topics are, or could be interpreted as being, political (Coburn et al., 2016; Cottrell & Hardie, 2019; Darling-Hammond & Hill, 2015; Flessa, 2012; Hands & Freckelton, 2019; Office of the Treaty Commissioner, 2008; Schick & St Denis, 2003; Tupper, 2013; Tupper & Mitchell, 2022) and individuals inevitably become politically active when they interpret policies, which can have unintended consequences on the policy and its implementation (Werts et al., 2013).

School divisions are mid-level actors in the policy chain and play an important role in local PI, are cognizant of external expectations, and are responsible for communication fidelity up and down the chain (Miller, 2010; Shanahan et al., 2008). Policies can impact the scope of focus in systems and schools, contribute to strategic and pragmatic responses, and unintentionally constrain the authority of the principal (Flessa, 2012). Beyond this, there are also the formal codes of the profession, the standards of the field, the professional role identity, and the micro-institutional contexts that influence the actions of principals (Mizrahi-Shtelman, 2021). Principals must ignore inevitable distractions and minimize their negative effects during PI (Flessa, 2012). Connections between power and learning, the dimensions of policy design and implementation, the capacity of those across the levels of the system, the amount of specificity included in policy, and the ambitiousness of the ideas presented in policy are important factors that influence PI and success (Coburn et al., 2016). Increasing the likelihood of policy success can be achieved through stronger management strategies such as better data collection and improving analysis as policy failure is often the result of poor information gathering, policy formulation, and implementation (Howlett, 2012).

Intentions, planning, and the adoption of policy at the district-level are essential to school-level PI and can positively support implementation (McLoughlin et al., 2022). Ensuring that people in various places are ready for change prior to commencing ensures that the contexts are ripe for implementation (Murray-Johnson & Guerra, 2018). Policy can set focus, such as learning goals or structure, for a principal (Flessa, 2012). Policy implementers require relationships and communities where discourse is shared and shape individuals' responses to policy demands (Honig, 2006). Content, form, and sequence are important to policy rhetoric while argument and persuasion are policy tools that can be leveraged to create alignment, vision, and to build beliefs, but don't lead to uniform implementation in various sites (Lowenhaupt et al., 2016). The relationships between policy, people, and places are simultaneously the drivers and the consequences of implementation (McLaughlin, 2006). Justifications, logics, and the feasibility of policies contribute directly to PI by principals who are impacted by their own attitudes, will, and motivation (Thajane & Masitsa, 2021).

When facing adversity, some principals focused on the barriers to success while others looked to opportunities to improve education (Werts et al., 2013). PI should be the combined responsibility of all stakeholders involved (Vanbuel & Van den Branden, 2022). Otherwise, what

can appear as harmless policies can become politically charged and become vulnerable to barriers in the implementation process or quickly repealed once implemented (Moran et al., 2022). The capacity, beliefs, and values of principals and the perceptions of stakeholders affect the success or failure of implementation (Tupper, 2008; Werts et al., 2013). Implementing policy doesn't have to be an individual effort and involving multiple people enhance the process and ensures flexibility but may also increase the variability due to the number of participants involved (Thajane & Masitsa, 2021). Principals have professional and personal motivations and identities that act as drivers or barriers to engaging with policies and in some contexts, incentives are applied to further motivate human compliance (McLaughlin, 2006).

Professional learning for principals on how to interpret and adapt the guidance of others to their specific contexts, including modifying detailed implementation documents created by those higher up on the policy chain are relevant and offer system efficiency (Comstock et al., 2016). Despite noted attempts to train principals, many schools are unable to implement policies to a satisfactory standard (Thajane & Masitsa, 2021). Teachers are the most significant factor affecting students' learning (Leithwood, 2020) and their beliefs and needs must be considered because they are the foundation of instructional decision-making in schools. Efforts to change the commonly fixed beliefs and behaviours of teachers support policy success (Moran et al., 2022). Teachers need learning opportunities, but these are limited by time, money, and material resources (Hands & Freckelton, 2019). Top of policy chain infrastructure that guides and supports should ideally be paired with local control over resources in change efforts (Comstock et al., 2016).

Difficulties, Barriers, and Needed Improvements to Educational Policy Implementation.

The promise of increasing the positive results and significant impacts of the education sector on the community through system-level policy-driven change could compel the sector to improve the efficacy and reliability of educational PI (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018; Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, 2021). This could be further enhanced through strategic investments as dedicated resources allocated to building the lacking or missing capacity of policy implementers, in the policy and educational landscape (Datnow & Park, 2009). Sound public investment could bring about noteworthy societal enhancements in the future (Cottrell & Orłowski, 2015). The policy scope and the extent of change targeted can create barriers for

policy success, especially when insufficient policy instruments are applied to the efforts and systematic infrastructure to support change across numerous schools are lacking (Datnow & Park, 2009). There is a known lag between policy design, implementation, and research (Coburn et al., 2016). Specific top-down policy conditions are necessary to support changes to instruction, which need to be balanced with ongoing opportunities to make adaptations for specific students, and to develop resources (Comstock et al., 2016). Learning from those at the bottom of the policy chain will result in the top of the chain increasing its efficacy and responsiveness to noted realities and needs (McLaughlin, 2006). Existing calls for future research on educational policy to better understand “what works for whom, where, when, and why” (Honig, 2006, p. 4) must be answered. The top of the policy chain has been focused on policy compliance and does little to improve the quality of programs or to affect school and classroom practices, which has been caused by the insufficient allocation of policy tools and having all levels of the policy chain actively and consistently contribute to policy success would enhance and increase the educational policy process (Datnow & Park, 2009). Attention must be paid to balancing top-down guidance and flexibility for localized adaptation, and furthermore, that implementation needs exist in the policy environment at the local-level such as calls for clear and comprehensible information (Comstock et al., 2016; Honig, 2006). These school-level adjustments are evidence of fingerprints from the implementers on policies received from above (Flessa, 2012).

Ambiguous information or policy directions that lack clarity create process conflicts for implementers (McLaughlin, 2006). In the case of the IS educational policy, the government of Saskatchewan has attempted to create clarity without denying complexity on policy goals that require systemic change, new ways of thinking, new structures, and transforming relationships (Senge et al., 2007). Ambiguity in educational systems can be beneficial as it allows for adaptation and negotiation of strategies, indicators, and priorities, which is important as policy processes are neither linear nor do they follow discrete phases despite being described as such in past policy research (McLaughlin, 2006). Implementers must conceive policy as iterations and cycles that move and respond to the needs of people according to that which is negotiated during PI and not a unidirectional process (McLaughlin, 2006). Allowing for adaptations to policies enables greater local buy-in and ensures ongoing cooperation (Century & Cassata, 2016).

Ensuring that implementers engage with policy is important and superficial engagement leads to reverting to the prior status quo and impedes meaningful change (Datnow & Park, 2009).

PI is dependent on institutional or organizational power and conflicts and struggles, including those political in nature, are the result of educational policy and professional responses being in contact (McLaughlin, 2006). Numerous people with varying amounts of power can be found along the chain that each make contributions and affect the process and outcomes (Bialik et al., 2018). Because of the reliance within the levels of the chain, breakdowns in communication and energy cause disconnections (McLaughlin, 2006). Assumptions made about policy-driven educational change without data are one of the reasons why some change efforts are paired with few resources to build capacity, which creates a shortchanging or underfunding of the educational context and limits the overall policy success as those at the bottom of the chain are required to do more with the same resources (Datnow & Park, 2009). Policy paradoxes are created when energy is lost because of poorly formulated policy that doesn't take knowledge into account and results in lags in learning and improvement efforts that must overcome government regulation (Hopkins & Levin, 2000). When no additional supports are offered by the government, it assumes that those lower in the policy chain already had these in place and that they weren't needed (Hands & Freckelton, 2019).

Avoiding assumptions about how soon change and policy success should be expected are encouraged (McLaughlin, 2006). A three-year period is too soon to understand how principals implemented a new policy (Lewis et al., 2022). Using an inappropriately short timeframe to measure may result in noting limited or lack of change when the longer-term policy gains simply required time, may have significantly delayed effects and would be visible after a decade, and assuming near immediate successes or bumps in performance should only be expected in short-term policy goals which do little to solve long-term underlying problems (McLaughlin, 2006). In urban systems, policy decisions are made quickly and changes to educational systems as rapid cycles of renewal and dramatic shifts act as barriers and makes evaluating and tracking policy impact difficult (Lewis et al., 2022). The time needed to orient, build capacity, and carry out change is often a period of multiple years which causes disconnections within and across the levels in an educational system (Coburn et al., 2016). The rate of change is limited by the time it takes for all stakeholders to carry out their processes and return to a state of stasis (Hussain et al., 2018).

Politics and political power allow those who hold it to wield it, as well as their will on others and determine policy choices and social constructions for target populations that are disproportionate to those applied to different racial and minority groups (McLaughlin, 2006). PI is deeply influenced by race and class-based tensions, which mobilizes groups to support or resist policy out of fear for what is to be won or lost, in local educational, economic, and political institutions (Honig, 2006). Groups affected by race and social class may struggle, be frustrated, or be significantly impacted by policy that is influenced by stakeholders with unequal access to power or voice throughout the process whereas alternate equitable spaces with distributed power are unique in that they co-construct policy implementation with others (McLaughlin, 2006). Policies include political messages and can cause individuals or groups to become frustrated, distrustful of leadership, and disengaged or in some cases, engaged agents despite the conflict between the policy and their experiences (Werts et al., 2013). Schools that serve minority students with socioeconomic hardships have been observed to have lower levels of implementation because efforts were resisted or opposed by teachers who judged policies as inappropriate for their students (Datnow & Park, 2009). Perfect storms are created when limited money, time, and material resources are available to principals to address ambiguous policy (Hands & Freckelton, 2019).

Those who have an oversight role at the top of the policy chain are often concerned with efficiency and often conceive PI as a problem of carrying out directives in an administrative sense whereas those at the bottom of the chain are concerned with messiness and getting something done (McLaughlin, 2006). Principals face volatility, complexity, ambiguity, and resistance daily (Breakspear, 2017; Edmondson, 2021). Principals aren't mindless compliers, and policy can be a source of conflict that results from constraints and shortfalls rather than predisposition, and when constraints in implementation are experienced, their leadership discretion, flexibility, and preferred role are forced resulting in a more managerial stance (Flessa, 2012). Accountability policies aim to deliver benefits over a long term but face significant short-term costs and face major resistance, sometimes even from those who stand to benefit (Honig, 2006).

Sense Making of Policy

Process.

When end users receive policy, prior to commencing the implementation process, they must first make sense of the policy, a process known in research as sense making (SM) (Ancona, 2011). Policy messages and strategies are designed to address problems and are developed and interpreted throughout educational systems (Timperley & Parr, 2009). Principals make sense of policy for others under their supervision by communicating important information through talk that they offer as a support (Waite, 2021). Principals play a central role in implementing changes that affect teaching and learning, and while being known to be important, principals' talk hasn't yet been studied (Lowenhaupt et al., 2016). Talk can also be hurtful, oppressive, and colonial and be a form of warfare used to achieve specific aims that inflict violence on Indigenous peoples in occupied lands (Cottrell et al., 2012). Policy discourses and leaders' talk can also be tokenistic, symbolic, and in some cases racist, which reduce the strength or needs of nondominant students and contributes to hollow actions towards important goals (Cottrell & Orłowski, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015). For policy to impact any layer of a system, implementation must be guided by critical policy change messages, delivered down through the system chain, and influenced by the SM process of the prior leaders in the implementation chain which can lead to reinterpretation, loss of accuracy, adjustment for different audiences, and ultimately lead to the failure of the central tenets of the policy (Timperley & Parr, 2009). Understanding the factors that lead to success and failure, what they are, and how to avoid typical failures is important for PIs and increases the likelihood of project success (Frese et al., 2003).

Once principals engage in the SM process, alternate views about policy intent can exist (Werts et al., 2013). The process of policy SM can be understood as "a lens through which to understand innovation implementation" (Century & Cassata, 2016, p. 179) Three processes: noticing, processing, and reacting are used by principals in complex spaces where they must make sense of, understand, attend to, respond to, manage, and interpret multiple policies simultaneously causing them to relate to some and turn a blind eye to others at the risk of having their professional identity shaped by these same processes (Mizrahi-Shtelman, 2021). Principals make sense of policy, translate them to their contexts, and use specific language throughout the process, such as patterns of renaming and translating to transform abstracted policy ideas into readily applied concepts for their community, another source of fidelity loss at the end of the policy chain, but not without the risk of the root causes of aspirational policy generating strong

emotional responses in stakeholders and negatively influence their views of these local policy actors (Mizrahi-Shtelman, 2021).

Role(s) and Impact(s) of Factors that Affect Sense Making.

Several points of implementation are dependent on the sense making (SM) of policy messages and the factors that impact SM include the clarity of policy messages and the impacts of the belief systems of those responsible for implementation being overlaid on policy messages (Timperley & Parr, 2009). There is great importance in understanding the formal professional codes and standards that impact the SM and decision-making process (Mizrahi-Shtelman, 2021). The reinterpretations of policy messages can cause dissonance with central tenets of policy and interfere with implementation because of inadequate comprehension and leaders being unsure how to resolve the competing demands created by new policy (Timperley & Parr, 2009). Contradictory or conflicting mandates can force principals to decipher and adjust the policy goals and lower the accuracy of implementation (Flessa, 2012). Principals typically adopt one of four distinct professional role identities because of SM, translation, and PI; manager, leader, nurturer, or facilitator (Mizrahi-Shtelman, 2021). SM is a process of mutual adaptation by principals who must interpret, adapt, and enact policies to improve their likelihood of PI and policy success in their context (Datnow & Park, 2009). Success is often achieved by paying close attention to independent and dependent variables and by ensuring that the goals set are achieved with little or no criticism from internal and external stakeholders which causes principals to rely on their experiences and beliefs, to follow policies as they are written, and to deviate only to meet objectives (Howlett, 2012). Principals' internal and external factors shape their experiences, personal beliefs, and social relationships during SM, which they use to navigate complex policy situations and scenarios (Lewis et al., 2022).

District dissemination, sense making, and explanation of policy information can have positive impacts on data-driven decision-making and PI (Werts et al., 2013). The benefits of SM outweigh negative variation in educational systems as it contributes to professional understanding and implementation readiness. Leaders are required to ensure that constructed solutions are appropriate responses (Nelson & Squires, 2017). In some cases, policy implementers act with self-interest and not in response to the problem at hand or they apply their pre-established solutions to the problems they face while districts that engaged in policy SM and translation were noted to improve strategic decision-making processes in schools, better align

schools with the demands of accountability policy and play a crucial role in shaping policy implementers perceptions of the comprehensibility of policy messages (Kingston, 2003).

2.7 **Synthesis and Conceptualization of the themes**

The treaty legacy and relationship with Indigenous peoples are the historical background that impacts and frames all future experiences between the two groups. In our contemporary period, governments are committed in spirit and in policy to undoing the harm caused by decades of harmful government policy, but the ongoing settler colonial project, financial austerity, and prevalent impacts of white supremacy are barren soil on which to mend and grow the treaty relationship. School-based leaders are directed by educational policy and the policy chain to improve Indigenous learning rates and educational achievement through continuous improvement; however, these middle managers lack instruments to bring the policy to life and to overcome the above-noted negative societal and cultural factors. Educational policy implementation is very complex and challenging, the school-based leaders in Saskatchewan demonstrate limited progress towards the IS policy goals as noted by the provincial auditor, and changes to the current policy, instruments, progress timeline, and within the community are needed for success to begin to be noticed. My conceptualization of the themes is demonstrated below.

Figure 2

Emerging conceptualization of themes



Note. Remixed content created by Charles Paul Bazin Webster. From *North America satellite orthographic.jpg* [image] by Ghalas, 2005, Wikipedia

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turtle_Island_-_/media/File:North_America_satellite_orthographic.jpg). PDM 1.0.

From *medal-viki-84ca7d* [photograph] by Unknown, 2016 (<https://picryl.com/media/medal-viki-84ca7d>) PDM 1.0.

2.8 Discussion

The work of school-based leaders in Treaty 6 territory occurs on stolen lands that were negotiated through treaty with promises that have since been broken. The treatment of Indigenous people by settlers and white governments has a long legacy of harm and oppression for personal gain and exploitation. Indigenous people today face significant obstacles and impacts from the treatment they received from a government that promised them peace, coexistence, and mutual benefit but delivered poverty, suffering, and low educational success. The contemporary white dominant society is dominated by belief in white superiority and white

supremacy. School-based leaders are part of this dominant majority but are also required through their role to interpret and implement equity-based educational policy that seeks to improve the inequitable educational outcomes for Indigenous students. In line with past hardships imposed on Indigenous peoples, no additional funds have been allocated to this historic undoing and equity-based work by the provincial government. The impacts of this work after four years are not yet visible and the educational outcomes for Indigenous learners haven't yet improved. The Inspiring Success educational policy is ambiguous and non-specific so that it can be interpreted and implemented contextually by school-based leaders but has also resulted in a greater task complexity as these professionals must interpret the policy and design the response for the people in their place. Continued efforts in this equity-based change process are needed.

2.9 Summary of Paper Two

This paper examined literature that supported a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities faced by those in the policy chain, specifically school-based leaders who must attempt to implement educational policy in Saskatchewan. The review of literature highlighted relevant findings, but none specific to the research question, the organizational improvement plan, and the specific context, which when considered alongside the limited success of the first four years of the IS educational policy, suggests a compelling need to conduct novel empirical research.

Paper 3: Research design and methods

3.0 **Abstract**

In this paper, I present my approach to the inquiry, the methodology and methods of inquiry, sampling, data collection, and data analysis process, how I intended to ensure rigour, reliability, and trustworthiness, and the ethical considerations I identified that could impact my study. This organizational improvement plan uses an instrumental case study research design and employed semi-structured interviews to gather the voices of school-based leaders responsible for creating change for Indigenous learners and communities in Treaty 6 Territory. I present the reasons why I chose this methodology, the methods, and how these relate to my position and perspective.

3.1 **Chapter Introduction and Framing of Problem of Practice Research**

Rather than Wîtaskêwin- living together on the land (Office of the Treaty Commissioner, 2008), as it was promised in the treaty agreements by non-Indigenous peoples, Indigenous people experienced continuous change since the arrival of non-Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island (Deer, 2011). A long legacy of oppression and hardship, now known as the settler colonial project (Veracini, 2011), was authorized by government policy and inflicted on Indigenous people after they welcomed non-Indigenous newcomers to their lands. As it is now called, Saskatchewan, an ethnically diverse multicultural and a pluralistic society, is a place that has a long legacy of cultural, linguistic, and physical genocide (Calderon, 2014; Patzer, 2014; Powell & Peristerakis, 2014).

Canada's settler colonial project is alive and well and forms the societal context against which public education is delivered daily in Saskatchewan (Green, 2006; Needham, 2021; Tupper & Mitchell, 2022). In 2018, as a result of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (Madden, 2019a, 2019B; The National, 2015) the provincial government sought, through a renewed government educational policy named Inspiring success: First nations and Métis prek-12 education policy framework (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018), to work collaboratively with all stakeholders to strengthen relationships and to "achieve an equitable and inclusive system that benefits all learners" (p. 14), to improve the otherwise stagnant and inequitable rate of achievement and the general educational experiences of Indigenous students (Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, 2019, 2021, 2023), and to undo the decades of destruction by reconciling the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples through education. The legacy of cultural and physical genocide inflicted on Indigenous people

(Calderon, 2014; Patzer, 2014; Powell & Peristerakis, 2014), the ongoing settler colonial project (Veranici, 2011), neoliberalism and class warfare (Dabscheck, 2018; McMurtry, 1998; McMurtry, 2002; Orlowski, 2015; Peterson, 1997; Schiller, 2008; Sumner, 2007), and white supremacy (Gibbons, 2018) are the backdrop upon which this policy seeks to create positive change for all learners and the greater provincial society.

A dominant majority of western school leaders, in a landscape of Continuous Improvement (Singh & Singh, 2015), are tasked with policy implementation, finding successes towards policy goals, and overcoming policy barriers in the education sector without the application of additional policy instruments. Continuous improvement frameworks most commonly define success as improvement on narrowly predefined student outcomes, quantified in non-culturally appropriate ways (Khalifa et al., 2016). The smallest common denominator in the system, regardless of circumstances, holds the responsibility, defined through neoliberal economic accountability discourse for all aspects of student achievement and learning (Flew, 2014). Despite being out of schools' external factors, teachers' success in the classroom with students can be limited by socioeconomic factors such as poverty, overcrowding, inadequate housing and health services, addictions, and more (Anderson & Richards, 2016; Briscoe & McIntosh, 2023; Clouston & Link, 2021). The problem of practice investigated in this study is the gap between ministerial policy and goals and Indigenous educational outcomes in Saskatchewan.

3.2 Approach to Inquiry

This organizational improvement plan uses an instrumental case study research design to investigate western school leadership practices (Fullan, 2014), which I interpret as systems leadership (Hopkins, 2009, 2013; Hopkins et al., 2014; Hopkins & Higham, 2007; Leithwood et al., 2020; Meadows, 2008; Sumaira & Shahbaz, 2021; Senge, 1997; Senge, 2003; Senge et al., 2007; Senge et al., 2015) in Treaty 6 territory to understand how school-based leaders engage with educational policy and implement the IS policy to support the improvement of educational outcomes of Indigenous children learning in Treaty 6 territory and contribute to Wítaskêwin. The study seeks to capture and amplify the voices of school-based leaders in Treaty 6 territory who strive to bring about IS policy goal success and to understand the meaning and knowledge that they have constructed (Yazan, 2015) and to study these as an instrumental case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1978, 1994, 2003). Although case studies can be quantitative and test theories,

Merriam (1998) explained that in educational contexts, they are most often qualitative and have clear demarcations. Case study is a strategy to achieve a detailed examination or exploration of a phenomenon, in its context, using multiple data sources that were used in applied and natural sciences (Ndamé, 2023). I chose this methodology because rather than being a methodological choice, it is suggested to be a choice of what is to be studied (Stake, 2008), to focus on the results and not the topic, and because it has become one of the most common ways of conducting qualitative inquiry in the field of social sciences (Ndamé, 2023; Rashid et al., 2019; Stake, 2003; Yazan, 2015) which allowed me to align my study with the current research field practice. I was aware of case study's contested legitimacy in social science research, its loosely defined protocols, and the lack of consensus of design and implementation (Yazan, 2015) but was confident that the available literature would adequately guide me (Pan & Tan, 2011). Drawing again from Stake (1978, 1994, 2003), I sought to understand the complexity of a problem concentrated into a single case and my research target was specific, bounded, included patterns, leading me to conclude that an instrumental case study was an appropriate methodology. Treaty 6 territory represents a single bounded and defined case where I found school-based leaders willing to be interviewed during a 4-month period during the 2023-2024 school year to uncover their prior efforts, successes, and barriers encountered implementing the IS educational policy and allowed me to critically analyze how they engage with educational policy in Treaty 6 territory and their contributions towards Wítaskêwin.

The proposed study was influenced by my research design decisions and my theoretical assumptions (Cooper, 2010; Harrison et al., 2017). My philosophical stance and worldview (Crotty, 1998), represent my “beliefs, assumptions, concepts, and values” and influences my “view of reality, what counts as knowledge and ways of knowing and guides research priorities, choices, and actions” (Held, 2019, p. 1). As a constructivist, my relativist ontology guides my beliefs that research “is about understanding subjective meanings of others’ lived experiences” (Held, 2019, p. 4), that these are unique to each research participant, and that “self-production cannot be understood outside the context of power” (Kincheloe 2008, p. 89). Simply put, I seek to “understand the subjective experience of reality and multiple truths” (Levers, 2013, p. 2) of the research participants. This philosophical assumption, tied to my constructivist paradigm, is aligned with Yazan (2015) explanation of Merriam’s (1998) view that case study research is based on belief in a constructed view of multiple interpretations of reality based on the

interactions of individuals within their social worlds. Yazan (2015) presented socially constructed knowledge as the result of peoples' social realities which are generated and constructed in people's mind, something I hold as a core belief about myself and others.

This study was also influenced by my epistemological view of knowledge as being a social and subjective experience and that truth is never "the sole proprietorship of any single domain of knowledge" (Bentley et al., 2007, p. 12). As such, knowledge is experiential, meaning findings are created and contextual (Held, 2019), and when accessed, researchers can gain insight on how participants and their social spaces have been shaped by dominant perspectives (Kincheloe, 2008). I seek to produce knowledge about educational practice, for the world, and I am intrigued by the way people make sense of experiences in a world with layered reality and knowledge (Yazan, 2015).

Constructivism focuses on culture and society and their impacts on individuals' realities and lived experiences which tend to be subjective rather than objective, and employs case studies and reflexivity, among others, to develop an understanding of participants ever evolving contextual and subjective realities so that they can effect change (Cohen et al., 2018). I associate a strong significance to the above-noted factors based on my personal reflection, reflections about my community and the world, and the ways that I access and build knowledge. Crotty (1998) adds that research efforts can seek culturally and historically based "interpretations of the social life-world" (p. 67). The constructivist view explains that "people actively and agentially seek out, select and construct their own views, worlds and learning, and these processes are rooted in socio-cultural contexts and interactions (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 23). Constructivism is complex, cannot be made otherwise, and in educational contexts, it has evolved to critical constructivism (Ross, 1992) which beyond constructivism, maintains that knowledge is an interpretation, in a specific context, made by people, and that educated people are able to understand these interpretations and their implications (Kincheloe, 2008). The origin of the critical element for Kincheloe (2008) is critical theory and explains that people are attempting to extend their consciousness as social beings through self-reflection on alignment to social powers.

3.4 Methodology and Methods of Inquiry

Brown (2008) explains there are multiple realities that create the sense of the world for an observer and that their view of reality is constructed from their experiences, which make it valid. The study features a qualitative instrumental case study design (Stake, 1987, 1994, 2003). Hence,

this study uses this approach to build an understanding of these multiple independently created realities and was selected because it has been used in research for a long time, is versatile and structured, and is recognized as a “valid form of inquiry to explore a broad scope of complex issues, particularly when human behaviour and social interactions are central to understanding topics of interest” (Harrison et al., 2017, pp. 4-5). Merriam (1998) warns that despite being commonly known by many, case studies didn’t have a common structure or process. This case study “recognized the complexity and ‘embeddedness’ of social truths” and was “a step to action” (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 379) and recognized the importance of the context in which the phenomenon was investigated (Priya, 2021) through a sharp focus of attention (Stake 1987, 1994, 2003). This study sought to shed light on and to be an in-depth group exploration of the beliefs, actions, and processes of the professional lives of school-based leaders who sought to achieve the goals of the IS policy while allowing for the reader to “extend their experience, discover new meaning, or confirm what is known” and to understand “the reasons for a problem, the background of the situation, what happened, and why” (Brown, 2008, p. 3). The study of the treaty relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples was framed within an emic perspective “that focuses on researching social phenomenon within a particular cultural context and understanding this phenomenon as members of that cultural context understand it” (Azungah, 2018, pp. 385-386). The study followed Pan and Tan’s (2011) eight suggested steps to complete a structured case study. It pushed the edge of what we don’t know by stepping away from what is deemed comfortable (Singer & Easton, 2015), contributed new knowledge to the world of educational leaders and public policy actors by seeking the meaning that school leaders ascribed to the social and human problem (McMillan & Shumacher, 2010) that impacts Indigenous students in Saskatchewan schools, and presents a local case where there is a real need to humanize school communities (Marshall & Khalifa, 2018).

Although it is rarely conceived as such, could it be that the public education system, schools, SBLs, and teachers are part of the problem and contribute to the gap between ministerial policy and goals and Indigenous educational outcomes, and that greater respect towards Indigenous agency and sovereignty are needed in Treaty 6 territory? If so, I wish to contribute to the end of white settlers harming, preventing, and existing as institutional barriers for Indigenous students and communities. Rather than positioning myself as a saviour of Indigenous students, I seek to save white settlers from us and to stop ongoing detrimental cycles of intervention and

harm. I am confident that Indigenous researchers, agencies, communities, and peoples will contribute to their self-emancipation (Held, 2019) and that as a non-Indigenous person, my role is to ensure that Saskatchewan's education sector and systems do not impede, interfere, or delay this process. I investigated this by collecting the voices, experiences, and perspectives of western school leaders (Meadows, 2008; Senge, 2003) as those who are entrusted as middle managers for policy interpretation and implementation (Honig, 2016; Howlett & Walker, 2012; McLaughlin, 2006) to support and grow the practice of numerous teachers and to ensure student learning (Hattie, 2015b). Other goals were to deliver an account of the current rate of success of the educational policy (Sablan, 2019), to influence those who wield power as policymakers (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018; Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, 2023; Saskatchewan School Boards Association, 2022), and to create new trustworthy information that could be considered by the reader (Harrison et al., 2017; Rashid et al., 2019; Yazan, 2015), and to advocate for educational leaders and educational change in Treaty 6 territory.

Case study research, according to Brown (2008), has contributed significantly to our knowledge base of organizational culture and is a powerful research methodology to understand organizations. Drawing from this, I selected case study research for this study because of its historical use, because it enables the investigation of bounded systems (Brown, 2008), and because, as a researcher, I wished to add informative and contextual data to the field of studies. Selecting this qualitative research methodology, as noted above, is not an original approach as it is one of the most used in social research (Priya, 2021) but seemed obvious because I sought to understand how and why members of the education sector engage with, make sense of, and implement policy (Brown, 2008). The findings from my case study contribute to and refine our understanding of the policy chain and educational policy in Saskatchewan and reveal participants' hidden views and values and provide original findings.

This was a worthy research topic because it is relevant to the needs of students, this problem affects every aspect of the Canadian political and economic landscape, and influences the relationship between Indigenous peoples and settlers (Abele, 2007; Government of Saskatchewan, 2018). The Problem of Practice (Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate, n.d.) is the gap between ministerial policy and goals and Indigenous educational outcomes in Saskatchewan. The IS policy, as well as inadequate educational funding has created a moral imperative, an economic imperative (Ministry of Education, 2010) and a moral panic (Hier,

2016) to improve the learning experience so that more Indigenous students experience equitable learning opportunities and successfully graduate with a high school diploma.

The methodology has been selected to support the strategic design and because of its ability to be tailored to provide a rich textual description (Harrison et al., 2017; Shaked & Schechter, 2018) of how school leaders experience and attempt to address the policy imperatives and overcome the challenges presented in the IS policy document to readers. “In Canada the old colonial order and its preoccupation with assimilation of Aboriginal peoples to British ways has been replaced by a new constitutional order that respects Aboriginal rights” (Battiste, 1998, p. 16) without ever substantially changing the ground-level material or social dynamics for Indigenous peoples (Cottrell & Hardie, 2019; Cottrell & Orłowski, 2015; Orłowski & Cottrell, 2019; Papp & Cottrell, 2021). The proposed study relied on the case study’s ability to capture “the individual’s point of view, examining the constraints of everyday life, and securing rich descriptions” (Harrison et al., 2017, p. 8). The study targeted a diverse sample of school leaders based on their range of leadership roles, contexts, and experiences to understand the current state of progress on the five-policy goals, promising practices and barriers within the enduring strategies of the Education Sector Strategic Plan, and what additional needs are noted by school leaders to increase the odds of policy success (Frese et al., 2003).

The study’s inquiry question was: How do school-based leaders engage with educational policy and implement the IS policy to support the improvement of educational outcomes of Indigenous children learning in Treaty 6 territory and contribute to W̱itaskêwin?

The study would be guided by the following main research questions (Harrison et al., 2017; Singer & Easton, 2015):

- How do leadership actions, beliefs, and processes lead to policy success in public schools in Treaty 6 territory?
- How do barriers persist despite leadership actions, beliefs, and processes and limit policy success in public schools in Treaty 6 territory?
- Is the Inspiring Success educational policy a remedy or a roadblock to the improvement of Indigenous learning rates and the treaty relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Saskatchewan?

Case studies are “the preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being explored, when the researcher has little control over events, and when the focus is on a phenomenon in a contemporary context (Yin, 1984), stated similarly by Priya (2020).

The methodological underpinnings and aspects of this proposed study surpassed those known as constructivist (Harrison et al., 2017) and aligned themselves to critical constructivism (Kincheloe, 2008) and recognized socially and historically located power relations. It explains intertwined facts and values, that power in society is unequal, and that inequality and compounding oppression exist. I seek to fulfill my ethical responsibility, in part, through this study (Ermine, 2007) by promoting social justice (French, 2023; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015) and equity (Sablan, 2019), while being a complete insider (Cohen et al., 2018; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010) to western certified professional school leadership (Fullan, 2014; Fullan, 2018; Kovach, 2021) in Saskatchewan’s public education system.

3.4.1 Sampling and Participants

The study featured two levels of purposeful sampling in design, which case was to be studied and who would be accepted as participants (Brown, 2008). This study purposefully sought the participation of a minimum of four and a maximum of eight school-based public education leaders in Treaty 6 territory from a population of more than 200 possible participants to maximize the findings and impact of the study (Malterud et al., 2016). As a researcher, I sought “the particular more than the ordinary” (Stake, 2008, p. 125) and purposively selected among the willing participants to ensure the best possible representation of perspectives, experiences, and insights (Stake, 2008). I was interested in accessing school-based leaders with unique racial, ethnic, and gendered perspectives and purposively select based on these attributes. The selection criterion for participants required that they have at least two years of school-based public education leadership experience in Treaty 6 territory. Any school-based leader on leave or retired was not accepted (Cohen et al., 2018; Harrison et al., 2017). The purposeful sampling described above represents a sense of responsibility and personal commitment to my home territory and colleagues to gather a diversity of voices. I have always lived in Treaty 6 territory and have dedicated my professional life to bringing about positive change for all members of my community by improving the quality of public education and ensuring equitable opportunities for all regardless of race, culture, sex, or gender.

The structure used by Shaked and Schechter (2018) and concrete case study suggestions (Brown, 2008; Pan & Tan, 2011; Rashid et al., 2019; Vershuren, 2003; Yazan, 2015) were studied closely as successful research models and guidelines and their use ensured greater validity, coherence, and alignment (Harrison et al., 2017) in my study. All participants were voluntary participants who were free to exit the study at their own discretion (Cohen et al., 2018). Their identity and responses were confidential thanks to the use of pseudonyms that were assigned to or self-selected by participants. No identifying information was attached to the interview transcripts. The only location that stored the connecting information was my secure research journal. There was no need to identify specific school-based leaders, schools, or communities for the findings to be relevant and useful to the field and reader and any one of these pieces of information could have broken the confidentiality and posed a risk of personal and professional harm to the participants. Therefore, given the possibility that sensitive topics were discussed during the data collection process, no connecting information was made available to participants nor to the public. Once the purpose of the study was considered and understood, participant's written consent was recorded on participant consent forms that I prepared and participants received no compensation, financial or other, for choosing to participate in the study.

3.4.2 Data Collection

Participant data was collected using semi-structured interviews (Brown & Danaher, 2019), which are the space where multiple realities are constructed (Azungah, 2018), and were conducted individually with each participant. The interview's key questions were prepared and shared with participants prior to seeking their written consent. These prepared questions acted as the foundation and were adjusted and adapted according to a semi-structured method (Rabionet, 2011) that granted the interviewer the flexibility to respond to emerging ideas and topics presented by the participant. I believed the interviews would be enhanced by a conversational design (Shaked & Schechter, 2018) where questions flow from prior participant responses and deviate as necessary to ensure the relevant data was collected and accurate. I selected the most common method of data collection in case studies (Merriam, 1998) to ensure the greatest possible methodological validity. My design sought a broad range of data allowed for a greater coverage of a diverse range of issues (Brown, 2008). In turn, I leveraged these to later advocate using the themes identified so that the realities of the marginalized Indigenous students (Held, 2019) would be considered as "what could or should be" (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 294). With

participant consent, the interviews were video and audio-taped for transcription and analysis (Cohen et al., 2018) and lasted approximately 1 hour. I transcribed each recorded conversation in its entirety. Completed transcripts were emailed to participants for their verification. Once verified, all data collected, which was largely in digital format, was saved and shared with the principal investigators for storage in their U of S OneDrive and accessed from my secure laptop. The data files and folders, kept for storage, analysis, and record keeping have been kept exclusively on my supervisor's secure Microsoft account with password protection to ensure the greatest possible security and confidentiality. Once the study was completed, all personal information that I collected on research participants, including contact information, codes/pseudonyms, were kept in unique secure folders in my supervisor's secure OneDrive. Once the results were published, all collected data was submitted to the principal investigators for the mandatory five (5) year post-publication period as set out by the guidelines of the University of Saskatchewan.

I kept a field note journal (Ravitch & Carl, 2019) to capture and store important events, thoughts, and observations about my study as well as any verbal consent offered by participants. I started using the journal prior to commencing the data collection process, throughout the data collection and data analysis process, and kept it accessible until the final defence of my dissertation in the event it was useful or relevant. During the data collection process, I tracked important information, like non-verbal cues, wonders, ideas to probe further, and question reformulations, in my field note journal to mitigate against the loss that can happen once abstraction occurs from the face-to-face experience to transcription noted by researchers (Cohen et al., 2018; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Ravitch & Carl, 2019).

Below is a list of interview questions that were developed and used in the interviews. These were piloted on a non-participating colleague friends to gather feedback with the purpose of refining the questions.

- How did you make sense of and implement the Inspiring Success educational policy? What supports were you offered/did you seek and from whom? What supports did you offer your staff?
- How does the Inspiring Success educational policy define the educational problem faced by the province? How would you define the problem?
- How do leadership actions, beliefs, and processes lead to policy success in public schools

in Treaty 6 territory?

- How do barriers persist despite leadership actions, beliefs, and processes and limit policy success in public schools in Treaty 6 territory?
- Is the Inspiring Success educational policy a remedy or a roadblock to the improvement of Indigenous learning rates and the treaty relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Saskatchewan?
- How has the Inspiring Success educational policy affected your organization, you as a leader, and the teachers in your school?
- How would you explain and describe the Inspiring Success educational policy to a parent (stakeholder) from your school or a person in the community?
- How does Inspiring Success fit with other policies that you are required to implement as a school-based leader?
- How do you support your teachers to achieve the Inspiring Success policy goals in your school?
- How do you and your staff determine what is appropriate for your students in these circumstances?
- How would you describe your school community and municipal community's relationship(s) with Indigenous children and people?
- What is needed to make the Inspiring Success educational policy successful? How do you know this?

3.4.3 Data Analysis

The study employed a four-stage data analysis process—condensing, coding, categorizing, and thematic analysis (Williams & Moser, 2019) for the purpose of “developing, analyzing and interpreting patterns” (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 4). As described by Shaked & Schechter (2018), each stage had a strategic purpose such as condensing; finding pieces of data relevant to the study from the raw data, coding; adding codes to pieces of data, categorizing; joining similar pieces, generalizing, and deriving categories, and thematic analysis; discovering a conceptual construct from the categories and understanding the interconnections and influences in the construct. The coding process in this study was systemic, organic, evolving, and subjective, and was refined through iterations (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The study aimed to employ “inductive (data-driven) to deductive (researcher- or theory-driven) orientations” (p. 56). The analysis of

raw data (Chandra & Shang, 2019; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019; Thomas, 2006) as printed transcripts, was re-examined several times (Chandra & Shang, 2019), was first analyzed using core concepts (Azungah, 2018; Bradley et al., 2007; Thomas, 2006) organized in a predetermined list of codes that acted as an organizing framework (Azungah, 2018; Bradley et al., 2007; Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Later, to find concepts and themes in utterances used by the participants, I used systemic inductive coding to find concepts and themes described by participants (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019; Thomas, 2006). I used open coding (Chandra & Shang, 2019; Williams & Moser, 2019) and set a limit of no more than 30 codes, followed by axial coding (Williams & Moser, 2019) with a set limit of 10 axial codes, and finally, selective coding to extract 3 themes providing concise findings that adequately answer the study's research questions (Cohen et al., 2018). These levels of data analysis allowed me to offer an adequate interpretive narrative of the case to the reader (Brown, 2008).

The process was cumbersome and awkward because of the number of pages of interview transcripts, and the richness of the participant response. Once the transcripts were fully marked up with pencilled notes in margins, circled key words, bracketed key statements, and highlighted quotes to draw from, I amassed this data into a nine by 16 column word document so that the key data from a participant could be viewed as a through line and to remove the bulk of the text. I kept records of page numbers with the key words or short utterances of participants so that I could go back and verify supporting information or additional context information when considering the data. I chose to create a Microsoft Word document and not a Microsoft Excel sheet as I did with my literature review due to the search problems I experienced with large volumes of text. This process proved helpful to find commonality, differences, and trends between participant data. My extensive engagement with the data and the iterative coding process noted above did force continuous reflection and deep thought, which I am confident led to my findings and the confidence I hold in their trustworthiness and value beyond the case. I am confident that this process and technique would evolve and grow in future research endeavours, as upon reflection, it seemed laborious and slow. The process could also be replicated in future research because of the opportunity to slowly carve the data down to its most relevant form, the multiple opportunities to review and work with participant data, and the strong linkages allowing me to return to the original source if needed or desired. The topic and goal for research, the

number of participants, and the audience would contribute to the data analysis design. I would neither persuade nor dissuade the reader from considering this process for their own research as it evolved according to my process and needs, and its efficacy and efficiency are not truly known.

3.4.4 Rigor and Reliability/Trustworthiness of the Inquiry

I am a white male settler born and raised in Treaty 6 territory who adopted their treaty identity as an adult after learning about the settler colonial reality in Canada (Orlowski & Cottrell, 2019) through university courses, catalyst treaty teacher training, attending Indigenous ceremonies, and being trained as a Dakota fire keeper community officer (Holmes, 2020). I am deeply impacted by my settler-colonial heritage (Crosschild et al., 2021; Veracini, 2011) and my alignment to critical constructivism (Kincheloe, 2008). I am aware that these experiences and attributes influence me as a researcher, and I commit to engaging in critical reflection in the future (Kincheloe, 2008). My research is an instrumental case study from Treaty 6 territory in Saskatchewan, that seeks to contribute to reconciliation through education and research, influence policymakers and the policy chain by presenting the voices of school-based leaders, and to compel them to address policy barriers so that the Crown's treaty responsibilities can be upheld (Carr-Stewart, 2006).

The study was understood to be one of few empirical studies that explored how school-based leaders engage with educational policy, their experiences, and their attempts to address and overcome the challenges known in the education field and community, some of which are presented in the IS policy document. Due to the structure of my Education Doctorate program, the findings were collected from a small sample and bound within one of six treaty regions in the province (Cohen et al., 2018). Cultures and ethnicities (Causadias, 2020) as well as cultural realities, such as diverse Indigenous groups, settler, rural, urban, among others, were expected to be significant in the participant data and to the study. The study didn't ensure cross-cultural validity, and the findings were collected during a very short period, less than half a year, and represented a moment in time for the participants and the educational policy which was in its fifth year of implementation, "thereby excluding effects of social change and process" (Cohen et al., p. 265). The parameters pertaining to strategic selection of participants described above, the location of the study, the use of most common methods and rigorous data analysis processes, and the set timeframe demonstrate the efforts I made to ensure adequate case bounding was

demonstrated, as strongly suggested by researchers (Harrison et al., 2017; Rashid et al., 2019; Stake, 2008; Yazan, 2015).

Brown (2008), warned that researchers must do everything possible to ensure their analysis attends to all pieces of evidence, addresses alternate interpretations, addresses the key elements of the study, accesses expert knowledge, and ensures the highest quality of analysis possible. I aimed to ensure that the “interpretations of data are warranted by the theories and evidence used” (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 245). The use of recognized and suggested methods met the standards described by Harrison et al. (2017) to ensure case study validity. I further refined my study design by using multiple sources of evidence, relying on the chain of evidence, and relying on my supervisors to review drafts on my dissertation (Cohen et al., 2018). My findings, as described by Brown (2008), had to be strong, plausible, fair, and supported by data to create the change I sought in the education sector, educational leadership, and in my community. One might suggest that this could be interpreted as creating change that helps Saskatchewan’s education sector understand how critical it is that we get out of the way and remove institutional and sectoral barriers from the public education landscape. The study’s trustworthiness (Stahl & King, 2020) was demonstrated by taking several measures from multiple diverse participants during the data collection stage of the study (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019) and ensuring the findings have value and are considered effective research. I am confident that my interview instrument had reliable consistent measures because I asked the same questions to each participant, and I relied on previously established wording during the interview that had been reviewed by my supervisors and participants. I am also confident in the validity of my data because the questions were designed according to the research reviewed and aligned to the specific target I sought to explore. My study demonstrates trustworthiness because I relied on a significant amount of peer-reviewed data, a reliable interview instrument and process, honest research participants, and ongoing draft reviews from my supervisors (Cohen et al., 2018).

In the future, revisiting this study and adding a longitudinal element with the same group of participants would allow progress and regression over time to be measured (Shaked & Schechter, 2018) and focus groups, also common to case studies, could uncover further insights and creative solutions within the participant group.

3.4.5 Ethical Consideration

Every effort was made to ensure representational ethics and to ensure no harm was done to participants of the study while telling the story (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This was accomplished by meeting the “professional obligation to protect people from harm through misuse or misrepresentation” (p. 214). Furthermore, I was aware that the “wider context for research is language, and the way it can often unintentionally marginalize” (p. 219). I acknowledged the impacts that my own language, culture, academic background, power, privilege, and status could have had within a colonial structure (Crosschild et al., 2021) and attempted to minimize these when interacting with participants. Beyond these, there was also the ethical space between Indigenous and Western thought worlds (Ermine, 2007) that existed in the policy document, provincial curriculum, and the classrooms that were explored and discussed by the participants and myself. Being respectful towards, honouring of, and considerate was of great importance for the research study (Causadias, 2020; Kovach, 2021).

The principle of informed consent was adhered to in my study. I sought and obtained ethics approval from the University of Saskatchewan prior to communicating to public school boards in Treaty 6 territory. Once obtained, I communicated with the appropriate people at Saskatoon Public Schools, Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools, Prairie Spirit School Division, Saskatchewan Rivers School Division, and Prince Albert Catholic School Division and met each school board’s expectations, including any local ethics application process they requested, to then be able to invite their school-based leaders to participate in my study.

3.5 Summary of Paper 3

This paper presented and framed the problem of practice as well as the approach to the inquiry, the methodology and method selected, the study’s inquiry question and the main research questions, the sampling and participants, data collection and analysis processes, efforts to ensure rigour, reliability and trustworthiness, and the ethical considerations I undertook. The design of the study was carefully considered and crafted according to the tenets of case study described in the literature to align the study with the most used methodologies in social sciences. When designing this study, I purposefully selected a commonly used methodology that aligned itself with constructivist ways of being and knowing to critically analyze how SBLs engage with educational policy and contribute to Wîtaskêwin in Treaty 6 territory of Saskatchewan. The findings were anticipated to create positive change by influencing policymakers and educational leaders and to be highly relevant to school boards wishing to engage in equity-based policy and

continuous improvement. The researcher laboured to ensure the confidentiality of participants, schools, and communities is ensured throughout the research process and afterwards according to the 2022 Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Researcher Involving Humans.

Paper 4 – Findings of Research

4.1 Abstract

This paper outlines the instrumental case study completed to determine the current state of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples by investigating how can SBLs successfully implement the Inspiring Success (IS) educational policy to support the improvement of educational outcomes of Indigenous children learning in Treaty 6 territory. The problem of practice, extant literature, methodology inquiry goal, sample, data collection, and analysis are reviewed. Later the findings, a discussion including a comparison of the findings to the literature are presented for the reader. The paper closes with implications of practice and theory, further research, and a conclusion.

4.2 Introduction to Particular Problem of Practice

This instrumental case study seeks to investigate how SBLs can successfully implement the IS educational policy to support the improvement of educational outcomes of Indigenous children learning in Treaty 6 territory. The problem of practice is the gap between ministerial policy and goals and Indigenous educational outcomes in Saskatchewan.

Time, Space, and Social Climate: September 2023 – June 2024- Treaty 6 Territory

Treaty 6 territory, in what is now called Saskatchewan, continues to be a location of contested power and control (Abele, 2007; Gibbons, 2018; Madden, 2019a; Sefa Dei & Restoule, 2019). Saskatchewan, a western Canadian province, is a place where the cumulative effect of oppressive policy has left many of the original inhabitants of the land in some of the worst socioeconomic conditions and substantial worse off than the non-Indigenous provincial or national population (Cottrell & Orłowski, 2015; Jutras, 2022; Wallin & Tunison, 2022). Beyond the legacy of oppression and hardship, like in much of the rest of the world, this region continues to change rapidly and to face numerous complex challenges created by external international forces but also federalism's tri-structure of federal, provincial, and municipal governments (Cerniglia & Longaretti, 2012).

During the 2019-2020 school year, schools and school boards in the Treaty 6 region, as in the rest of the world, had to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. This health crisis interrupted learning and the typical processes that had historically defined educational experiences and the education sector's stakeholders. All communities and economies were deeply affected. To ensure the survival of these sectors and systems, governments around the world and within Canada used

historically unprecedented financial policy instruments to send much needed resources and relief where they were believed to be needed most. In a short period of time, the policy instruments used by governments created several unintended consequences such as uneven production rates, supply chain bottlenecks, over and under supply, hyperinflation and surging prices, and the end of cheap credit and borrowing (Brooks et al., 2023). By September 2023, nearly all sectors and members of communities in Treaty 6 territory faced significantly increased costs on nearly all products and services forcing everyone to make strategic choices about their priorities and spending, resulting in compounding socioeconomic hardships, often felt most significantly by the vulnerable and those living in poverty (Batrawy, 2022).

The level of funding of public education is often described as funding per-student, can be adjusted for inflation, and allows for the comparison between moments in time and geographic locations (Drummond & Kachuk Rosenbluth, 2013). Unfortunately, in Saskatchewan, the rapid rise of inflationary pressures after the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts on the cost of delivering public education were further compounded by years of deleterious cuts to the rate of funding per-student resulting in the diminishment in the quality of the educational experience, defined by some as the number of students in each classroom, supports available to each child, and the overall funding available for education-related services to students in the PreK-12 provincial education system (Statistics Canada, 2024, 2024a, 2024b). From its 2012 funding rate, Saskatchewan had fallen from the highest Canadian per-student rate of funding to sixth (Zwaagstra et al., 2023). In a six-year period from 2022 to 2016, Saskatchewan decreased its funding per-student by approximately \$3,362 a figure that represents a reduction of more than 20% (Statistics Canada, 2024, 2024a, 2024b). All these political and socioeconomic realities presented themselves daily in schools where students, teachers, and school-based leaders (SBLs) gathered to realize the goals of the Inspiring Success (IS) educational policy. The reader should note that the above-noted funding realities are beyond the scope of the educational debt owed to Indigenous peoples for the systemic underfunding they have historically faced (Orlowski & Cottrell, 2019), and the absence of additional policy instruments to realize the IS policy, as described in the provincial policy document (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018).

The 2023-2024 school year also coincided with the attempted negotiation of a new provincial contract for Saskatchewan teachers and school-based leaders (SBLs) between the Government-Trustee Bargaining Committee and the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation (STF).

At the heart of the negotiation for the employee group were the impacts of years of cuts to students learning conditions and professionals work conditions. During the negotiations, the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation membership applied several different sanctions resulting in direct impacts to students, staff, schools, and communities. These sanctions and its impact on the school day and experience often had direct impacts on SBLs workload and work life.

It was in the above-noted socio-political climate that I sought local approval to conduct research from school boards with SBLs, both of which were negatively impacted by the sanctions imposed by the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, historic and ongoing racial tensions (Green, 2006). This study sought participation from five different school divisions that would have represented the diversity of PreK-12 public education found in Treaty 6 territory (Cottrell & Hardy, 2019; Cottrell & Orlowski, 2015; Orlowski & Cottrell, 2019; Tupper, 2014; Tupper & Mitchell, 2022) rural and urban school divisions that offer elementary and high school education to uniform and more culturally diverse communities. Of the five applications, four school divisions responded to the request to conduct educational research. Three school divisions reviewed the application and granted permission to conduct research. Within these school divisions, the opportunity to engage in research was delivered to SBLs through the school division's preferred communication channel. In most cases, school division controlled this communication using an invitation message that I prepared. Of note, one school division didn't respond to multiple requests to participate, and another indicated that the materials and request would be reviewed when possible, and after nearly three months, the director of education indicated that the division would not participate in the study. The direct effects on the study are noted to have limited the overall number of possible interested participants and the geographic area in which SBLs' voices could be collected due to work intensification.

4.3 Brief Description of Extant Literature and Related Studies

The relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples is defined by continuous change (Deer, 2011). Part of this change was the signing of treaties between Indigenous peoples and the British Crown, which would be the building blocks for Canada (Office of the Treaty Commissioner, 2008). Since signing the treaties, the federal government of Canada began inflicting a long legacy of oppression and hardship on Indigenous peoples known as the settler colonial project (Veracini, 2011). With the support of colonial policies, the government sought the displacement of people against their will by authorities for specific

purposes (Donald et al., 2012; Dunstan, 2017; Veracini, 2008, 2011; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Tupper & Mitchell, 2022) to attempt to carry out various types of genocide of Indigenous peoples (Calderon, 2014; Gibbons, 2018; Madden, 2019a; Masta, 2019; Patzer, 2014; Powell & Peristerakis, 2014; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Tupper, 2012; Zembylas & Matias, 2023) leading to capitalist modernity (Dirlik, 2003, 2005, 2014; Veracini, 2008, 2011). Since signing the treaties, non-Indigenous peoples gained privilege and benefit through economic and social exclusion (Tupper, 2013) and built communities founded on colonial assumptions of white privilege (Wallin & Tunison, 2022). Colonialism, class warfare, white supremacy, and neoliberalism continue to normalize the culture of daily accumulation and dispossession by laying claim to respect Indigenous rights while ignoring and contravening Indigenous leaders and maintaining structural racism (Parasram, 2019). In Canada, there exists a legacy of racially based tensions that are clearly noted in the systemic marginalization of Indigenous peoples (Wallin & Tunison, 2022) and also in the case of those trying to address systemic racism who faced personal hardship and refusal for their efforts by whites while being honoured by Indigenous peoples (Green, 2006). The prior noted sources of resistance may not be the only case as North American society is defined and permeated by racial realities (Baker, 2006; Gibbons, 2018; Mills, 2007). There are several societal problems driven by the white dominant majority that make implementing equity-based educational policies like the IS educational policy very difficult (Daramola et al., 2023; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Hands & Freckelton, 2019; Patuawa et al., 2023; Velasco & Sansone, 2019; Welborn, 2019). Racism, ignorance, delusion, sexism, patriarchy, and supremacy is driven by whites as normative and universal in North American societies (Mills, 2007), a group that takes their race and position for granted, even in education (Taylor, 2017). Persisting racial inequalities in society are the result of social stability and security for whites and compounded by perceived zero sum and fixed-pie logics that suggest that resources can't be applied to create greater equity for others (Eibach and Keegan, 2006). Underfunding of education is a form of economic exclusion, is often directed at Indigenous learners, and is one of the most obvious embodiments of colonialism in Canada (Gauthier et al., 2020). Counter-pressures to public funding of education are neoliberal economics and class warfare (Dabscheck, 2018; Flew, 2014; McMurtry, 1998, 2002; Orłowski, 2015; Peterson, 1997; Schiller, 2008; Sumner, 2007). The current achievement gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students legitimate colonial myths rather than identify debts

owed to Indigenous peoples for a legacy of colonization (Needham, 2021; Orłowski & Cottrell, 2019) that includes “the reserve system, this legacy of incarceration, residential schools, sickness, the removal of children in the ’60s, missing and murdered women” (Kent Monkman, as cited in Canadianart, 2017 n.p.).

Public education is the backbone of North American societies (Hogan et al., 2020) and the Ministry of Education is responsible for leadership, direction, and educational planning for the present and future growth and development (Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, 2019). Education is a means of ensuring a basic level of education for all citizens and a wealth redistribution strategy driven by the collection and distribution of tax revenue through universally applied intergovernmental financial aid in the form of spending per student (Arclean & Schiopu, 2015; Glomm, 2004; Kang, 2021) and is also an enduring structure of the settler project that maintains, reinforces, and replicates ideology to the current day (Masta, 2019). Policies are formal records of decisions made on specific issues that are then communicated to stakeholders which creates winners and losers (Howlett et al., 2020). Public policy expresses adopted goals, decisions, and actions (Abele, 2007; Reyes et al., 2014). Systems leadership focuses on creating the conditions for, enabling, and sustaining system-level change (Hopkins, 2013; Hopkins et al., 2014; Leithwood et al., 2020; Meadows, 2008; Sumaira & Shahbaz, 2021; Senge, 1997, 2003; Senge et al., 2007; Senge et al., 2015). Principals are change agents who must make sense of new initiatives and policies for various stakeholders, communicate vision, and link accountability to professionalism and autonomy (Lowenhaupt et al., 2016). Principals’ talk transfers key messages to stakeholders (Timperley and Parr, 2009) and require skills and knowledge about policy implementation to be successful (Hands and Freckelton, 2019). SBLs are educational policy leaders and drive organizations’ ability to adapt, improve, and change through learning (Breakspear, 2010b; Senge, 2003).

4.4 Methodology

The methodology employed was an instrumental case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 2003). It was selected because it is one of the most common ways of conducting qualitative inquiry in the field of social sciences (Ndam, 2023; Rashi et al., 2019; Stake, 2003; Yazan, 2015). The problem of practice is specific, bound, includes patterns and this methodology permits understanding the complexity of the problem concentrated into a single case (Stake, 1994, 2003).

4.4.1 Inquiry Goal

The purpose of the instrument case study is to critically analyze how school-based leaders engage with educational policy and implement the IS policy to support the improvement of educational outcomes of Indigenous children learning in Treaty 6 territory and contribute to Wîtaskêwin.

4.4.2 Sample and Data Collection

This study included seven SBLs with a minimum of two-year experience implementing the IS educational policy in a PreK-12 context from rural and urban centres from Treaty 6 territory in Saskatchewan.

Introduction of Participants

In this instrumental case study, I sought to gain insight into the efforts of SBLs in Treaty 6 territory to engage with and implement the Inspiring Success (IS) educational policy while ensuring their confidentiality, and as such, all identifying information has been intentionally removed. All participants are referred to by two letter pseudonyms replacing their unique first and last initial. Participants from this study were all SBLs with at least two years of experience implementing the IS educational policy in PreK-12 schools and more than five years of educational leadership experience. This study achieved a near-balance of male and female voices and elementary and high school perspectives. The participants were three female elementary principals, one male elementary principal, one female high school principal, one male high school vice principal, and one male high school principal. Two participants were visible minorities of which one was Indigenous. The seven participants, OT, MA, IH, ME, PL, FV, and SM represented one less than the maximum number of participants sought. All but one participant were principals; however, each participant was solely responsible for SBLs duties and none had direct instructional or assessment roles with students at the time of the interview. In keeping with ensuring the confidentiality of all participants, the strategic choice has been made to withhold all geographic data beyond the Treaty 6 territory of Saskatchewan, including urban or rural indications from the reader. Participant data was collected with digital devices from individually held semi-structured interviews. What was shared with me during the semi-structured interviews is presented below.

4.4.3 Data Analysis

Participant data was analyzed using a four-stage analysis process including condensing, coding, categorizing, and thematic analysis to develop analyze, and interpret patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Shaked & Schechter, 2018; Williams & Moser, 2019). This process was applied to develop, analyze, and interpret patterns in participant data from an inductive to deductive approach and to understand interconnections and influences (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Shaked & Schechter, 2018). Raw data was re-examined several times, first using a limit of 30 open code core concepts, followed by eight axial codes, and later selective coding to identify three concepts and themes (Azungah, 2018; Bradley et al., 2007; Chandra & Shang, 2019; Cohen et al., 2018; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019; Thomas, 2006; Williams & Moser, 2019). This strategic choice sought to ensure concise findings that would adequately answer the research questions through a comparative structure (Brown, 2008; Cohen et al., 2018).

4.5 Findings

Themes

Systemic, organic, evolving, and subjective data organization and analysis of the seven participants data sets, which represents more than 190 pages of transcribed interviews, yielded three overarching themes and eight categories. The researcher was guided through a four-stage data analysis by Williams and Moser (2019) which was selected because of the clarity of the process to follow. Labouring through a linear process from open codes to axial codes and arriving at themes generated conflict and dissonance as the categories were understood to be holistic and encompassing of multiple open codes when considered in the context of the study. From the perspective of the participants, and from my own professional practice as a SBL, the work of engaging with and implementing the IS educational policy as a SBL is interpreted and understood to be an interconnected web of ideas, concepts, actions, and dispositions. Therefore, the reader is encouraged to conceptualize these findings to be less of a category/subcategory and more of a macro/micro view of the educational leadership landscape, much as someone would see when looking at a high-resolution picture of a frozen moment and seeing peoples, objects, and places, and then zooming into finer details, and finally pixels that make up the larger picture. The themes and the categories were largely anticipated given the scope of the literature review, the intent of the study, my insider perspective, and the structure and questions of the interview. The following section will first present the eight categories identified in the participant

responses; policy, place, people, relationships, change, actions, barriers, and needs, and then the three overarching themes of the study; roles, relationships, and responsibilities.

The interview questions presented to participants were

- How did you make sense of and implement the Inspiring Success educational policy? What supports were you offered/did you seek and from whom? What supports did you offer your staff?
- How does Inspiring Success fit with other policies that you are required to implement as a school-based leader?
- How do you support your teachers to achieve the Inspiring Success policy goals in your school?
- How do you and your staff determine what is appropriate for your students in these circumstances?
- How do leadership actions, beliefs, and processes lead to policy success in public schools in Treaty 6 territory?
- How do barriers persist despite leadership actions, beliefs, and processes and limit policy success in public schools in Treaty 6 territory?
- How would you describe your school community and municipal community's relationship(s) with Indigenous children and people?
- How would you explain and describe the Inspiring Success educational policy to a parent (stakeholder) from your school or a person in the community?
- How has the Inspiring Success educational policy affected your organization, you as a leader, and the teachers in your school?
- What is needed to make the Inspiring Success educational policy successful? How do you know this?

Policy

Known/Unknown

The first category identified in participant responses was policy. Despite being provincial in scope and expected to be implemented in all schools for the four prior school years, not all participants felt the IS educational policy was known and familiar to them. Anticipating this, I provided each participant a copy of the policy including its goals prior to the interview. During

the interview, participants were asked to reflect on the IS policy and others that they were required to use in their SBL roles.

Policy, according to MA, creates expectations and requirements to “get on it” for those in the education sector and IH described it as something that could be frightening, like a set of rules that could be difficult to understand or to follow. While four participants knew and spoke with passion and conviction about the value and importance of the IS policy, its goals, and its imperatives, one participant felt as if it was known but couldn’t articulate where or when they would have encountered the policy, despite being a strong advocate for the goals. Two participants were unfamiliar with the policy and suggested that it could have been briefly mentioned or presented in an organizational process such as an administrative meeting. One went as far as to say it was unknown to them. This reality was highlighted by OT who asked: “I wonder how many people have read it?” and explained that SBLs, although they likely didn’t have adequate policy training and experience, nor the cultural perspective and background to truly understand the IS policy, they had to read, know, and understand the policy as a professional requirement to be a leader. Two participants wondered how and when the policy had been communicated to them as SBLs and one recalled a brief presentation to introduce and discuss the policy with colleagues.

PL was introduced to the policy when they participated in targeted division-level leadership meetings focused on the IS policy for SBLs from schools with high Indigenous student populations led by senior leaders to encourage implementation efforts. These meetings, according to PL, sought to ensure that SBLs were aware of the policy and that it was something to review when carrying out leadership actions such as looking at student performance data and allocating supports. Those least familiar with the policy still spoke highly of its goals when these were reviewed and discussed during the interview. As a researcher, I found it significant that not all SBLs had received the IS policy, reviewed school division progress through regular leadership contexts such as division-wide administrative meetings, and weren’t aware of tangible actions and strategies that supported policy implementation and progress throughout their division.

Response to Policy

All participants were in favour of the goals and saw good things in the provincial policy and none spoke against the policy, per se. PL noted alignment between provincial and division

goals. SM described the policy as hopeful because this iteration of provincial policy was “far more aligned with Indigenous ways of knowing than not.” IH remembered how important the IS policy was to a Métis colleague who shared feelings of excitement and relevance. OT voiced that the IS policy was aligned with other policies and research and reflected some of the requests in the National Indian Brotherhood’s Red Paper of 1970. SM was pleased to see the evolution, and how far the provincial policy had come; from the accountability framework to the Hoshin Kanri A3s, policies which they explained were focused on the wrong things, and how the IS policy demonstrated a more holistic and forward-looking stance that moved “First Nations and Métis pieces” from the periphery to the centre. For those unfamiliar, the prior mentioned provincial accountability initiatives were part of prior iterations of Saskatchewan’s provincial education plan. MA agreed and affirmed that the policy was based in Indigenous worldview and intended to support Indigenous children in schools. All SBLs perceived the IS policy to be very rich and aspirational, something that would be an ideal future state for our community. Despite the adjustment in educational policy framing and focus, SM expressed grave concern:

“I think we would have to completely revamp policy if we're going to do justice to the Inspiring Success framework. The reason I say that is because these policies are rooted in a Western approach, and for better or worse, like it or not, is rooted in racism.”

They added that the ways of knowing, language, and the vocabulary used in the policy was problematic as it was written in English and from a Western perspective, lacked relationality, and would require reconsideration of how education works for Indigenous people. SM also indicated their belief that the IS policy will be another marker in the province’s policy journey and wouldn’t achieve the needed change due to lack of adequate stakeholder engagement and funds: “So if you're doing a policy framework, my question would be around like which groups did you talk to right? Did we talk to intellectuals, or we talk to the average family? And what are their stories?”

Policy Landscape for SBLs

In the current educational leadership landscape, multiple participants suggested that busy professionals must be compelled to work tirelessly towards lofty policy goals. IH described this when they explained: “We have to explore the imperative of it – that's where I could find a place for it in my heart. Once it’s in my heart, I make time for it.” ME suggested that what was important was understanding, valuing, and seeing the moral imperative behind the policy, one of

six imperatives presented in the document. For ME, the past legacy of hardship was understood and compelled them to specific leadership actions which they explained that they strove to ensure that “all students are safe, and successful within our education system. And historically, the group that we as a system have not served in the way that helps them be successful, is the Indigenous students.”

Beyond the educational sector, MA reflected that the IS policy is little known by stakeholders and few if any policy instruments have been allocated to communicate the existence or importance of the policy. Participants expressed that the IS policy, or similar educational equity goals for Indigenous learners had been left to SBLs and school boards to communicate to stakeholders. While discussing defending policy implementation efforts, PL clarified: “you're also teaching the parents, and you're also letting the community know why this is important.” They further explained: “So it really depends on the community, the size of the school, the families that are part of that school.” This indicates that the level of resistance or acceptance to the policy goals, or similar policies that create equitable change for Indigenous learners, could be predicted by socioeconomic and the racial composition of the school community, a geographically bound reality in communities. In a community with a high Indigenous enrollment, FV explained their experience implementing the IS policy in their school community was: “it was just natural... It didn't seem rehearsed. It didn't seem fake or phony. It was implemented. We were living it, breathing it, doing it.” PL explained a similar experience and added that community members were open and wanted to support and be a part of the school. In more challenging circumstances, MA described how they had to explain to parents: “It’s about education. If you don’t want your child to be a part of it, that's OK. But we're still teaching it.” This statement reveals the persistence of endemic racism that constrains education policymakers’ goals for reconciliation and the reality faced by SBLs when families opposed and shielded their children from societal efforts to build racial and cultural understanding and harmony.

The Power and Authority of Policy

Participants recognized the capacity of educational policy, school board policy, and provincial curriculum to bring about the type of societal change described in the IS educational policy. Each of these describes organizational decisions and the knowledge that is officially recognized in the provincial education system. OT explained that the IS policy was essential for Indigenous achievement and outcomes and offered safety to those pursuing these goals. MA

described how the provincial curriculum, the IS policy, and their school division's mandate towards Indigenous learners gave them the imperative, authority, and protection to communicate the expectations of the school board and the provincial government to stakeholders. The policy was described by OT as a powerful agent in the educational landscape when they shared: "I knew that a policy document would help hold heavier weight than an Indigenous woman. [...] We're working in a public education where the bulk of the students, teachers and leaders are not Indigenous." For PL, the IS policy validated alternate worldviews from Elders and Knowledge Keepers, demonstrated their importance in the educational landscape, and in the absence of school board policies or strategic plans, could support SBLs who faced resistance in implementing equity efforts in their communities, a reality in their division. FV determined that their organization took the policy seriously because senior leaders brought the policy imperatives into the organization, discussed, and explored these with various staff including SBLs, and at one point, allocated specialized staff to specific Indigenous support roles.

Policy Sense Making and Implementation

SBLs must make sense of educational policy prior to implementing it. OT described this process as reading, knowing and understanding the policy, the provincial policy landscape, complementary initiatives, and supporting documents, as well as how people engage with important challenging tasks. When reading the policy, PL felt it made sense and included the voices of the right people and integrated meaningful provincial initiatives (Following Their Voices), similarly mentioned by SM, who indicated the policy imperatives resonated with the above-noted initiative. OT explained that knowing a policy's author and who was and was not able to participate in its creation was noteworthy and important, something suggested by PL when referring to including the voice and ideas of some but not others and the problems that are created when the children and families served are not included in consultative processes. FV agreed and expanded this to their day-to-day experiences supporting students. IH made mention of the inclusion of Indigenous peoples in the policy's creation and shared their beliefs about working alongside families, the importance of considering possibilities, the scope of the goals and the time needed for success, and their concerns for what might be missed, not done, lacking relevance, and becoming invisible because of alternate leadership foci. OT considered where their leadership gives them control, and what resources were available to use in pursuit of the policy. The IS educational policy was understood by all participants to be aspirational and lofty.

IH felt the policy lacked direction or a place from which to start and expressed this: “Well, it's so broad. And I feel like when I read it, I don't come away knowing what I need to know. Knowing what I need to do.” This description from IH would indicate that the IS policy is ambitious and requires years, additional supports, and framing from school boards to help SBLs to contextualize and implement the policy. OT explained that implementing the IS policy was difficult as SBLs had to make the policy fit because: “It doesn't align like a little puzzle.” This statement reveals the individual efforts required from each SBL and the infinite permutations and combinations that could arise from the individualized sense making and implementation processes. For PL, making sense included considering the people and the place where she was to implement the policy. Implementation for OT and ME included aligning leadership actions to the policy. FV explained that the provincial policy was like a skeleton, something understood by some SBLs and not others, but for those who did, it allowed them to lead differently and with confidence. SM explained that they conceptualized the policy as an end destination and not the gauges, something in the far distance when looking through the windshield of a car on a journey, something that shouldn't be confused as the be all and end all.

Place, People, and Relationships

The second, third, and fourth categories identified in participant responses were place, people, and relationships. These have been combined as they held many connections identified in the research participants' experiences and perspectives and for me as a researcher.

Socioeconomic

Socioeconomic realities and barriers were discussed by several participants. MA identified a worsening socioeconomic condition in their otherwise resilient community that presented itself as food vulnerability and the need for school lunches to be provided for students, a disproportionately represented reality for Indigenous students. Some schools, discussed by PL, OT, MA and FV, recognize the unique needs of community members living within the complexity of poverty known as community schools, spaces where Indigenous families and learners are overrepresented, which is sadly, a support no longer offered to communities by the provincial government regardless of the community's needs. PL shared from their experience:

“What I really saw in the community schools is how much is falling on education instead of being the responsibility of the health district and on the Ministry of Social Services.

And so we're doing those things because we know that children won't learn unless those basic needs are being met.”

In response to community needs, FV explained that schools in school divisions have different levels and types of supports which can make the work of supporting students difficult for SBLs and represents resource-based barriers opposing the IS policy and limiting commitments to reconciliation due to and cumulative reductions in provincial educational funding.

Culture and Race

Treaty 6 is a place where races and poverty are divided geographically. This was understood and described by FV when they wondered aloud if the same efforts were being made “on the other side of town.” It is also a location where single acts and token events, such as land acknowledgements and orange shirt day celebrations, are expected to hold impact and significance, but where meaningful change and action is absent, a reality mentioned by MA, ME, and SM. ME worked strategically to create a living culture for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students where Plains Cree words are spoken daily. OT explained that there is much work to be done: “We're not where we need to be. We're still building, but that's me, seven years into a school, we can't even tell you how much it's taken to get to where we're at.” Later, they added that efforts in the education sector in Treaty 6 territory “on the surface it looks good, because I think we've done lots of work for welcoming environments and that part is good, but the normalization of the failure of Indigenous learners is still comfortable for people.” OT’s statements, among others, indicate how much effort is applied by SBLs to uplift and maintain the spirits of non-Indigenous staff who find the work and the goals of the IS policy difficult while Indigenous students continue to endure poorer educational outcomes.

The learning needs of students from differing races and cultures were frequently mentioned explicitly and implicitly by participants. Despite Indigenous students’ being a minority in some schools, SBLs are aware of their needs and progress in learning as according to PL, there are familiar normative division data monitoring processes. They spoke with confidence and conviction when they stated: “we have those stats, we have the stats in this province of our literacy levels and our graduation rates, and they aren’t good.” For ME, maintaining these efforts with a specific lens on Indigenous student success was a non-negotiable after the school division shifted its focus. For OT, being the only Indigenous person in a school, and as the leader, is very hard. For Indigenous families in this region, OT suggested that SBLs need to encourage and

welcome their voices so that they may ask questions and play an active role in supporting student learning.

SM referred to the history of the place where land and resources were seized from Indigenous peoples, where colonial logics and racism are realities, where jealousy and hatred for settlement payments are shared, and blaming the victim is common much like when they explained the community's logic: "They've gotten themselves in that kind of a way, rather than seeing how were they set up to be harmed that way?" FV reflected on the presence of racism in their community, could name white locations like locker rooms where working-class adults created a space where racism was always just below the surface, and described the municipal community as straw; a location where whites would openly oppose efforts to support those facing complex poverty, a safe way for them to oppose supporting Indigenous people in need according to MA, FV, and SM. SM described a common underlying action made in the community: "it's making really fundamental assumptions about people based on our biases and our prejudice." As professionals, OT clarified that Indigenous SBLs can only experience a certain threshold of poor treatment and racism from others because of the nature of working in a public-school division and that racist actions and speech can only go so far, a reality that should be concerning to the reader. IH highlighted that their community believed that they were in relationship with Indigenous people but saw no evidence or involvement other than to endorse and to attend community events when they were held. SM stressed the importance of graduation for Indigenous peoples, which can be a step towards a greater educational journey, or a first for a family. FV expressed the complexity of supporting Indigenous learners when they described teachers' limited capacity to teach Indigenous content or to engage learners, or passivity regarding their professional expectations to teach when they stated: "they leave it for someone else" thinking the work was better suited to someone else. They further explained the limited prior impact of the education system when they added: "I had a superintendent tell me: I can't believe I'm the superintendent of the school division, and my son knows nothing about treaties!" This statement represents a personal/professional knowing/doing gap for this senior leader, indicates the extent to which they actively pursue the work of the IS policy, and is further evidence of the failures of the public education system to meet its mandate and policies; in this case, teaching Treaty Education, teaching truth and reconciliation, and reconciling and restoring

the treaty relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to contribute to Wítaskêwin.

Diversity

Multiple participants referred to diversity or the lack thereof in their communities. In one instance, ME reflected on a white family's departure from the culturally diverse school in search of a monocultural space despite their financial inability to relocate the family's dwelling to this neighbourhood. When supporting the attempt to locate a monocultural classroom, they shared with the family: "our schools [and] our classrooms reflect the community in which you live" and upon reflection, made connections to the policy's moral imperative and felt conviction toward the imperative based on the experience. MA and PL reflected on the changes and realities they experienced moving from a school community that had significant diversity and Indigenous enrollment to one that was predominantly white. ME observed continuous community change based on economic interests and explained that the: "community continues to turnover with recent immigrants who come and live in the area until they can establish either some wealth to move out of the area to a home or out of the province." FV explained that certain age groups in the dominant white majority do not understand or support the goals of the policy.

People as Learning Resources

ME focused on meeting, knowing, and accessing key Indigenous and Métis people in their community to help implement and realize the goals of the policy and to seek feedback. Relationship was in some cases the conduit to and in others the outcome of having community members support the school's work, which ultimately supported students and staff learning, something they cherished, felt fortunate to have, and encouraged other SBLs to develop. FV explained how Indigenous people in specialized roles in schools, like Elders and Knowledge Keepers, allowed for easier access, the creation and maintenance of relationships, and greater staff and student learning. ME used distributed leadership to empower Indigenous school staff, like teachers and educational assistants, to lead and share their knowledge and expertise and to support the school community. PL described the importance of hearing and getting guidance from stakeholders to ensure that the actions of the school and leader reflected the community it served: "we can get the answers that we want, if we ask, and we only include certain people."

Pathways to Leadership

Multiple participants spoke of their prior roles, their mentors, or their own experiences that brought them to their leadership careers and influenced what they do and why they do it. MA reflected on and spoke proudly of a mentor who brought Indigenous content and seasonal celebration into a largely white school community with two Indigenous students. FV spoke in a similar fashion of their administrative partners who were seen as colleagues and mentors who created opportunities for their further learning and involvement in large learning events pertaining to equity for Indigenous learners. OT, FV, MA, ME, and SM spoke of prior roles where they worked closely with Indigenous peoples and the positive impact these experiences and relationships had on their knowledge and ability to lead in unique ways.

Relationships

Relationships were of great relevance and importance to participants. FV expressed that children who build diverse relationships are themselves better for knowing more and ultimately strengthen everyone's story because a greater number of people can understand differing perspectives. OT explained that all experiences are intertwined with relationship. PL frequently mentioned the importance of relationships and explained how these allowed them to be guided and to have the support of families, but that these could also present complexity when conflict arose from community members' unique cultural traditions and understandings within Indigenous groups. FV suggested that a conversation between two people could be the starting point to a meaningful relationship. IH reflected on relationships and shared that the goal was:

“not to create a list of what to do to engage parents, but to rethink, relearn and truly understand that I don't really know anything at all. It's much like equity and anti-racist anti-oppressive education. It's about continuous learning, unlearning, and relearning, and it's never complete.”

SM shared how relationships allow the possibility of supporting others and overcoming conflictual moments and errors made. ME made connections between their school community, the original inhabitants, and newcomers and how this relationship continues to emerge, grow, and evolve over time with greater cultural diversity.

SM spoke with conviction about the positive relationship and partnership that allowed for collaborative work between the school and the police school resource officer and the work of students who were creating cultural spaces in the community, such as in fire halls. IH shared their realization that as a teacher and as a SBL, they needed to change their position, to partner

with families, to work collaboratively, to support each other, find accommodations, and that all of this required knowledge of the other, shared experiences, and vulnerability. PL illustrated the power of strong home and school relationships when they shared:

“they (families) very much appreciate the work that we're doing, and they're wanting to be a part of that work, and the families want to be part of it, and they want to give us their stories and their traditions and values. And they then can see themselves as part of the school community and the things that we're doing.”

Unfortunately, the legacy of assimilation and cultural genocide and the results of colonization and oppression have not left all Indigenous people wanting to regain their language and culture. FV heard this directly from a student who stated: “I don't want to have anything to do with my culture!” Others, when their voice and guidance are sought in relationship, are willing to guide and support schools as described by SM: “The Elders told me language, ceremony, land-based learning, relationships with each other, and healing school. Those five things. So, they became our narrative.” The IS policy and curriculum were described by SM as western and needing attention. They explained: “I think to really develop appropriate curriculum means that starting from scratch, meeting with communities and asking communities, fundamentally, what do you want us to teach or what should our young people really learn, where it's working with Elders in that regard as well” And further expanded when they stated: “I would say to really reflect, and if we really were genuine about working with Indigenous people, I would say we would have to go back to the very beginning and kind of redo all of all of that.”

ME spoke to the strength of diversity and the gift of being able to see multiple perspectives and ways of knowing, attributes of new Canadians in their community. FV described how relationships with students would encourage them to express themselves about their learning experiences: “the kids would come and tell you, they vote with their feet, and they say: I don't want to be in that one (course) anymore” given a SBL had an open and supportive disposition, something similarly demonstrated by OT when describing their approach to working with and building the understanding of Indigenous families so that they can support student learning. SBLs know and care deeply for the members of their school and community through relationship, something demonstrated by SM when they described the unique needs of members of their school community:

“People learn at different rates; people have different traumas. I have one student that had five deaths in her family in one school year. How do you account for that, right? How do you address all of that and still expect a child to learn?”

PL spoke firmly to the importance of open relationships, specifically knowing and considering students and their needs, which is not without complexity. They explained: “we need to have a relationship with children and families and when other aspects of life aren't stable, the relationships can't be maintained, when children and families are moving every three to four months.” Participants explained SBLs and teachers develop relationships with students, parents, and community members to bring about change and policy success.

When considering the importance of SBLs' relationships with internal stakeholders, such as teachers and staff, MA described the impact of leadership and its observable evidence in professional relationships: “you've provided leadership in that area, but if you don't have anybody willing to follow you, you haven't accomplished anything, right?” This is especially important depending on the size of the school and the contact the SBL has with students and results in another version of distributed leadership among the staff. PL explained: “in a small school. You really do get to know each child and their family and the barriers that might exist. In a bigger school, it's harder and so then you rely on your teachers gathering that information.”

MA extensively discussed the soft skills of SBLs and how these need to be leveraged when working on change efforts and policy goals with stakeholders. Relationships were also considered problematic in certain circumstances by FV when dispositions and stances included saviour complexes, something MA presented when they said: “we had very well-intentioned people who loved kids and cared for them and spent all their time clothing and feeding and loving them, and not worrying about teaching them.” OT stated this differently when stressing that without changing educational outcomes, being nice or kind is of little importance and suggested that improvements in instruction and assessments to support Indigenous learners were of greatest importance. Another obstacle for SBLs was the provincial government who upheld outdated and racist policies, expressed by FV: “what are you guys doing? (...) you're not doing anything. We're doing all the heavy lifting down here.” SM stressed the importance of those above in the policy chain: “trusting SBLs to act responsibly and ethically in the best interest of students” and that this should be commonplace as they are closest to the work. SBLs are change agents who according to FV sometimes make people angry when they bring about needed

change, but that ultimately, they are open to “meeting people where they’re at and make them have that good experience” that leads to change and understanding because they had a chance to discuss and work alongside each other. Otherwise, they are concerned that those who oppose change efforts and state messages such as “Everything was just fine before!” remain unchanged, continue to exist as barriers, and present themselves as victims while continuing to oppress others.

SM had compelling messages about the responsibility of non-Indigenous people to work alongside and to give up power and privilege to Indigenous peoples. When thinking about what Elders could contribute, they shared:

“And where is the role of Elders in all of this? Right? Where are their voices? And we should be leaning heavily on the Elders for them to say these are important, these are very important elements of our ways of being, our life.”

Change

The fifth category in co-constructed participant data was change. This category arose from participants’ observations looking back and gazing forward. SM shared concerns about policy stakeholder engagement and noted lack of meaningful opportunities to participate: “I don't like the word consult because you've created something already. You're just asking them to rubber stamp it. How do you co-create it co-develop it and understand it?” FV noted the slow pace and reluctance to change in the education sector: “you want that stuff to change, you got to start thinking outside the box. We can't, you know, for instance, you can't keep doing what we did back in 1960s. School has changed.”

Change through policy

Several participants reflected on changes to policy and change through policy. IH named the IS policy goals honourable. MA presented staff’s motivation for change through policy as being driven by leaders’ use of carrots or sticks. PL presented the provincial policy evolution they witnessed over a decade or more and the continued focus on supporting Indigenous students and their literacy scores. Despite concerns for seeking the right change through the wrong approaches, SM described this as: “these are incremental steps, but that work of reconciliation and curricular relevant and engaging curriculum started way back in the day already. So, I would say this policy framework is really built on work that has come before.”

The scope of change sought by the IS policy was also greatly discussed. OT suggested that SBLs need to understand and support small- and large-scale change and stated: “when it comes to a larger picture of societal change. There has to be a continuum of what that looks [like].” PL shared their view of the power of public education to bring about positive change:

“I think it's important, teachers, and you know educators as a whole, need to recognize the power that we have in changing society's views and there is racism in society and the way through that is through education and through the work that we're doing in schools. And so, if we start here, you know, and we can influence the young people in our building. So those young people will become the adults. Those young people also can influence their families and so always having that in the back of our mind, that's our responsibility. If that's our, you know, our call in education, is to support that work.”

The scope of time needed to bring about the change described in the IS policy was considered and described by OT and SM to be long-term change. SM wondered about public education's current ability and past success rate in closing equity gaps for Indigenous peoples.

“Elders have a very hopeful belief that in seven generations we can close that. I'm a lot more pessimistic than our Elders and I just see choices in policy that's happening at a federal level or government level that is just going to exacerbate that problem rather than helping us actually narrow it.”

FV recognized the expectations placed on public education by stakeholders: “A lot does get put on educational system, whether it's we need to fix mental health, we need to fix all that stuff.”

Change Readiness

In response to ongoing organizational change from policy, several participants considered readiness and the current state of divisions and schools. OT suggested: “it's OK to be at that space at that time. That's not necessarily a bad thing. There has to be a start of work.” IH described the level of change readiness and pace of change for their staff: “I think there's a lot of noise getting in the way. And so, I don't know that they're always open to it, or necessarily ready for it. I think in a lot of cases they're just surviving.” MA recognized this challenge and shared their thoughts about their SBL colleagues' actions: “some of them just say we're doing it. That's unfortunate, because they have the best of intentions, but what ends up happening is, they end up looking behind them and nobody's there.” ME described their urgency to move to action despite the current state of the education sector:

“We are the change we need to see. It is us and we can go out and find people to help us with this change and do this. But, if we continue to wait for the silver bullet, the magical document that says, if you do this, this is gonna happen, it's not coming. We are the people that are making this happen now, and so, I think my biggest leadership action or belief is that it has to become action and, and it's not enough to talk about it.”

Changing Learning

Public education and concerted leadership efforts, like those of MA, can create change such as children experiencing, participating in, learning about, celebrating, and engaging in various cultural experiences, including Indigenous ceremony like smudging, something they would have missed if not for their school experience that provided them with ideas and ways of being wider than those of their families or communities. Previously, SM explained how through partnership, students can lead this change in community spaces with the support of their school. MA explained their pursuit of IS policy goals and their leadership vision as:

“(…) what we’re trying to accomplish, both with those Indigenous kids and then with the rest of the population, is to make sure that those kids don’t feel different than, other than, less than, in any way, right? Like they’re just part of our community.”

MA reflected on their first experience of teepees being raised with cultural teachings in a nearly all-white school to the change found in schools described above. FV’s reflections brought about awareness of the departure from monocultures to the diversity now found in public schools and the ability of community members and students to identify and call out racism. Still not satisfied, FV lamented that older community members still don’t know the truth of the treaties or Indian residential schools and their impacts, and the commonality of colonial logics. They suggested changes to mandatory courses such as Indigenous Studies 30 to create a new level of community awareness of and about the past as well as an adjustment to the historical record.

Many participants suggested, as does the policy, that changes were needed in instruction. When describing supporting changes to instruction through professional development, MA cautioned leaders to look for evidence of staff learning in practice at the classroom level and not to be satisfied by what is heard. SM shared evidence of structural changes such as staff changing their approach from units to outcomes, close observation to what students were demonstrating as learning, and changing access to instruction to recognize the impacts of poverty and complexity in students and the community.

Changes in Educational Organizations

Many changes occur in organizations over time. As people had changed in division office roles, ME noted a reduction in diversity of viewpoints, loss of shared voice, and a narrowing of ways of knowing, while in another school division, SM noted greater attention paid to listening to the voices of Indigenous students and diversity in division committees. FV reflected on specialized roles like treaty catalyst teachers and school committees over time and considered these as lost opportunities for meaningful change. Participants also reflected on the evolution of the focus on equity in schools. MA, FV, ME, and OT described the shift as more generalized and less focused on Indigenous needs. OT shared concern: “you lose the whole piece about, we’re Indigenous people, that our identity and culture and languages are rooted deeply into who we are.” FV was inspired to hear topics of equity being discussed by their own children and credited this to the work of public education. They also recognized more knowledge and understanding in the people of their organization and younger members of the community, similarly noted by ME. Other colonial cultural elements of schools such as the calendar, as noted by FV and SM, remain impervious to change.

Leadership Actions

The sixth category found in participant data was actions. This category arose directly from the fifth interview question.

Vision and Beliefs

Participants discussed and described the importance of a focus and priority in their work. MA explained how the focus for their division, supporting Indigenous learners, was maintained for a more than 10 years and eventually named in their strategic plan. ME explained that a vision needed to be honed, simplified, and stated repeatedly. OT suggested that visions should be guided by and draw from leadership philosophy. FV expressed how their vision was based on being welcoming and humility and IH shared theirs was being open and inviting. Beliefs were also important to participants, such as SM, who explained how these changed the way SBLs and staff work with Indigenous families. PL described how leaders’ beliefs could be challenged during difficult decision-making and OT expressed this could also happen when reviewing student learning data. IH described living out beliefs in partnerships with families and believing in the community.

ME explained how the vision sets the climate and the tone for the school and frames the actions and outcomes, which PL explained as a force framing professional opinions and points of view. MA explained this:

“my leadership style is I rarely tell people what they have to do. I show them what they could do, and then I just highlight the hell out of the things that I really think are great, right? So those are the things that I pump up and we talked about, and we throw out there, and I raised them in SCC meetings so the parents know and we talked about all those things. So, what that does is teachers are then looking around saying: Oh! OK! So, this is what's valued. This is the culture around here. At this school, this is the kinds of things that we do. So, people, most people, tend to pick up on that”

ME and FV suggested the vision and climate creates staff ownership and commitment to the work. ME attributed this to their staff’s ability to commit to action. MA and ME demonstrated this outcome when their staffs brought their students to various cultural and linguistic spaces thanks to the school’s vision and after receiving coaching and support.

Knowing

Participants presented various versions of leadership knowledge and ways of knowing. Several participants explained that they are continuously developing their worldview. As a disposition, ME and FV explained that they start with and try to maintain humility through leadership, described by OT and FV as presenting themselves as not knowing everything and PL and ME as recognizing the small part each leader is contributing to the overall success of the education system. IH and FV expressed the need for SBLs and staff to engage in ongoing processes of self-reflection for bias and prejudice.

Knowledge of policy, digging deep, and knowing its importance was suggested by OT, PL, and SM. Knowledge of the moral imperative for ME and connections for IH between provincial and organizational policies guided their work and leadership. MA, PL, ME, FV, and SM described how they were guided by policy towards reconciliation. FV and SM described white supremacy and common prevailing colonial logics as counterforces to reconciliation. Regarding leading change, ME suggested leadership needs to know and recognize professional autonomy while OT IH, FV, and SM described the importance of knowing the level of change readiness and the current state, explained further by OT and ME as knowing which staff could be possible allies.

Knowledge of Indigenous students, their needs and the community were discussed by MA, OT, PL, FV, and SM. MA, ME, FV, and SM explained the importance of seeking, establishing, and maintaining connections and opportunities with Indigenous people in schools and in the community. Regarding partnerships with families, IH expressed how working alongside families honoured the children and families and allowed access to their knowledge: “Repositioning as a verb carries with it the acknowledgement of that ethical space and the responsibility of knowing and learning where the other person is, knowing their stories, listening, and learning from them.” SM expressed how knowledge about students and assistance from staff could help students centre themselves and be ready to learn.

IH suggested that SBLs should know and use their strengths in their practice. SBLs have special duties that requires them to gather, organize, and monitor student learning data over time. SM described how historically, these processes focused on the wrong things and as suggested by FV, it was not uncommon that students were and are still assessed using colonial logics, like hours in a course or spelling rather than on demonstrating learning outcomes like ideas, thoughts, and understanding. ME explained how knowing and identifying Indigenous learners and monitoring their learning was crucial to know if instruction was making a difference. PL and ME explained how they continuously review Indigenous learning results, something supported by their division.

Decision-Making and Prioritizing

Participants extensively described the importance of decision-making and prioritization in their work. ME explained that they base and align their beliefs to the policy’s moral imperatives, echoed by PL who explained that their final decisions were guided by their beliefs and a response to the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. OT suggested that the cultural backgrounds of Indigenous and non-Indigenous SBLs affect how they make decisions and their leadership practice. PL explained how the year start focus, and messages are strategic SBL decisions and frame and influence their stakeholders while MA described the impact of decisions as creating a culture where staff can talk about equity and student success, something described by OT as a recent positive change that was historically absent. ME explained their focus on ensuring relevant Indigenous content for staff learning as a strategic choice and a sense of responsibility to the community and policy. OT and SM presented goal setting, those that are owned, shared, and tangible, as important leadership decisions. ME

and FV presented student and staff opportunities, such as access to important community members, as specific decisions made by leaders. OT explained that the negative impacts of budget cuts created a need to redesign of essential roles, the restructuring of the work of their staff, and the adjustment of processes due to newly imposed limitations. PL presented timetabling specialty roles to address the most pressing student needs and supporting classroom-level decision-making as important SBL decisions, like collaborative problem solving suggested by IH and FV. SM outlined decisions to coordinate and strategically deploy resources to minimize the impacts of student absence from school, for co-teaching to support learning, and impact in classrooms. IH, referring to the wealth provided by partnering with families, described choosing to and encouraging staff to form partnerships as important decision-making.

Several participants described SBLs decisions as strategic ways to address policy goals. OT described carefully considered leadership actions, such as when to be direct when communicating to stakeholders as the leader and when to be or indirect and have others do this to ensure maximum impact. When reflecting on direct and indirect actions and the visibility of their leadership, they explained:

“But I also think that I don't know how much my staff or people I work with would recognize the successes that we have in our school and attribute it to my leadership. I don't know if they recognize the things that I do as leadership practices, you know, because I build on lots of different things to make things happen.”

PL presented the financial implications of SBLs decisions when they suggested that they are responsible for spending money from school budgets and allocating limited resources according to what is known about students. SM described experiences when they demonstrated managerial efficiency and efficacy by saving limited funds through strategic decisions by selecting and deploying resources to address student learning needs, something they designed at the school level and sought approval from division leaders. They also explained difficult choices to select Elders and Knowledge Keepers over educational assistants, to train specialized staff in trauma practice, and to develop generalized training for all staff to best address student needs.

Alignment

When discussing the policy chain, MA agreed to the importance of policy alignment but expressed that things shouldn't just be sent “down the pipe” but should rather be described as expectations with supports to bring about positive change through the growth of their teachers

and their subsequent work with students. ME and OT explained how the school's values were infused in the programming for students and professional learning for staff. OT shared this thought when they described bottom-up initiatives that were taken from their school and implemented across the school division to overcome the impacts of harmful budget cuts to core processes that supported teachers' professional development.

Maintaining the Focus Through Communication

The IS policy exists within an extremely busy and contested educational landscape where multiple priorities are vying for organizational attention. All participants spoke of the importance of revisiting the policy and ensuring that it was kept alive. This was described by MA when they stated:

“I think there gets to that point where for some people, they're like; yeah, we've heard this already, and that's fine. So then maybe you kind of move in some different directions for a bit, but then, at some point, if you want the work to continue, you have to come back and make it a priority again.”

OT and PL explained how as SBLs, they maintained and pushed strategic work forward in their schools, communicated about, and invested leadership time and energy to realize goals.

Participants attributed significant importance and priority to using their leadership voice to communicate to stakeholders. Two types of communication emerged in participant responses, ongoing communication, and challenging communication. IH, PL, VP, and SM presented communication as inviting or uninviting and that through communication, SBLs can better understand identity, unique needs, and realities. FV suggested that when SBLs are with families, they can also hear about the impact of instruction beyond the school on the family when communicating. PL added SBLs communicate to engage and gather the voices of stakeholders, to make improvements, or to offer feedback. This was of great importance to SM who cited concerns that the government was inadequately engaging stakeholders. OT described communicating as a SBL to help Indigenous students and families navigate the system and to know their rights. Communication that was ongoing to describe priorities and progress to stakeholders. All participants described using their voice to communicate and justify policies, their vision, and expectations. ME and OT expressed how this communication would later become artifacts on the walls of the school. PL explained that SBLs use their voice to demonstrate their plan and efforts throughout the policy chain. Several participants shared how

they communicate staff success and back it with student data to make connections between professional efforts and impacts to celebrate and motivate stakeholders. According to OT, FV, and SM, SBLs create school narratives to share stories of success despite legacies of harm and trauma and to create a societal counternarrative. It is worthy to note that they frame their message and its related ideas and concepts to what is known by stakeholders and not to the policy per se.

Supporting Instruction

Participants described the importance of equitable learning opportunities and improved educational outcomes for Indigenous students. OT and PL explained that this needs to be planned and MA added that it should have alignment, be intentional, supportive, and be encouraging to create change and encourage staff growth. This was expressed by PL's reflective process:

“supporting the growth of First Nations, Indigenous, Métis students and their literacy scores. And so, what are your plans? What are you doing to support your teachers? How are you helping them to learn so that they are bringing Indigenous ways of, of knowing into their curriculum?”

FV was encouraged by the realization that greater knowledge existed in youth than in prior generations and suggested that staff learning could create a common language for policy implementation and reconciliation. SM suggested that improved outcomes required the deconstruction of learning into pieces to match it to student needs, to prioritize the selection of Indigenous materials, and to supporting and encourage the staff to investigate curriculum decolonization and new ways to deliver instruction. They explained how as a result staff accepted multiple demonstrations of learning and that students have opportunities to catch up when needed. OT and FV explained how they challenged staff with opportunities to do different things. OT described their past messaging as: “an opportunity to be able to have open conversations and, and give people the, you know, it's OK to try something. You're not gonna get in trouble for it.” OT, ME, and FV explained how they accessed and utilized human resource supports and encouraged others to do the same. Regarding helpful support people to schools, ME, FV, and SM spoke more specifically about community supports, MA of division supports, IH of family supports, and MA, PL, FV, and SM described Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

Recognizing limitations and seeking long-term success, ME explained how they avoided reliance on division supports and independently created personal connections and relationships.

Participants suggested that improving educational outcomes requires SBLs to work closely with and to support their staff. MA's instructional leadership efforts included suggesting content and learning activities, whereas ME FV, and SM supported reviewing programming and learning curricula, and FV espoused that SBLs should also be open to learning new ideas and ways from younger staff. OT, IH, and PL presented their efforts in helping staff to be open to and to see the urgency of improving their professional practice, striving for continuous improvement, and accepting and engaging in learning, coaching, and direct feedback. This was balanced for OT, IH, PL, FV, and SM by monitoring quality instruction by being in classes, working through audits with external consultants, and by completing supervisory processes. Several SBLs described improving instruction by placing learning at the centre of everything and IH, FV, and SM suggested that further needs existed in their staff's assessment practices. IH, shared: "I don't see assessment being a strong component of teacher pre-service education, local professional development options, nor living consistently in many classrooms."

Distributed Leadership

ME extensively described the additional value distributed leadership (DL) brought to the implementation process. MA, ME, and OT described the process of giving authority to key staff and the resulting energy created by distributing leadership to staff and the impact derived from multiplying the number of leader voices. OT vividly described when and why they chose to use their own voice to communicate the importance of their collective work and the imperatives for change. They presented an ongoing rich leadership process where they worked closely with key staff members to empower them, to validate their voices and experiences, and later, in large staff learning events, have them share out their professional efforts and impacts so that their voices would demonstrate the extent of the commitment to various goals and processes for Indigenous learners that existed within the school's staff and to contribute to collegial impact, inspiration, and support for their colleagues' professional growth and practice.

Policy Support from the School Division

Few participants spoke of known division processes that supported SBLs to implement the IS policy. FV wondered aloud several times but was unsure if experiences and supports were the result of division choices to support the implementation of the policy whereas PL described

the direct involvement of senior leaders in schools with high Indigenous enrollments and their efforts to work cooperatively to address the learning needs of the students. ME described their efforts and urgency to implement the policy despite the division's efforts:

“At this point in my leadership, I'm like: You know, what? Doesn't matter what's happening up here. I can make my link in the chain as strong as possible. The top being broken doesn't mean, doesn't affect where I am in it, but I'm at a place now in my leadership where I can say that. I feel pretty good about that.”

SM described division structures and processes that were informed by the provincial policy such as stratified committees, that included multiple roles and voices including those of SBLs, to respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and to create tangible goals pertaining to the identified needs of students' such as gaps in their learning. MA advocated proudly for the work of the Indigenous branch that supported the infusion of Indigenous content and worldview and strongly encouraged connections between his school and their staff. Noting limitations and trusting their existing Indigenous and Métis relationships, ME moved forward in implementation without relying on division Indigenous personnel feeling they already had access to the right people. No participant described a strategic plan at the division level to make sense, to implement, or to support the implementation of the IS policy. This doesn't mean such plans don't exist but I highlight that they are not commonly known or referred to by SBL participants.

Barriers

Despite the success and impact of the above-mentioned SBLs actions, participants noted ongoing barriers that limited policy success which is the seventh category identified from participant data.

Leadership Base and Capacity

Multiple participants voiced concerns for school board's ability to maintain the focus, not to lose sight in the busy landscape, and the lifespan of the IS policy, which FV suggested needs sustained focus, dedicated vision, beliefs, and actions. IH specifically mentioned the unsatisfactory rate and depth of change over time. Of specific concern to OT, PL, and SM is the face of leadership and the sector. OT expressed concerns for non-Indigenous leaders making decisions about Indigenous policy suggesting that the lack of diversity is understood to impact approaches, experiences, understanding, and the ability to successfully navigate the IS policy. An example was described by SM; senior leaders listening to students as a reaction and the

subsequent result of accidental harmful decision-making stemming from a lack of consultation as opposed to being a standard action. FV also noted that SBLs have a limited understanding, and few are able to lead differently. SM went further: “students have to see themselves reflected in the people that are in leadership and the people that are teaching them too.” Regarding worldview, PL stated:

“You know, we have a certain worldview and we've grown up a certain way. That's not how everybody else has grown up. That's not their experience with education, their experience with school in general, and we can't put ourselves in their place all the time, but we try and think about what they've been through and how do we best support”

Another noted concern for participants was the professional inactivity of SBLs.

Regarding SBLs, IH, ME, and PL shared similar concerns about those not knowing where to begin or those concerned with doing something wrong and defaulting to inaction. ME added concern for overfocusing on theory and learning with adults, never moving to action, and processes that do not look specifically at Indigenous success. They shared: “my inference is we've lost capacity to do it, or maybe there's a little bit of, you know, been there, done that, what's the next shiny thing? Umm. And I don't think we've succeeded.” OT shared concerns for the loss of momentum created by staff turnover and the impacts they've noted on progress.

OT, suggested there was no force demanding change, or as ME described, the system isn't yet designed to compel action and that the will to carry out the work is lacking: “It's not a knock-on people. I think sometimes, there's so much coming at you. But I do think some of our senior leaders have lost the will too, to make it a priority or a focus.”

Cultures were also noted to be concerning such as changes to hiring practices of teachers by IH and senior leaders by SM. Dominant white ways of being, that can be felt in organizational cultures, were noted by ME after a recent return to colonial processes and structures after changes to the senior leadership team, and ME, FV, and SM suggested that currently, there is a limited ability to do more than to perform simple actions such as anthems, land recognitions, and one-day events like Orange Shirt Day.

Learning for Change

Change through staff learning was noted as crucial by the participants. FV suggested Indigenous staff may need to relearn their own cultural identity due to the impacts of colonialism and OT and IH noted at times that their staff's response to learning was closed and disengaged.

IH expressed that some are open but due to student complexity, many staff seem tired, not willing, and closed to improving practice. IH and ME highlighted that recent division supported learning was over-focused on learning how to use software tools or standardized literacy assessment systems that were disassociated of cultural relevance to Indigenous learners and thus missing the goal of developing a strong professional practice that impacts these learners. IH was the only participant who considered the adequacy of training for teachers, specifically citing those responsible for language and culture programs and when considering the limitations and inadequacies of school-based learning opportunities, they shared: “we get right around 60 hours of time to move instructional practice and assessment practice to effectively, improve instruction for all of our students, in increasingly complex classrooms.”

Ongoing Racism

Participants noted elements of institutional racism and SM highlighted that there was a false notion of shared history between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in the IS policy. SM added: “addressing those systemic racist practices that we need to really explore, and then there's also the reaction of folks feeling threatened when we explored those practices, and, and it's not meant as an attack.” Regarding shared policy responsibility, OT suggested: “it needs to be starting at the ministry, right? So, it's the ministry who's letting us down here, to give us the supports, to give us the direction, and on what this even could possibly look like.” FV suggested needed alignment within and beyond the PreK-12 education system for students to be successful and measures such as policy success and contributions towards graduation rates as colonial. SM noted racism in curriculum development: “When we develop curriculum, we decide what's important from a Eurocentric perspective. And then we try then to squeeze in Indigenous ways of knowing where we feel that it's appropriate, but it doesn't really fit.” Addressing racist behaviour or actions in the sector, OT explained, is unprecedented despite its presence, and as a result, remains challenging and daunting for SBLs to address and impact. FV and SM highlighted concerns with colonial measures in the education sector based in western perspectives and understanding such as the number of hours in classes, timelines, and start and end dates set by the ministry. This was expressed by FV: “no one is really willing to listen because this is the way it was. They just keep things the way they were, so sometimes, government is a big barrier in that, they don't... they have all these policies.”

Reductions, Cuts, and Doing More with Less

Cuts and lack of funding was noted by several participants to have affected the volume and quality of professional learning opportunities for staff, the size and the complexity of the students in classrooms, and the noted loss of opportunities for students. The intensification of the needs of students and decreases in supports were noted by all participants. IH suggested SBLs are putting out fires and spinning plates in a reactive stance as they are the first and only immediate support to classroom teachers which results in SBLs being pulled in many directions, less able to attend to important work, and forced to work and make important decisions under duress. IH described this: “there’s never enough time to do all the things that we need to do. And then there are added layers of complexity and noise and so much else going on. And sometimes the important work gets lost.” OT further described this when they stated: “sometimes the work is heavy when you look at data.” SM explained the possibility of difference in perspectives in the community and sector when they stated: “From space, the world looks great when you zoom in. There are some issues that we're dealing with, right? So, I feel that that's where that disconnect is.” IH explained that teachers are surviving, at best, due to classroom complexity and are looking for help from overburdened teacher colleagues, all that remains after numerous cuts, and that although educational assistants offer momentary relief for security and safety concerns, they are increasingly scarce and often no longer able to support improving learning. Beyond this, MA explained that many educational assistants are available thanks only to federal funds from Jordan’s Principle (a recent federal-provincial agreement for services for Indigenous students) and otherwise would not be available to schools. The result, IH explained, is students returning to the very same situations where they struggled initially. PL described continuous cuts and the elimination of key resources and staff, also shared by FV, who added that doing the work described in the policy was interrupted by cuts. These same cuts have created a landscape described by PL and SM where awareness of the policy exists but without resources to support the work. SM explained: “We just don't have enough funds to support the incredible growth that we have, never mind the additional work of trying to bring about reconciliation and to achieve, you know, equity in pedagogy.”

Community as Barrier

Beyond financial, human communities were noted as barriers. Despite experiencing limited opposition for culture and language instruction, MA recounted outdated notions and ideas in parent opposition stating: “don't you dare let my kid participate in any of that Pagan

Indian crap” which according to PL discourages other SBLs and teachers. They explained: “I’ve been in schools where the percentage of (Indigenous) students is really, really low. And then we have community and parent questions and pushback on: Why are we including so much Indigenous content in our teaching?” For SM, the IS policy doesn’t address the root fundamental problems in the community. OT described this when they shared: “I think that’s where it’s really hard because, an element of ensuring inequity continues because you need inequity. You need it for some groups to do better than others. That’s part of society.” OT and SM explained that closing the gap and redistributing wealth is not in the dominant majority’s immediate best interest and a cause for concern for the community. PL noted that community racism adds to the work of school and that a lack of true intersectoral collaboration is absent in the education sector where socioeconomic realities like poverty, food scarcity, and children in care, noted by MA, OT, PL, FV, and SM, exist.

Communication as Barriers

Communication and messages were also noted barriers by participants. In their absence, such as when there is no explicit policy presentation or discussion or when leadership plans and strategies are unknown, a reality noted by MA, IH, ME, and FV, SBLs and staff are unaware of the policy and its goals. ME suggested that division leaders need to simplify and reduce the complexity of the educational landscape; otherwise, no vision can be identified and SBLs lose sight of what is important, which they explained as: “you can’t figure, you can’t see the forest for the trees.” There are also unintended messages from school division, explained by FV as continued distractions, that cause a loss of focus. IH explained something similar, fractured communication on what matters and what is important because policy work is clouded by local initiatives or new presentations. Upon reflection, ME stated: “I think if you relied completely on the division to help you actualize the vision of IS, it would never happen.”

Needs

The eighth and final category identified from participant data was needs. All participants described the deleterious effects of multiple cuts to public education budgets. PL expressed this: “the problem is that we don’t have the budget behind what they want to have happen in this province. So, the ideas are there, they’ve got the right stakeholders, they’ve got the right plan. We’ve had the right plan. (...) but then we don’t have the budget to actually make it happen.”

FV expressed the need for predictable funding that allows for sustained efforts and work within the sector. MA noted budget impacts on large cultural events and at the school-level when they stated: “a lot of that work is being left by the wayside. Just, there isn’t enough, either, will to have it done, or people to have it done.” IH, PL, OT, FV, and SM called to restore positions previously cut that have increased the workload of SBLs and decreased supports available to students and teachers, and to create specialized school and division support roles. Reflecting on funding for training and professional learning that were previously available, were noted by IH to be:

“I feel like one of the most important losses after years of education funding erosion would be the opportunity to engage staff in professional development, especially in the areas of authentic assessment practices and inquiry-based pedagogy. We do have policy and support documents, both provincially and in my division. However, where is the professional development and opportunity to dig in with our staff outside of the small number of hours that we can dedicate to a variety of professional needs and the side-by-side coaching, when we have a moment to do so? We have a generation of teachers who are working in different classrooms with more and more complex needs than I ever did, and they are exhausted.”

The importance is highlighted by OT: “I do think a lot more work on the classroom side needs to happen, and that aligns with, honestly, the literature around student outcomes. It's in the instruction that you change things.”

Specific to SBLs, OH and IH stressed the importance of high-quality leadership programs and meaningful prior training. MA suggested new SBL development and support sessions, OT, IH, ME, and FV suggested policy learning and supports for policy work and goal achievement for SBLs. These would have the added benefit of keeping the IS policy alive in organizations and support meaningful action. As described by ME:

“I've found, over the course of the years our division has, has morphed our policies from, from a focus on our First Nations, Inuit, and Métis student success to more general anti-racist, anti-oppressive pedagogies and policies, and I think, there's nothing that precludes one from focusing specifically on Indigenous students within that, those frameworks, but I... there's no explicit connection.”

IH named the need for shared responsibility throughout the policy chain. Beyond SBLs' opportunity to learn, OT, IH, PL, ME, and FV cited needs for time, to read and discuss policy, to carryout actions, to address identified needs, and for professionals to support each other. MA and OT named the energy, effort, and availability, to coach staff, and MA and ME named the will and courage in leadership to bring about the policy's desired societal changes.

Participants also named needed supports to bring about policy success. ME presented meaningful relationships with and understanding of Indigenous peoples, communities, and organizations as well as explicit connections to Indigenous policy goals to provoke leadership thinking and action. IH suggested reflective processes for SBLs and staff that require them to be aware of their biases, presuppositions, privileges, and racism and division personnel with which to discuss these and the IS policy. OT and IH requested a road map for policy success and societal change and ME sought community partners that would support the work of schools. Supports for strategic planning and aligning the work of schools were suggested by OT and IH and mentorship for SBLs was suggested by MA and OT. Additional programs and human resources are also sought:

“our school division leaders, they know what things would work. They know that it would be better to have more language programs to have more literacy teachers to be able to provide Elders and Knowledge Keepers in more schools. They know that there's lots of things that can be done.”

Consolidation of Categories Into the Study's Themes

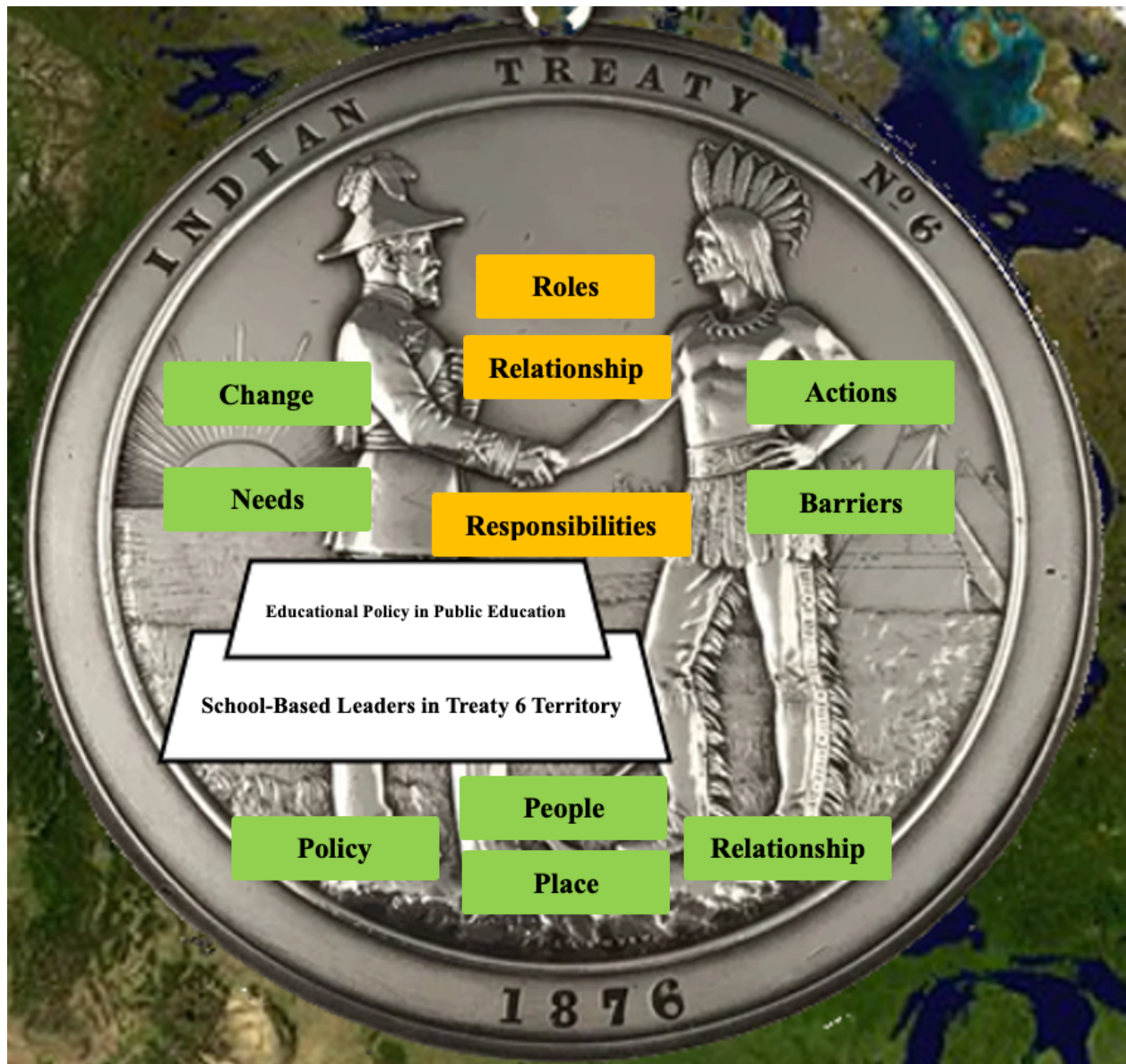
The eight categories identified in the participant responses were policy, place, people, relationships, change, actions, barriers, and needs. Through the analysis of participant data and the categories, the story of the case study has identified three themes: roles, relationships, and responsibilities. The work of SBLs is a unique role with responsibilities to act in the best interest of those in which they are in relationship, much like the treaty relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. No person or group of people in society exist in isolation and important connections create a web of interdependencies. The work of bringing the IS educational policy to life, overcoming the current barriers, and the success of its five goals requires all members of the policy chain and the stakeholders of the public education sector to uphold their roles and responsibilities through dynamic relationships.

4.6 Discussion of Findings Including Comparison of Findings to Literature

First, the major findings of the study will be juxtaposed to the research literature that was previously presented. Strong connections and tangible representations between the research and the Treaty 6 context are noted. The subsequent discussion identifies the ongoing impacts of the settler colonial project, racism, neoliberalism and fiscal conservatism, and a research practice gap. Promising actions pertinent to policy sense making and implementation are noted in the prior research, identified as current pressing needs in the educational leadership landscape, and could be immediately scaled and implemented in school divisions. Afterwards, drawing on this information, the state of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Treaty 6 territory is considered. The eight categories identified in the participant responses and the three emerging themes are used as a structure and presented using the same order for ease of reading. The implications for leadership and theory are provided for each.

Figure 1

School-Based Leaders' Concrete Steps Towards Wítaskêwin in Treaty 6 Territory



Note. Remixed content created by Charles Paul Bazin Webster. From *North America satellite orthographic.jpg* [image] by Ghalas, 2005, Wikipedia

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turtle_Island_-_/media/File:North_America_satellite_orthographic.jpg). PDM 1.0.

From *medal-viki-84ca7d* [photograph] by Unknown, 2016 (<https://picryl.com/media/medal-viki-84ca7d>) PDM 1.0.

Categories From Participant Data and Major Findings

Policy

Policies are formal records of decisions such as goals, decisions, or actions, adopted by people with authority and power in organizations that can be communicated to stakeholders (Abele, 2007; Howlett et al., 2020; Reyes et al., 2014). SBLs in Treaty 6 territory were the sole research participants of this instrumental case study and are part of the Saskatchewan government's policy chain with unique roles and responsibilities' relevant to policies. The findings identified that the participants in the study described and represented a variety of levels of awareness of, knowledge about, and experience with the IS policy. This finding would indicate that further efforts must be made by the provincial government to ensure that they adjust and enhance their work with school divisions, that they participate cooperatively in robust communication, support, and monitoring processes, that they, along with the active participation of school boards ensure that all SBLs are fully proficient with the IS policy and can successfully make sense of the policy for their people and place, and that they ensure, through monitoring, that SBLs and school divisions move to action in implementation. This aligns itself with the importance of critical policy change messages that must be delivered through the system and the policy chain (Timperley & Parr, 2009). Although suggestions for further policy training and professional learning were made by participants, participant responses failed to indicate that they were unsure or unable to make sense of and to implement policies in their schools generally, making this recommendation specific to the IS policy.

Stakeholders are all living and nonliving groups that exert varying amounts of power, legitimacy, urgency, and dynamically influence each other (Elias, 2008; Martell, 2008; Mitchell et al., 1997; Stone, 2002). One SBLs lack of knowledge about the policy and OT's wonder about the actual number of people who read the policy was indicative of a lack of adequate communication and monitoring throughout the policy chain and with stakeholders. This lack of communication was named by multiple participants when they mentioned the need to keep the policy and the focus alive. The provincial government should fulfill its roles and responsibilities at the top of the policy chain to support the communication, sense making, design, planning for policy implementation, and ongoing monitoring and measurement of progress. Since per student funding has been reduced by more than 20% (Statistics Canada, 2024; 2024a, 2024b), there is a greater need for the provincial government to lead this work provincially with stakeholders which is the third policy goal, through shared management of the provincial education system, as there are fewer division support positions in school divisions. This shared work would create

efficiency within the educational system by co-creating policy instruments, offering guidance, and adapting provincial policy instruments to unique needs and realities.

Participant data indicated that all SBLs were favourable of the IS policy goals and indicates dispositional alignment and openness for equity-driven change through policy. Stakeholders are part of the policy chain where power and influence are concentrated in the smallest membership in the highest group in the chain and the greatest membership has the lowest concentration found at the bottom of the chain (Mitchell et al., 1997). This organizational shape and power structure is visible in participant responses and suggests that ethical, anti-racist and anti-oppressive leadership are paramount (Khalifa et al., 2019). Policies, people, and place, also known as the policy chain (Timperley & Parr, 2009), must come together for implementation success and are dependent on the existing level of capacity and readiness as well as the complexity of the implementation (Century & Cassata, 2016; Datnow & Park, 2009; Honig, 2006; Lewis et al., 2022; McLaughlin, 2006; Thajane & Masitsa, 2021). Findings from the study indicate that a state of global readiness for the IS policy has not yet been achieved with SBLs. When describing their staff, participants had concerns surrounding the existing realities, the state of readiness of stakeholders, and the complexity of policy and implementation. When discussed by participants, they indicated that their staff continue to develop the necessary level of readiness in disposition, knowledge, or practice. OT spoke about accepting the current state “it’s OK to be at that space at that time” but then described how they moved forward with action in implementation with the support of allies on staff who could support the work meaningfully. MA’s reflection of colleagues’ experiences: “they end up looking behind them and nobody’s there” makes the clear case for strategic leadership and implementation and careful monitoring for progress (Lewis et al., 2022). Findings indicate that greater investments and supports are needed to increase the general state of readiness to ensure that progress can be made on the IS policy goals by SBLs and stakeholders. When IH referred to “noise getting in the way,” this highlights the importance of SBLs ignoring distractions (Flessa, 2012) something noted to be a PI support that should be provided by districts (Honig, 2006; Miller, 2010).

School-based leaders are at the end of the educational policy chain and have specialized roles and responsibilities to meet organizational goals. The IS educational policy is noted to be ambitious and created for a heterogenous group of users and communities (Timperley & Parr, 2009). Participant data reflected this as demonstrated by IH when they called the policy “broad”

and lacking direction for SBLs. Educational leaders must anticipate how policies will impact organizations, the responsibilities, the measurements, and what gains to expect (Hands & Freckelton, 2019; Lowerhaupt et al., 2016; Moran et al., 2022). Largely, participants didn't clearly define this during the interviews when asked about policy sense making. Findings from the study align with the conclusions from research that this type of policy typically has loosely defined implementation boundaries, require multiple years to accomplish, and aim to create sustained change in practice and cultures which is difficult to design and achieve (Coburn et al., 2016; Howlett, 2020; McLaughlin, 2006; Thajane & Masitsa, 2021; Werts et al., 2013) Participants responses highlighted that division plans, structures, or processes were unknown. Although it is not expected to be representative of the reality of school boards in Treaty 6 territory, participants didn't explain or identify specifically how the policy would be implemented nor measured throughout the policy chain. This is interpreted as missing organizational process and information that would be useful and exist as supports to SBLs and evidence of strategic implementation efforts by school divisions. PL described strategic meetings where the policy was used as a point of consideration for SBLs when decision-making and SM named stratified committees which represent division processes where policy information was shared, considered, and then sent to other groups to consider or implement. SM suggested the committee structure and process was the relevant vehicle used by the school division to create tangible goals to address student needs, a support suggested in the literature for ambitious policy. Noted alignment between provincial and division goals by PL, the connections between the policy and the Red Paper of 1970 by OT, and SM's comment about policy alignment with Indigenous ways of knowing are tangible evidence of professional interpretation, sense making, and analysis by participants. OH did something similar when they assessed their colleague's emotional response to the policy as part of their sense making. Findings in participant data indicated awareness and knowledge in SBLs about the evolution of provincial educational policy over time, it's aims, the addition of Indigenous and Métis contributions in successive iterations of policy, and the inclusion of Indigenous worldview and perspectives in the policy itself. SM statement about having to "completely revamp policy if we're going to do justice" indicates a disconnect between the SBL and those above in the policy chain who attribute different levels of legitimacy to the policy.

Greater sector knowledge about the IS policy and more proficient use would improve the educational leadership landscape, improve the implementation process, and increase stakeholder actions and impacts (Hands & Freckelton, 2019; Lewis et al., 2022; Mizrahi-Shtelman, 2021). As noted by Timperley and Parr (2009), policy goals by themselves do not constitute effective strategies, and as such, through rich and engaging consultative processes at all levels of the policy chain, stakeholders should be engaged to identify and address societal barriers and determine a shared incremental approach to policy implementation that could be further tailored according to unique needs (Kingdon, 2003; Wets et al., 2013). This process would align itself to OT's observation that societal change requires a continuum to describe points of departure and progress throughout the sector and community. The educational context is a complex interspace (Mizrahi-Shtelman, 2021) where policy is negotiated and later appropriated in an environment which results in policy variability (Bialik et al., 2018). Participant data clearly demonstrated variability in knowledge and action and uncovered several pressing sources of complexities in the educational landscape for SBLs. Research findings indicated that there is a great need to recommit to the implementation process throughout the policy chain to design a better plan that attends to where and how change will be created (Hands & Freckelton, 2019; Honig, 2006; Rowland et al., 2023). Literature on educational policy and its implementation clearly indicates what to expect and what actions to carry out throughout the policy chain (Century & Cassata, 2016; Datnow & Park, 2009; Honig, 2006; Hopkins, 2013; Mizrahi-Shtelman, 2021). The findings of this study highlight an educational landscape that struggles to attend to its mandate and that is unable to create a concerted change through policy. As such, SBLs described a broken front trying to implement and measure the policy with little supports or resources, as described by PL and SM when they explained that the policy exists but without resources to support the work (Cohen et al., 2007; Hettiarachchi & Kshourad, 2019; McLaughlin, 2006; Ming, 2023).

Place, People, and Relationships

The forced cultural transformation, assimilation, and the erasure of Indigenous communities and peoples with oppressive and destructive policy and laws (Assembly of First Nations, 2010; Cottrell et al., 2012; Ladson-Bilings, 2016) have given way to provincial policy, that according to PL and IH, has the right or honourable goals that exists in an underfunded context (Lupton, 2005) and is maintained by colonial logics (Schick & St Denis, 2003),

economic, and political stress causing oppression and racism (Green, 2006). This legacy of tensions, racism, and economic marginalization through the settler colonial project continue to produce poor educational outcomes for Indigenous learners (Cottrell et al., 2012; Cottrell & Hardie, 2019; Cottrell & Orłowski, 2015; Gibbons, 2018; Government of Saskatchewan, 2018; Madden, 2019a; Masta, 2019; Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, 2023; Simpson, 2004; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Tupper, 2012; Veracini, 2018; Wallin & Tunison, 2022; Zembylas & Matias, 2023). Historic acts of racism are suggested to have ended thanks to renewed relationships and understandings eliminating non-Indigenous responsibility and refuting the existence of systemic racism (Baker, 2006; Gibbons, 2018; Gillborn 2015; Green, 2006; Held, 2019; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015; Mills 1997; Park & Bahia, 2022; Pratt, 2004; Sleeter, 2017; Sablan, 2019; Su, 2017; Tupper, 2013; Tupper & Mitchell, 2022; Valasco & Sansone, 2019; Veracini, 2011), however, research findings indicate the creation of equity policy isolated from much needed policy instruments cannot undo or overcome ongoing colonialism and racism, the root causes of white supremacy and the unfair and oppressive social and economic conditions that currently exist (Cohen et al., 2007; Datnow & Park, 2009; Hettiarachchi & Kshourad, 2019). As stated by the commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Justice Murray Sinclair: “education is what got us into this mess (...) but education is the key to reconciliation” (Madden, 2019a, p. 292).

SBLs motivations and identities that act as drivers or barriers (McLaughlin, 2006) could be addressed by the six policy imperatives and should be continuously reviewed as suggested in the participant data by IH: “Once it’s in my heart, I make time for it” and could act as a counterforce to focus the attention of overburdened SBLs and the policy chain. Participant data confirmed that professional beliefs and policies must eliminate biased decision-making for Indigenous students (Riley & Ungerleider, 2012). Participants recognized the power and authority provincial and local policy holds and the protection it offers them against the endemic racism they noted in the community and the sector. The sector, which has just begun focusing and monitoring Indigenous success is not yet proficient at using policies to eliminate racism in employees or racist employees as described by OT.

Canadian communities are founded on settler colonial assumptions of acceptable racism, privileges, benefits, and the perceived superiority and entitlement of non-Indigenous peoples, and has been defined, normalized, and permeated by racial realities through economic and social

exclusion (Baker, 2006; Tupper, 2013; Wallin & Tunison, 2022) which make implementing equity-based policies very difficult (Eibach & Keegan, 2006; Gibbons, 2018; Taylor, 2017). FV's comment regarding efforts made "on the other side of town" reflect geographically based resistance and the ongoing existence of racial geographies in Treaty 6 communities (Gibbons, 2018), and white ignorance that opposes, disengages, or divests professionals from their responsibilities and change efforts (Mills, 1997; Valasco & Sansone, 2019). Non-Indigenous peoples use accumulated wealth, privileges, and special access to maintain and grow their power, privilege, and wealth (Shea, 2000) while excluding Indigenous people through competitive exclusion, proving the falsity of Canadian national benevolence (Bialik et al., 2018; Cottrell et al., 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2016; Mills, 2007; Zembylas & Matias, 2023). Participant data identified the continued evidence of white parents' fear, opposition, and critique of diversity and equity initiatives that challenge their racial privilege (Henry et al., 2021; Theoharis et al., 2023; Toure & Dorsey, 2018) and a significant over-representation of whites in school leadership (Yamashiro et al., 2022). Aligned research findings from participant data and the literature confirm that Saskatchewan is a location where a greater distribution of wealth to create societal equity is needed as childhood poverty, poverty, and Indigenous educational failure are accepted racialized realities and justified through logics of blaming the victims (Cottrell & Orłowski, 2015; Green 2006; Spooner, 2015).

Relationships with stakeholders were of great importance to participants. They saw these in various positive ways, and the pathway forward to policy success during conflicts. OT's comment about the connection between experiences and relationships indicates the close links SBLs share with those with which they work and FV's remark about conversations with stakeholders indicates the point of origins for meaningful relationships. Participant responses, such as MA's, indicated how parents used their power and legitimacy to avoid having their children engage in learning experiences that they didn't support or accept being exposed to diversity: "don't you dare let my kid participate in any of that Pagan Indian crap" and by ME to escape unpalatable diversity and Indigenous content and experiences, economically and geographically. Participants didn't explicitly describe systems thinking and analysis (Meadows, 2008; Senge, 2003; Senge et al., 2007; Senge & von Ameln, 2019) but described a strong understanding of how the system works, specifically much needed resources, the organizational structure of school divisions, cuts and reductions to funding over time, and the limited success

and results produced in Indigenous student learning rates (Meadows, 2008). Participants described interconnections between stakeholders, forces, and influences. Several participants spoke specifically about longitudinal patterns of behaviour, organizational changes and outcomes within their school division, mostly noting reductions, losses, and compounding impacts. SM's observation best described the connections between external groups and schools who work together to bring about societal change and countered the notion that changing parameters and variables would bring about changes and suggested that large scale or second-order change would only be possible by changing the root causes of Indigenous peoples' limited success in schools and ongoing colonialism (Leonard, 2013; Meadows, 2008). Nearly all participants described frustration at the education sector attempts to create first-order change within an economic climate of ongoing and damaging cuts to funding while demanding change (Daly & Chrispeels, 2008). SM and FV explained how the education system's work had little impact on novel problems and how second-order changes and the application of new thinking and concepts were needed to solve problems (Leonard, 2013).

Change

No active resistance to change was openly declared by participants and all were in favour of the IS policy indicating that SBLs do not perceive the policy to be wrong or flawed (Amis et al., 2004). An organization's ability to change is connected to its capacity to learn, something driven by leadership (Breakspear, 2010a, 2010b; Senge, 2003) and noted by participants who described stakeholders' need to change, specifically citing improved knowledge, practice, and ways of being. IH highlighted the limitations of time faced by SBLs to drive staff learning and the reductions in opportunities to learn from budget cuts. SBLs in schools represent and hold positional authority, ensure equity and ethical conduct, and compel staff to bring about change for the oppressed, minority groups, and the good of the community and face racial tension (Briscoe & McIntosh, 2023; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Green, 2006; Gunn et al., 2011). This was expressed most significantly by ME who described great urgency and agency in making change for Indigenous peoples and the community through specific leadership actions and partnerships. When principals engage in sense making, they must first consider the people and places' starting capacity and readiness which defines what can be achieved through the implementation of policy (Honig, 2006). Readiness was mentioned by nearly all participants although no participant fully described what they believed could be achieved, suggesting that

SBLs, the policy chain, and stakeholders haven't yet fully assessed and acknowledged their starting point or co-created a vision for the end destination. Participants described multiple instances where SBLs supported and aimed to treat stakeholders well, to recognize their needs, and to lead them in various ways towards accomplishing predefined or mutual goals (Northouse, 2016). Passive resistance countering change with conformity to the existing culture was briefly mentioned by one participant and was likely a predictable source of change resistance (Breakspear, 2010a; Kanter, 2012).

Research findings aligned themselves to the literature on formal change processes in education through incremental changes (Howlett et al., 2020; Leonard, 2013; Lindblom, 1979; Kingdon, 2003). This was most noted because no participant described an abrupt change caused by the IS policy and participant responses highlighted white resistance (Murray-Johnson & Guerra, 2018; Velasco & Sansone, 2019). Incremental decision-making in government was noted by participants who could recall past provincial policy iterations and the policy evolution that led to the IS policy. The IS policy represents normative isomorphism as it was not independently created and is rather a response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's report of 2015, much like in other provinces. Although the provincial government had opportunities to learn from a trial-and-error process with prior policy documents, the IS policy document represents choices that are only marginally different from those that existed in previous iterations and maintained a governmental approach to the limited allocation of policy instruments (Howlett et al., 2020).

Most noted in MA and ME's description, the incremental change was so slow, something that allows stakeholders to accustom themselves with limited opposition (Amis et al., 2004; Kanter, 2012; Kingdon, 2003). ME suggested the change was so slow, passive, and lacked organizational importance stating: "I think if you relied completely on the division to help you actualize the vision of IS, it would never happen." FV noted several organizational changes over time and wondered if they were connected to, or the result of, the IS policy. PL noted that the policy and the change had started before the IS policy. SM was the only participant to explicitly state incremental changes referring to curricula and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and to mention school division goal monitoring processes referring to locally created tangible goals. Other participants indicated ongoing strategic focus on Indigenous success in learning through data monitoring processes, but these were not described as part of a system focus on monitoring

policy progress. Although the IS policy was created with stakeholders, it was created and controlled by the provincial government and best described as a top-down colonial change processes through educational policy (Khalifa et al., 2019). The preponderance of participant data indicated alignment with dominant change processes noted in the research that do not create long-term success and often achieve suboptimal results because of an exclusive focus on what to change and not how to bring about change that created unaddressed needs (Rowland et al., 2023).

Class warfare is the ongoing and open conflict between classes of people in society over the distribution of resources and wealth in a resource-starved community (Orlowski, 2015; Peterson, 1997; Shea, 2000). Participant data presented a few instances where concern for resources and protectionism, presented in a racist manner by parents, and were interpreted to be individuals acting to self-maximize their personal interest through class warfare (Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Dabscheck, 2018; Green, 2006; Orlowski, 2015; McMurtry, 1998, 2002; Persky, 1995; Peterson, 1997; Schiller, 2008; Sumner, 2007). The most noted concern from participants was changes to educational funding over time, aligned to fiscal restraint (Driscoll et al., 2014) and logics of fixed-pie or zero-sum schema (Eibach & Keegan, 2006) used by contemporary neoliberal governments to maintain class warfare (Savage, 2016) and to resist and oppose large public expenditures for change through equity-based policy for those who have been marginalized, have experienced historic wrongs or harms, or those who have been oppressed (Eibach & Keegan, 2006). Participant data highlighted numerous instances where SBLs were required to do more with less and the harmful effects they had on the quality and the range of services that can be offered in schools. Although significant in recent literature, no leader described personal approaches linked to interest convergence that could create changes without experiencing backlash from whites (Kafka & Wilson, 2023, Park & Liu, 2014; Pierce, 2016).

Actions

Leadership actions, practices, and behaviours are guided by ethics, responsibility, and accountability and are influenced or restricted by multiple factors requiring responsiveness to contexts through appropriate practices, navigation, and processes (Leithwood et al., 2020). IH highlighted this when they affirmed that SBLs should know and use their strengths, OT suggested that SBLs' own culture impacted their decision-making and practice, IH and PL

described creating a sense of urgency as continuous improvement, multiple participants mentioned working closely with staff and distributing leadership responsibilities for greater impact, and several participants described trying to be responsive to their staff's most noted learning need, instruction, assessment, and those that include Indigenous perspectives (Claypool & Preston, 2013). Principals keep children's best interest at heart (Lowenhaupt et al., 2016) which was suggested by my SM when they stated that the policy chain should be: "trusting SBLs to act responsibly and ethically in the best interests of students" and demonstrated by others when they described strategic communication to stakeholders and within the policy chain to garner greater resources for their students. The literature and participant data both described the importance of ongoing commitment in school divisions and avoiding distractions, with one participant going so far as to say: "you can't figure, you can't see the forest for the trees" (Darlin-Hammond & Hill, 2015). SBLs use structure and strategic talk to transmit relevant information and messages to stakeholders based on their expertise, morals, and emotions (Leithwood et al., 2020; Timperley & Parr, 2009). Participant data outlined numerous instances where communication throughout the policy chain was lacking and greatly needed, and others where participants had used strategic talk for a range of advocacy purposes with stakeholders. Communicating with stakeholders was of noted importance and of high frequency in the participant data indicating this is one of the most relied upon strategies and processes used by the participants to influence and to bring about change, often presented as aspirational talk, which participants performed to influence the beliefs and actions of stakeholders (Sharratt, 2019). Harmful, oppressive, and colonial talk, used exclusively by stakeholders in personal communication with SBLs, was noted in participant data and used to achieve specific aims such as seeking to avoid or challenge change driven by SBLs and schools (Cottrell et al., 2012; Cottrell & Orlowski, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015).

Knowing truth and feeling uncomfortable is required, and despite being difficult, it is good for white settlers as it stimulates and compels society and individuals to action against institutional racism and oppression (Gill, 2020; Tupper, 2013; Patel, 2022). Education, which once oppressed, can now liberate (Abele, 2007; Anderson & Fleming, 2014; Assembly of First Nations, 2010; Madden, 2019a; Sefa Dei & Restoule, 2019; Simeone, 2014). Participant data from FV highlighted gaps in generational knowledge that impacted positive relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and nostalgia and outward aggression from a

community member about the prior state: “Everything was just fine before!” This statement suggests that actionable change is uncomfortable for those who seek to maintain privilege, which is a noted root cause for the resistance towards equitable changes for others (Green, 2006, Velasco & Sansone, 2019). Several participants described recent school division equity initiatives that seek to advance anti-racist and anti-oppressive pedagogies and to create positive change in schools for the betterment of all. Numerous concerns were raised in the participant data that Indigenous needs and realities were lost within this new larger focus on equity and that a lack of concerted effort was being applied specifically to improving educational outcomes for Indigenous learners.

Constructivist leadership creates opportunities for all members to engage in acts of leadership, resulting in improved organizational capacity, and applies the power of the group to take action (Galloway and Ishimaru, 2015). Participants noted concerns, strengths, positive outcomes from, and pathways forward in opportunities for stakeholders to be engaged with policy and change efforts, and to support change throughout the policy chain, as described in the literature above. Most significant for participants were moments of collective action for change created by the SBL and the barriers that opposed these. Alignment between participant data and the literature highlighted how SBLs balance the needs and interests of all stakeholders, based on their expertise and interactions, and how they regularly assess and monitor this throughout the implementation process (Hands & Freckelton, 2019; Leithwood et al., 2020) and where they are compelled, they question dominant norms and attempted to remedy educational debts owed to nondominant students, strategically, with limited resources (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Multiple instances were identified in the participant data where SBLs modelled the pursuit of equity for others, advocated to ensure equity, made strategic decisions about policies, and responded to inequities according to a contextualized vision while relying on their identities and the influence they have on others (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Mizrahi-Shtelman, 2021).

Barriers

Alignment between research data and literature identified that SBLs face complex and ambiguous problems that aren't easily quantified, that they work in a field that is filled with distractions, and that they are vulnerable to being misled (Flessa, 2012). Many participant voices suggested that the current state is over-represented by complexity, lacks stability and predictability, and includes numerous ongoing distractions. Reviewed literature suggested that

policies can distract school divisions from improved instruction and reduce variability in teacher effectiveness (Tunison, 2018) but this finding was exasperated by the impacts of continuous budget cuts that impacted opportunities for staff to learn and grow. Professional autonomy, the need for it to be recognized, and the impacts from multiple provincial improvement policies were noted in participant data and the literature (Lowenhaupt et al., 2016).

Policies create winners and losers, often described in the literature and by participants (Howlett et al., 2020). While having policy focused on Indigenous learners and their educational needs, the state of the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, and shared management of the education sector were seen as wins, implementing without additional funding and without addressing root causes were seen and described by participants as losses and further obstacles. The IS policy is another instance of underfunding of Indigenous education and economic exclusion which further supports the claim that an ongoing colonial legacy exists in the province and in Canada (Gauthier et al., 2020). Furthermore, the underfunding of education through neoliberal economics and the resulting class warfare and racism were noted in participant data (Dabscheck, 2018; Green, 2006; Flew, 2014; Orłowski, 2015; McMurtry, 1998, 2002; Peterson, 1997; Savage, 2016; Schiller, 2008; Sumner, 2007).

Alignment between participant data and the literature were noted in instances where the success of educational objectives and quality education were impacted by the hiring and training of teachers, the availability of adequate supports for students, the lack of opportunities to learn professionally, ongoing challenges to counter low educational results, and the impacts of modern colonialism (Anderson & Richards, 2016; Assembly of First Nations, 2010; Carr-Stewart, 2006; Drummond & Kachuk Rosenbluth, 2013; Rae, 2009; Shizha, 2017). There was a clear link for several participants between the quality of instruction and the adequacy of resources and funding in education (Lupton, 2005). While the literature indicated that there is a maximum funding threshold where increased spending would not solve educational problems and that reductions in waste and audits would be useful processes to educational management, no evidence that the reduction in provincial funding was absorbed without significant impact was found in the participant data, and those who spoke of audits indicated that they were positive but for improved practice and as an opportunity for continuous improvement rather than for waste reduction (Grubb, 2009; Hyman, 2017; Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 2024). Participants noted lack of funding and continuous budget cuts in the sector and indicated that more resources

are desperately needed, which aligns itself to findings describing the positive desirable impacts resulting from adequate educational funding (Hyman, 2017; Kang, 2021). The economic environment continues to be volatile (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 2024; Self & Schraeder, 2009) and economic realities impact education funding. Two responses, fiscal conservatism and robust expenditures are typically sought by governments as noted in the literature (Cerniglia & Longaretti, 2012; Derisma, 2013; Driscoll et al., 2014; Grubb, 2009; Robinson, 2014). Participants clearly described an educational landscape defined by fiscal conservatism.

Needs

Participant data indicated significant efforts, the paramount importance they attributed to overcoming the societal pressures opposing change, and the need to undo the harms inflicted on Indigenous peoples in order to lessen the hindrances and constraints so they may prosper like non-Indigenous citizens through educational opportunities, as noted in the literature and the IS policy imperatives (Battiste, 1998; Carr-Stewart, 2006; DiAngelo, 2018; Dirlik, 2008; Gill, 2020; Gillborn, 2015; Government of Saskatchewan, 2018; Matthew, 2022; Patel, 2021; Plaut et al., 2011). This would also enable western dominant schools, SBLs, and teachers to stop harming Indigenous students and communities. Research participants had strong concerns for the quality of learning opportunities for students, the amplification or exacerbation of prior gaps in student learning, and short- and long-term impacts created by the current state of educational funding and programming which impacts the implementation of the IS policy (Contini et al., 2021; Gallagher-Mackay, 2020; Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Khan & Ahmed, 2021; Sahlberg, 2020; Washington & Johnson, 2023).

Research findings confirmed that Treaty 6 territory and the provincial society attribute and maintain unequal rights and privileges for some over others, and that as described by critical race theory, race is socially constructed and experienced daily (Gillborn, 2015; Held, 2019; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015; Park & Bahia, 2022; Sleeter, 2017; Sablan, 2019; Su, 2017). The ongoing Settler-Colonial Project, which was made visible through participant data highlighted how Indigenous peoples were, and continue to be, stripped of their humanity and claims to ancestral lands because claims of lacking innate humanity which allows the dominant colonial group of whites to claim the land and resources for their own use through espoused superiority and entitlement (Battell Lowman & Barker, 2015; Cottrell et al., 2012;

Dirlik, 2008; Gaudry & Leroux, 2017; Masta, 2019; Orłowski & Cottrell, 2019; Veracini, 2018, 2019). This command and control is most visible in the provincial government's lack of concerted effort to create intersectoral cooperation to address specific community needs, the impacts of ongoing colonialism, poverty, and the ongoing resistance to allocate policy instruments and to participate meaningfully in the implementation and monitoring process of the IS educational policy, which all contribute to the maintenance of the status quo in Treaty 6 territory and the province (Datnow & Park, 2009; Green, 2006; Howlett et al., 2020; Spooner, 2015; Mills, 2007; Pal, 2006; Tupper & Mitchell, 2022).

Systems leadership and systems theory are noted in the literature to develop understandings about systems, their relationships, how they work, the patterns of their results, and change fallacies (Meadows, 2008; Senge, 2003; Senge et al., 2007; Senge & von Ameln, 2019). While some participant data indicated existing skills or experiences that allowed them to do this, a greater development of these skills in SBLs would allow them to develop and implement targeted processes that are honed for specific change initiatives and context. Policy goals are noted in the literature to be different than effective strategies. A knowledge and practice gap is noted in the policy chain within participant data where tangible goals are the exception and data monitoring processes and structures that have proven to be inadequate in the past and continue to be the most noted approach to ensure equitable opportunities in the field (Timperley & Parr, 2009). Another research-practice gap noted was the absence of school divisions in supporting implementation by actively explaining policies to stakeholders (Werts et al., 2013) thus creating a landscape that relied almost exclusively on SBLs' skills and knowledge about policy to be the driving force behind isolated policy implementation efforts (Hands & Freckelton, 2019). Based on participant data, school divisions and SBLs appear to be in real need of guidance to implement the IS policy due to limited budgets. Recent efforts by the Saskatchewan School Boards Association to animate the IS policy by having stakeholders in the education sector organizationally and personally reflect are evidence of efforts within the policy chain to overcome the barriers present in the educational landscape (Saskatchewan School Boards Association, 2022). The opportunity for school divisions to reflect and self-assess according to specific implementation strategies is significant but they will likely still lack the ability to carry out meaningful progress towards the policy goals without receiving much needed staff and resources in the form of policy instruments that the policy chain would use to move

policy goals to action, inform stakeholders, change contexts or practices, and deliver more human resources or organizational supports to end users (Cohen et al., 2007; Datnow and Park, 2009; Hettiarachchi & Kshourad, 2019).

Major Findings

The eight categories identified in this study were created by the analysis of participant data. When participant data was juxtaposed with the literature reviewed and the program pillars of the Education Doctorate program at the University of Saskatchewan, the story of the case study identified three themes: roles, relationships, and responsibilities. These three themes are present and resonate in each of the above-noted sources. As such, creating Wítaskêwin requires each of us in our roles to uphold our responsibilities and relationships and to live in the community, harmoniously, as treaty people, which would be the manifestation of Wítaskêwin. It should be known that Wítaskêwin; getting along on the land, will be the outcome sought and the pathway forward for the roles, relationships, and responsibilities of each treaty person including SBLs and stakeholders. It is SBLs and the education system that will be the “key to reconciliation” (Madden, 2019a, p. 292) and positive change for our community.

4.7 Implications of Study to Practice, Theory and Further Research

Organizational Improvement Plan Findings

Although the instrumental case study primarily sought to critically analyze how SBLs engage with educational policy and contribute to Wítaskêwin, the findings pertinent to the successes and barriers identified in the implementation of the IS policy have great value beyond the case and are highly relevant to school boards wishing to engage in continuous improvement and positive outcomes from equity-based policy. School boards should employ deep systems leadership and systems thinking to better understand and to bring about improved results. These organizations should also maintain, protect, and create new relationships and partnerships that improve efficacy, the delivery of services, and educational outcomes. Rigorous investigation into the efficacy and common practice in the policy chain in Saskatchewan should be engaged to understand the strategies, efforts, successes, and barriers experienced to date, like those identified in this document, and immediately remedy the research practice gap identified in this study. The entire policy chain should be engaged, and work cooperatively with stakeholders, on an ongoing fashion to end the settler colonial project, as directed by the policy imperatives included in the IS policy document. It should be recognized that this could be a process that takes

multiple generations and not years. The policy chain should immediately advocate and communicate the needs of the system with stakeholders and to stop and reverse the ongoing funding cuts that have been espoused through the fiscal constraints of neoliberal economics and implemented provincially (Orlowski, 2015). Finally, school boards should foster culturally sustaining pedagogical practices (Paris, 2017; Paris & Alim, 2014), transform unequal power relations and strive towards respecting and supporting the re-establishment of Indigenous sovereignty and governance (Washington & Johnson, 2023), reinvest in improved instruction and assessment practices that go beyond dominant white approaches so that learning outcomes for Indigenous students can be improved and the educational gap can be eliminated.

Instrumental Case Study Findings

The methodology of this study was an instrumental case study. This was strategically selected to challenge me to provide insight by focusing on the results and not the topic. Stated simply; the investigation of the gap between ministerial policy and goals and Indigenous educational outcomes in Saskatchewan as a problem of practice for SBLs and progress towards creating lasting Wîtaskêwin. The researcher acknowledges that the findings of the study regarding the implementation of the IS policy are not readily generalizable, but there is great value beyond the case and the trustworthiness of the findings allow the reader to analyze and apply the findings, as appropriate, to their own unique contexts. The study of SBLs was intended to support and facilitate the understanding of the treaty relationships the case and context were investigated vigorously, and results were closely analyzed to support the critical analysis of how they engage with educational policy and their contributions to Wîtaskêwin. I suggest that the case is perceived to be typical, although surely nuanced, of other cases that could be similarly investigated in other parts of the province or in Canada.

The findings of the study have informed some of the possible educational sector and societal barriers that oppose SBLs efforts to successfully implement the Inspiring Success (IS) policy to support the improvement of educational outcomes of Indigenous students learning in Treaty 6 territory and to bring about Wîtaskêwin. Further research regarding the efforts, strategies, and impacts within the system and policy chain, as well as the careful monitoring of the presence, health, and ongoing impacts of the settler colonial project that propagates racism and class warfare are needed. The study has determined that Treaty 6 territory is experiencing a policy paradox where a research and practice gap exist, limited money, time and material

resources are available to address ambiguous policy, the level of change readiness, due to the ongoing settler colonial project and its impacts, most noted as racism and class warfare, limits the progress of implementation and impacts of the IS educational policy and Wîtaskêwin continues to be lacking. If the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples is to be reconciled, as directed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, and the impacts of the settler colonial project, racism and white supremacy, are to be lessened and eventually eliminated, a systems approach must be crafted with stakeholders and implemented vastly through all levels of government, sectors, and communities to create meaningful change.

Implications for Theory

The study has multiple implications for theory. Most significant are topics of the settler colonial project, colonialism, racism, class warfare, education funding, stakeholder engagement, educational policy implementation, educational change readiness and change management, and equity. Each of these topics was reviewed in the key concepts, theory pertaining to the problem of practice or stipulative definitions included in Chapter 1, or the 4 themes presented in the literature review presented in Chapter 2. Further study of their implications and impacts in Saskatchewan's educational and community context would allow for greater understanding, less generality, greater local applicability, and impact through use.

4.8 Conclusion

This paper introduced the extant literature and related studies, the study's methodology, goal, sample, participants, and most noteworthy participant data from the seven interviews. Afterwards, it presented the eight categories; policy, place, people, relationships, change, actions, barriers, and needs, the study's three overarching themes; roles, relationships, and responsibilities, and a discussion that included a comparison of the research findings to the literature. The paper ended with the implications for practice, theory, and a call for further research.

Paper 5: Overall Synthesis, Overview, and Conclusion

5.0 Overall Synthesis and Overview, including Discussion and Conclusions

This final paper presents the findings related to my problem of practice through a doctoral-level contribution to the field and literature, first by presenting the findings of the instrumental case study findings and then by presenting the organizational improvement plan. Also included are outlines of the prior four papers and concluded by an overall synopsis and synthesis. The major conclusion of the study affirms that the Inspiring Success (IS) educational policy has limited impact on the Treaty 6 territory and provincial landscape because of the nature of the policy, the place where implementation has been attempted, the current state of the provincial education sector, and the people affected by the policy.

This is the culmination of my work in the Education Doctorate program at the University of Saskatchewan and an attempt to give back to my community and colleagues who have supported me and allowed me this opportunity to grow. Finally, this work is a call to action for my children, Zéphyr, Véronique, et Quillon, my colleagues, and my community to dare to make a difference in this world, however small, a demonstration of the value and importance of meaningful relationships in life, and an encouragement to live in a good way through Tâpwêwin, Wîtaskêwin, and Miyo-wîcêhtowin.

Instrumental Case Study Findings

This dissertation is the culmination of an instrumental case study conducted in 2024 in Treaty 6 territory in Saskatchewan. The purpose of the work was to collect relevant literature and participant data, to use these findings to critically study the government of Saskatchewan's IS educational policy and to bring about positive change through leadership. This study uncovers power relations, intertwined facts and values, unequal power, and compounding oppression that have existed historically continue to this day (Cottrell & Hardy, 2019; Cottrell & Orłowski, 2015; Kincheloe, 2008; Orłowski & Cottrell, 2019; Tupper, 2014; Tupper & Mitchell, 2022; Wallin & Tunison, 2022). I sought to fulfill my ethical responsibility (Ermine, 2007) by promoting social justice (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015) and equity (Sablan, 2019) through my insider access (Cohen et al., 2018; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010) to professional western certified school leadership and school-based leaders (Fullan, 2014, 2018; Kovach, 2021) in Saskatchewan's public education system in Treaty 6 territory. These findings should compel the education sector of Saskatchewan to further commit to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples by

ensuring that the IS educational policy (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018) framework principles are upheld and that societal barriers such as racism, neoliberalism and class warfare (Orlowski; 2015; Savage, 2016), and root causes to poor socioeconomic, inequitable educational opportunities, and worsened health outcomes for Indigenous peoples (Clouston & Link, 2021), among others, are systematically addressed and eliminated. Doing so would enhance and eventually achieve community health and positive relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and address each of the six policy imperatives (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018). This future state would be the embodiment of Wítaskêwin in Treaty 6 territory; living together on the land, one of the three Plains Cree principles on which the treaty was founded, and miyo-wichitowin; “a healing energy or medicine that is generated when we are actively together with the intention of honouring and respecting the relationships we are enmeshed within” (Donald et al., 2012) and Miyo-wîcêhtowin, “principal of getting along well with others” (Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000, p. 14). The study yielded three themes: roles, relationships, and responsibilities that are at the heart of this advocacy against the ongoing marginalization of Indigenous students (Held, 2019) which are leveraged to make a rallying cry for “what could or should be” (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 294). I recognize that the literature and educational landscape are uncertain as to how to design an appropriate policy response with the specific and appropriate knowledge and skills that would undo generations of genocide, oppression, and hardship (Howlett et al., 2020; Rittel & Webber, 1993). Continuous improvement through mimetic and normative isomorphism (Austin & Jones, 2016; Spooner & Orlowski, 2013) are prevalent in the field, and while said to be data-driven (Miller, 2010), it is often driven by that which can be easily quantified (Flessa, 2012). The focus on continuous improvement and an over-focus on students’ surface-level performance data in educational organizations leads to distraction, misdirection, and negative outcomes (Darlin-Hammond & Hill, 2015; Flessa, 2012; Spooner & Orlowski, 2013; Tunison, 2018).

Oxford Languages explain the etymology of policy is first Greek; politeia, meaning citizenship and later, old French: policie, meaning civil administration. In a Saskatchewan educational context, educational leaders make sense of, implement, and enact public policy at the school board level, where governance, authority, and power reside (Alexander et al., 2020; Jónasson, 2016; Mitchell et al., 1997). In 2009, the capacity and ability of Saskatchewan school boards and educational leaders to enact public policy has been directly impacted by the

Government of Saskatchewan's changes to legislation that amended and removed individual school board's ability to set a tax mill rate thus removing their local financial autonomy and power and making the resource lean IS policy more complex. While Saskatchewan's IS policy and the new Educational Funding Distribution Model are uniform across all school divisions (Saskatchewan, 2017), school boards must individually demonstrate the organizational will to design an effective policy response and to dedicate their limited human and financial resources to the pursuit of the policy's goals. This instrumental case study indicates there is more lip service than action and the provincial education system talks the talk but doesn't walk the walk. The policy needs financial resources, structures, and personnel to actualize, and little will change in their absence. The blame should not be placed solely on Saskatchewan's school boards as they are significantly limited by recently made changes that consolidate greater power and authority in the education sector to a small group of people in a colonial hierarchical leadership structure in government paired with the inadequate funding they allocate to the education sector. As such, the willingness to create the Inspiring Success policy, the refusal to fund the education sector's work, and the maintenance of unequal power relationships between the provincial government and stakeholders is evidence of the ongoing settler colonial project.

Organizational Improvement Plan Findings

This organizational improvement plan uses an instrumental case study (Stake, 1994, 2003, 2005) to critically analyze how school-based leaders engage with educational policy and implement the IS policy to support the improvement of educational outcomes of Indigenous children learning in Treaty 6 territory and contribute to Wítaskêwin. Case study research contributes significantly to organizations' knowledge base, their cultures, and their understanding (Brown, 2008) and allows researchers to explore individuals, organizations, relationships, communities or programs. According to Baxter & Jack (2008), instrumental case study:

plays a supportive role, facilitating our understanding of something else. The case is often looked at in depth, its contexts scrutinized, its ordinary activities detailed, and because it helps the researcher pursue the external interest. The case may or may not be seen as typical of other cases (p. 549).

The context of this study was of great importance (Priya, 2021) and the participants, who are guided by socio-cultural contexts and interactions, presented the complexity and embeddedness

of their social truths (Cohen et al., 2018). The investigation collected relevant information from seven school-based leaders (SBLs) with unique racial, ethnic, and gendered perspectives to uncover the leadership actions, beliefs, and processes lead to success, which barriers persist, and if the IS policy itself was a remedy or a roadblock to learning rates and the treaty relationship. The in-depth exploration of their beliefs, actions, and processes to achieve the goals of the IS policy yielded many relevant findings. Many of these are aligned to the literature reviewed, pushed the edge of what is unknown by moving beyond comfort (Singer & Easton, 2015), and contributed new knowledge through the insights of the participants and my interpretations of this social and human Problem of Practice (CPED, 2016; McMillan & Shumacher, 2010); the gap between ministerial policy and goals and Indigenous educational outcomes in Saskatchewan. The findings of this study contribute to and refine organizational understanding of provincial educational policy implementation, the provincial education policy chain that includes SBLs (Datnow & Park, 2009; McLaughlin, 2006), and reveals participants' hidden views and values (Kincheloe, 2008).

How do leadership actions, beliefs, and processes lead to policy success in public schools in Treaty 6 territory? The SBLs who participated in this study presented the most significant information that they were compelled to share and not an exhaustive previously prepared list. SBLs work towards policy success by establishing beliefs, maintaining their values, and describing these to others and compelling them to strive for change despite challenging circumstances. They maintain their leadership and professional focus on important matters and avoid distractions in complex educational landscapes. They communicate with and advocate to various stakeholders about their students and staff's needs, efforts, priorities, goals, and much more. They pursue change by establishing, being in, maintaining, and building relationships and partnerships with stakeholders. They learn continuously and support the learning of others and leverage this knowledge and experience to understand policy, place, and people. SBLs maintain several beliefs about what is right and just, how to lead change, the importance of every child and their success. They apply strategic processes to work positively with others, support the professional learning and holistic growth of all those around them, including parents and community members, and pay careful attention to the impacts of instruction and students' subsequent progress in learning.

How do barriers persist despite leadership actions, beliefs, and processes and limit policy success in public schools in Treaty 6 territory? SBLs spoke freely and with confidence about the policy obstacles they face in leadership. Of greatest significance to SBLs was the cumulative effects of years of cuts to public education funding and the system's limited ability to address and respond to the learning needs of students in classrooms. The ongoing distractions and lack of focus within the policy chain was significant for SBLs as many participants felt as if they were required to maintain the focus on provincial educational policy and Indigenous students in the absence of a provincial and division vision and focus. Finally, participants described financial and time constraints that impede teachers' professional learning and the system's ability to learn. As a result, concerns remain about the availability of quality instruction and assessment practices for every child, in every classroom. These barriers are further compounded by the settler colonial project and Eurocentric curricula that privilege Western knowledge and encourage the addition of Indigenous knowledge, where possible.

The findings of the study have informed which educational sector and societal barriers oppose SBLs' efforts to successfully implement the Inspiring Success (IS) policy to support the improvement of educational outcomes of Indigenous students learning in Treaty 6 territory and to bring about Wîtaskêwin. The primary finding of the study confirms that implementing educational policy is complex and its success is dependent on the policy, place, and people. The data collected from participants indicates that Treaty 6 territory is experiencing a policy paradox and a perfect storm.

5.0.1 Paper 1: Synopsis of main narratives and themes

This paper presented who I am and my prior experiences, the selected problem of practice and its context, the inquiry question guiding the study and the main research questions, and the relevance to educational leadership. Limitations and delimitations, stipulative definitions, as well as additional assumptions about the study were included. Preparing this paper required me to look back and to reflect, analyze, and critique my journey as a treaty person. Within the reflection, I considered my childhood and upbringing, my education and evolution in the PreK-12 public education system of Saskatchewan, my training as a professional teacher, my professional career to date which was juxtaposed against the notions of Wîtaskêwin and Miyo-wicêhtowin to better understand my relationship with Indigenous people, why I framed my

doctoral efforts on the treaty relationship, and what I hoped to accomplish through this dissertation.

The major finding of this reflective work is that despite being born in Treaty 6 territory, my life had been lived largely in the absence of Indigenous peoples through dispossession, that I was continuously exposed to colonial logics and white framing justifying the elimination and erasure of Indigenous peoples, and that through the effects of personal ignorance, the settler colonial project, and white supremacy, I had barely begun to create my relationship with Indigenous peoples and to know Tâpwêwin. As an adult and a professional teacher, I knew that if I wanted to have a treaty relationship, I would need to continue to create meaningful interactions and experiences with Indigenous peoples in my personal and professional life. The themes of this reflection are erasure, domination, denial and ignorance. These four themes describe how my family, community, and I were able to live with privilege on Treaty 6 land with no requirement to live alongside Indigenous people in any meaningful way.

Although I didn't present the four pillars of the University of Saskatchewan Education Doctorate program in my reflection, the most significant connections, are social justice and equity, Indigenous ways of knowing and contexts, and ethical leadership. The first connection to social justice and equity is made by recognizing that equitable opportunities and realities were not experienced by Indigenous peoples as they were for me and by noting an absence of social justice. As shared by one of the research participants, if I were purely satisfied by maintaining the past, I could also state: "Everything was just fine" which would beg the question: for whom? The answer would ultimately be; beneficial to me at the expense of so many others. The second connection made is to Indigenous ways of knowing and contexts as Treaty 6 territory is the homeland of many Indigenous peoples and the Métis, and my family was able to come here by participating in the settler colonial project, to access stolen lands, and to benefit individually through popular white ideological assumptions, also known as colonial logics. The final connection made was ethical leadership. Throughout my life, those in leadership roles, and later when I myself adopted leadership roles, espoused to be good leaders whose conduct was ethical. When considered in the moment and time, or in retrospect, ethics and ethical leadership must stand up to scrutiny (Hartog, 2015), without the justification of prevailing colonial or white logics, culture, and ideologies of the time. Responsibility, ethics, and justice must be considered at a moment in time, but also, within a larger context of justice and equity. The ends do not

justify the means and ethical leadership, despite being commonly espoused, is the exception and not rule. It is constrained due to the needs, wants, and the identities of privileged stakeholders and leaders.

5.0.2 Paper 2: Synopsis of literature

This paper examined literature that supported a more comprehensive understanding of the context and complexities faced by those in the policy chain who attempt to implement educational policy in Treaty 6 territory located in Saskatchewan. The review of the literature included the four major topics that I felt would adequately frame the study; the treaty legacy and historic relationship with Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island, in Canada, and in Saskatchewan, social context in which educational policy must thrive, principals as educational policy leaders, and public education and educational policy. It identified relevant findings, but these didn't resolve the research question, the instrumental case study, nor did they address the problem of practice in its context. The findings suggested a compelling need to conduct empirical research to answer the research questions through the instrumental case study.

Reflecting on the literature reviewed, all four pillars of the University of Saskatchewan's Education Doctorate can be identified. The first theme is most closely linked to Indigenous ways of knowing and contexts, social justice and equity, and ethical leadership as the history and legacy of the treaty relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples is a case study of oppression, inequitable realities, and the systematic and holistic destruction of Indigenous peoples in the pursuit of the settler colonial project. The leadership of the time, despite following policy and colonial logics, has demonstrated a lack of social justice and equity for Indigenous peoples and was an example of the greatest Canadian unethical leadership as it destroyed communities, served some and not others, was dishonest, and lacked respect and justice. The second theme, the social context in which educational policy must thrive, framed the context of people and place; a location dedicated to the settler colonial project where whites opposed change in hopes of maintaining various unequal privileges. This theme was closely connected to all four pillars of the program. The most significant connections were social justice and equity that once again eliminated rights, freedoms, and opportunities for Indigenous peoples while enshrining these for non-Indigenous peoples in structures, geographies, resources, wealth, and privileges. The third theme was principals as educational policy leaders and was closely tied to all pillars as these professionals are expected to be ethical leaders who seek to ensure social

justice and equity for all students and to provide a rich educational experience that includes Indigenous ways of knowing and contexts, as per the expectations in provincial curricula and must draw on comparative and international contexts to guide their leadership efforts. The fourth and final theme was public education and educational policy. Once again, all four pillars were connected, and the strongest connection was ethical leadership. Public education and educational policy must now rebuild people, communities, and relationships, demonstrate honesty and integrity while being just, and in service of all. This paper relied on literature from comparative and international contexts as the voices of researchers who contributed literature from alternate places and cultures which were explored to build understanding for my context. Many sources for this literature review were accessed and selected because they were closely tied to people and place, provincially and federally, but others contributed a fuller understanding and a relevant perspective based on their engagement in the field of studies from afar.

5.0.3 Paper 3: Research design and methods

This paper presented and framed the problem of practice and the approach to the inquiry, the methodology and method selected, the study's inquiry question and main research questions, the sampling and participants, data collection and analysis process, efforts to ensure rigour, reliability, and trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. The study's design was carefully considered and crafted for alignment with the most used methodologies in social sciences and constructivist ways of being and knowing. Critically analyzing how SBLs engage with and implement the IS policy was determined to be an effective way to determine the success and barriers in the educational leadership landscape, how they support the improvement of educational outcomes of Indigenous children learning in Treaty 6 territory and contribute to Wîtaskêwin.

The focus of this study was framed early during my experience in the Education Doctorate program. It commenced during coursework at the end of the first year of the program and into the second residency when participants were introduced to and challenged to identify a problem of practice. My first iterations were focused exclusively on funding and lacked connections to my area of leadership where I could impact the problem of practice. Prior coursework on policy, leadership, and stakeholders, which weren't of great academic interest at first, later became highly relevant once they were juxtaposed with my professional experiences, the pillars of the program, the provincial educational policy currently in effect, and the opportunity to bring about

positive change. Reflecting on this paper, connections were made to the pillars of ethical leadership and social justice and equity. Throughout the planning and design phases of the study, great attention was paid to ensure that it would be conducted from start to finish with great attention to ethical research behaviour to ensure that my research would be conducted without causing harm and would be accepted by readers and the field of studies. The topics finally selected for the study held the greatest personal and professional significance and promise to bring about social justice and equity in my home treaty territory.

5.0.4 **Paper 4: Findings of the Study and Research Questions Including Discussion.**

This paper presented the findings of the instrumental case study conducted in Treaty 6 territory in Saskatchewan that sought to critically analyze how SBLs engage with the Inspiring Success educational policy and contribute to Wîtaskêwin. The problem of practice how can SBLs successfully implement the Inspiring Success (IS) educational policy to support the improvement of educational outcomes of Indigenous children learning in Treaty 6 territory was investigated through semi-structured interviews with seven SBLs which generated rich participant data that often aligned itself closely to the literature reviewed for this study. The participant data, generated from 10 questions that were delivered during one-hour semi-structured interviews, was carefully analyzed using a four-stage process (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Shaked & Schechter, 2018; Williams & Moser, 2019). As a result of the analysis, eight categories were identified. These included policy, place, people, relationships, change, action, barriers, and needs. Additionally, three overarching themes emerged: roles, relationships, and responsibilities. SBLs were identified in the participant data and the literature to have unique roles, responsibilities, and relationships and to be entrusted to act in the best interest of many stakeholders (Martell, 2008). Although SBLs are responsible to bring about change through provincial educational policy, bringing the Inspiring Success policy to life and achieving the five goals requires all members of the policy chain and stakeholders to uphold their roles and responsibilities through dynamic relationships. Wîtaskêwin, getting along on the land, has been affirmed as the outcome sought and the pathway forward for all treaty people, including the policy chain. Responses to the findings of the study such as systems leadership and deep systems thinking, seeking relationships and partnerships that would improve educational outcomes, and rigorous investigation into the policy chain, were offered to improve the efficacy of the system and to remedy the research and practice gap. Also suggested was a unified response between

stakeholders and the policy chain to end the settler colonial project which would address the policy imperatives identified in the IS policy document. Although this is easily suggested, the literature has identified that bringing about this type of societal change would take multiple generations of concerted and dedicated effort. Finally, to begin this work, I suggest that the policy chain should immediately advocate and communicate the needs of the system to stakeholders so that adequate reinvestments can be made into public education, allowing school boards to improve the quality of its services, including instruction and assessment practices, so that learning outcomes for Indigenous students can be improved and the educational gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students can be eliminated.

Once again, I didn't explicitly present the four pillars of the Educational Doctorate program. Reflecting on the participant data, the discussion, and the conclusion included in the fourth paper, strong connections are made between ethical leadership, social justice and equity, and Indigenous ways of knowing and contexts. The IS policy exists within a context that is policy rich and impact poor due to the community and system's level of readiness for the policy, the people, and the place. As such, despite the presence of policy that seeks to create positive change and equity for Indigenous students, little progress has been made because of fiscal constraints, years of deleterious cuts to the funding of public education, and a lack of professional expertise in instruction and assessment, especially for Indigenous learners. Ethical leadership in government and within the policy chain is needed so that the policy can be backed with the necessary policy instruments. Otherwise, the maintenance of first-order change approaches to this novel problem is expected to maintain the results of the system into perpetuity. Ethical leadership is expected to do the right thing, according to the needs of the stakeholders it serves, even when these are unpopular. The needed changes in Treaty 6 territory are only unpopular because of the ongoing presence of the settler colonial project, class warfare, and white supremacy and ethical leadership that opposes these by applying the necessary policy instruments, as it did when it crafted the IS educational policy, communicates the decision and values of those in leadership to stakeholders.

5.1 Strengths and Limitations

This instrumental case study previously identified its limitations. The strength of the study includes its purposefully situation in my home treaty territory in the province of Saskatchewan and specific to the government of Saskatchewan's Inspiring Success educational

policy. The time and place of the study had numerous significant impacts on the study. Specifically, the educational leadership landscape was deeply affected by provincial teacher contract bargaining and the impacts of workload and work life intensification for SBLs, further compounded by the application of sanctions during the bargaining process and years of cuts to the funding of public education in the province. The design of the study and its imposed delimitations limit the generalizability of the findings; however, I sought trustworthiness in the extensive literature reviewed and the rich description included in papers 2 and 4 which stand as additional strengths of the study. These highlight important information, perspectives, and realities pertinent to the state of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and the successes, barriers, and needs relevant to the implementation of the IS educational policy. I am confident that there is great value in these findings and that they are relevant beyond the case. The reader is invited to analyze and apply the findings as appropriate to their own unique context.

5.2 Implications for Educational Leadership and Practice

This study contributed to educational leadership and the practice of SBLs by investigating the relationship between policy, people, and place. The instrumental case study primarily sought to understand the state of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Treaty 6 territory of Saskatchewan. This was accomplished by investigating the successes and barriers encountered by SBLs who must implement the IS policy to bring about positive change through equity-based policy. The findings of this study are of significance to all members of the policy chain and stakeholders within and beyond Saskatchewan.

Is the Inspiring Success educational policy a remedy or a roadblock to the improvement of Indigenous learning rates and the treaty relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Saskatchewan? As a researcher and a school-based leader, I align myself closely to one of my research participants, SM, and don't think of the world in simple binaries, dichotomies, or dualities such as good or bad, Coke or Pepsi, or remedy or roadblock. The policy, as it was adjusted from its prior iteration, is a step in the right direction, but like all the other policies, people and place in this study, they are infinitely complex, interwoven, interconnected, and exist as an infinite number of shades of grey rather than black and white. The Inspiring Success policy may have evolved beyond the short-sighted versions of

past provincial educational policy, and in this sense, be a remedy to those prior versions, but, in my opinion and analysis, it remains a pillar of the settler colonial project and must be incrementally adjusted as small gains are made in Saskatchewan's education sector and in our community. It is for this reason that I would also say it is a roadblock to success, less because of the policy itself and more because of the choices of the provincial government and those in the policy chain to maintain the status quo of policies, curricula, and structures that are racist, and have applied inadequate policy instruments resulting in the province's policy rich and impact poor reality. Could the policy be further adjusted to make it a better educational policy? Yes. I can see this being done in multiple ways. One possibility is that the policy's vision and goals are reduced so that the change sought is more accessible, achievable, and less likely to face resistance from whites, and in another sense, I can see the policy's vision and goals being expanded so that they are more reflective of the Plains Cree principles on which the treaties were founded and the true future state for which our community must strive, as well as designed and implemented in all of Saskatchewan's governmental policy to create change across all sectors. These two possibilities do not even begin to suggest the dismantling and decolonization of Saskatchewan's colonial education system and many other much more radical options are possible that would lead to the creation of true Wîtaskêwin and a mutually beneficial and harmonious existence in Treaty 6 territory. Whichever solution is chosen, among the infinite possibilities, shouldn't exclude the re-creation of provincial curricula that should be a true balance of the views of all stakeholders, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, of what our community needs our future generations to learn in publicly funded schools so that they can be successful, and our community can be a healthy, vibrant, safe, and truly democratic space for all treaty people.

The study identified a policy paradox, a knowledge practice gap, and evidence of a broken policy chain. School boards are encouraged to develop and foster systems leadership and systems thinking to better understand the policy, people, and place to bring about improved results and eventual policy success. School boards should also be encouraged to work together, cooperatively, to create second order change as adjusting variables and accountability measures have had a lack of noted impact to date, which is at this point, is forever expected. This study has noted that the impacts of racism, poverty, and economic exclusion, the results of the settler colonial project, are direct barriers to the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous

peoples (Spooner, 2015). Progress through policy, improved relationships, and Wítaskêwin seem impossible in the current landscape. Lack of progress will ensure that a positive future continues to be denied to young Indigenous people (Elliott-Groves & Fryberg, 2019) and that racist and genocidal beliefs may continue without opposition in Saskatchewan (Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, 2018; Green, 2006; Huich, 2024).

Strong and vibrant relationships between the policy chain, Indigenous peoples, and stakeholders have been identified by research participants to be crucial and are encouraged to improve efficacy, the delivery of services, educational outcomes, and overall policy success. There is also evidence of a lack of understanding regarding the time and policy instruments needed to bring about change and success with ambiguous and aspirational policy. All members of the policy chain would be well served to engage in rigorous investigation to determine which of their efforts, strategies, and practices contribute to success and efficacy and which cannot overcome the barriers in the policy landscape. The barriers and the research-practice gap in this study should be immediately addressed, because otherwise, the root causes impeding policy success will continue to create inefficiencies, limit policy success, and contribute to the unrealistic workloads of SBLs. The policy chain must also ignore neoliberal economic espoused ideology, advocate for, and communicate the needs of the system to all stakeholders so that meaningful investments in the future of the people and the province can be made through properly funding public education. Finally, school boards must take public funds and create opportunities for improved instruction and assessment practices that surpass white dominant approaches so that learning outcomes for Indigenous students can be improved and the education gap eliminated through culturally responsive and culturally sustaining practices.

As noted in this study, all members of the policy chain and stakeholders must work together to end the most significant barrier, the settler colonial project. This will only be achieved by open communication from and between all members of the community and should include the policy imperatives which could serve as points of interest convergence for Indigenous and non-Indigenous treaty people. The three themes of the study, roles, relationships, and responsibilities should serve as guiding principles and strategic communication towards a renewed relationship between treaty people in Treaty 6 territory and the province. A realistic and sober perspective should be applied to the scope of this work; generations, and not years, as the

impacts and legacy of the settler colonial project, which continues to this day, will require a strong vision and concerted and sustained focus over time.

5.3 Implications for Theory

The study has multiple impacts for theory that if further explored would allow for greater understanding and a refined practice by policymakers and the policy chain. The most noted topics are the settler colonial project, colonialism, racism, neoliberalism, class warfare, educational funding, stakeholder engagement, educational policy implementation, change readiness and change management, and equity. Each of these topics were reviewed in the prior papers. Further study of their significance and impacts in Saskatchewan's educational context would allow for greater understanding, less generality and a more tailored approach to our unique context, and ultimately, greater impact from use.

If the settler colonial project were interrupted and eliminated, and as a result, the presence and intensity of racism were decreased, direct positive impacts on the implementation of the IS policy and its goals are expected, which would enhance the work of schools to create engaged citizens in a healthy democratic society and would contribute towards Wîtaskêwin.

5.4 Implications for Further Research

This instrumental case study was designed to investigate the gap between ministerial policy and goals and Indigenous educational outcomes in Saskatchewan as a compelling problem of practice for SBLs in Treaty 6 territory of Saskatchewan and their contributions towards Wîtaskêwin. A vigorous investigation of the context, literature, and participant data has demonstrated that the case is typical, although nuanced, and that other cases in other parts of the province or in Canada could yield similar results. As such, further investigation into equity-based policy that applies interest convergence and attempts to minimize and eliminate the harmful effects of white supremacy, white fragility, and white opposition to change for nondominant members of society would further inform the work and efforts of the policy chain and SBLs implementing equity policy in Treaty 6 territory. Further research regarding the efforts, strategies, and impacts within the education system and the policy chain are needed as well as the careful monitoring of the presence, health, and ongoing impacts of the settler colonial project that propagates racism and class warfare.

5.5 Concluding Thoughts

The Inspiring Success educational policy seeks to support the improvement of educational outcomes of Indigenous students learning in Treaty 6 territory. The findings of the study have uncovered some of the possible educational sector and societal barriers that exist in the policy landscape and that oppose the efforts within the policy chain and those of SBLs who strive to successfully implement the policy. The study has identified a policy paradox, research and practice gap, and a perfect storm in Treaty 6 territory where limited money, time and material resources are available to address ambiguous policy, the level of change readiness, due to the ongoing settler colonial project and its impacts, most noted as racism and class warfare, limits the progress of implementation and impacts of the IS educational policy and Wîtaskêwin continues to be lacking. The level of change readiness has been directly impacted by the ongoing impacts of the settler colonial project, colonialism, class warfare, and neoliberal economic ideology applied in all levels of the federalist government structure and in the fabric of communities in Treaty 6 territory. The most noted impacts are ongoing racism and class warfare that limit the progress and impacts of the policy chain. As a result, Wîtaskêwin exists only in the most basic sense and treaty people are divided. If the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples is to be reconciled, as directed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, real attempts and change are needed as the current political, social, and economic landscapes impede progress. This would require a reduction and elimination of the impacts of the settler colonial project through the creation of positive relationships and engagement between all treaty people. A systems approach that eliminates engrained racism and white supremacy must be crafted with stakeholders and implemented vastly through all levels of government, sectors, and communities to create meaningful change.

5.6 Discussion and Conclusions

Noted Holistic Growth of Researcher and Leader and Final Thoughts

The Education Doctorate program at the University is based on the four program pillars of Indigenous ways of knowing and contexts, social justice and equity, comparative and international contexts, and ethical leadership. This is an excerpt from a written reflection completed at the end of my first year of the program:

Looking forward to year 2 and beginning to frame my inquiry into a problem of practice, two topics connected to the pillars of ethical leadership and social justice and equity are of interest to me. I would like to dig deeper into how, either from the lens of moral panic,

or moral imperative, we could as a society, through relationship, partnership, and public policy, restore the treaty relationship and ensure opportunity for Indigenous peoples through education, possibly by abolishing the Indian Act or how applying concepts and approaches to Federalism could create greater stability and predictability for the funding of public education in Saskatchewan and Canada.

I am proud of how I transformed these initial ideas into this final version. I feel this dissertation encompasses each of the programs' four pillars into something specific, relevant, and actionable to the educational leadership landscape of Treaty 6 territory. I maintain my belief that fiscal conservatism should not be applied to the education sector, on a timescale of generations, as debts are owed to Indigenous learners, the needs are too great, and the long-term impacts of underfunding as too costly for the well-being of our communities and our democracy (Cerniglia & Longaretti, 2012; Derisma, 2013; Driscoll et al., 2014; Grubb, 2009; Robinson, 2014). Challenging myself to incorporate and rely on each pillar has made my work richer and my understanding deeper.

The four pillars of the Education Doctorate program are present in this piece of work from the people, places, and ideas referenced, presented, or relied upon to make this argument. I have carefully considered these themes for three years and have seen countless connections and overlap which has left me to believe that they are closely linked and interdependent. I present this dissertation as evidence for the reader. This multiple year journey has been defined by and interwoven in relationship. I am deeply touched and recognize the significance of the support and guidance offered to me by those that sustain me; the land, my spouse and family, those who journeyed with me; my supervisors and professors, the language keeper who guided me, the study participants, and the colleagues from this program, and those I live with: my friends and colleagues, my community, and of course, all of creation. This program and study have allowed me to further explore, analyze, and commit to my identity, beliefs, and vision, to identify my leadership strength and needs, my penchant for systems leadership, and hopefully, to adequately give back through this dissertation for all that I have received. I am a better researcher, leader, and person for this experience and wish to support others in their pursuits, where possible. This study was conducted out of a sense of responsibility to others and now completed, stands as an artifact of my ability to think critically, research strategically, present an intelligent argument, and to prove it with evidence. The knowledge, skills, and disposition I have acquired and refined

in the Education Doctorate program from the University of Saskatchewan are of great use to my community as there is much important work to do. I am fully aware that the more I learn, the more I become aware of how little I know and am invigorated by the experiences and growth that await me in the future.

This study does little to truly resolve the problem of practice, the gap between ministerial policy, the goals, and Indigenous educational outcomes in Saskatchewan, that has been proven to be riddled with complexities and important human and sectoral relationships. Further investigation into organizational practices and attentive monitoring of the education sector results would further extend the body of empirical evidence on this topic and are relevant so long as the IS policy's lifespan is maintained through the policy cycle and chain. If white settlers learn and embrace the principles and constructs of treaty, as well as sovereignty and governance from Indigenous peoples and organizations through relationality, the policy chain could experience and benefit from the renewed agency and vibrancy of the diversity of perspectives, approaches, and possible solutions. As a policy chain and a community, we should commit and be open to working together and avoiding the rigid linearity of top-down policy solutions.

I am fully aware that this much-needed work has been created by many generations of people, and that I am playing a small part at this moment in time, picking up the prior work of others and adding to it by advocating for and trying to create the change that I wish to see in my community. I recognize that at the same time, others are working directly against these efforts in hopes of maintaining, protecting, or expanding the power, wealth, and privilege they have accumulated to date. Systems leadership and Indigenous ways of knowing describe decision-making, change, and impacts on a timescale of generations. I am humbled to think that my voice was relevant to this topic and accept its insignificance in the context of all the voices that came before me and that will come after me. Positive change and *Wîtaskêwin*, from an Indigenous worldview and a systems leadership perspective will take generations to achieve, but all treaty people should be motivated by the significant impact that each decision will have towards this goal and compel them to labour towards the transformation of the current treaty relationship. This dissertation is offered as progress towards improvement.

Although it is surely a point of contention for the reader, the themes of this study were intentionally kept brief to enable the diverse readers to see and conceptualize themselves in the findings. I felt that as a researcher, I had a requirement to leave this task to you, the reader. All

members of the policy chain described in this work have unique realities and identities that affect them personally and professionally. Like me, they must assess and reflect on these and juxtapose the themes of the study; roles, relationships, and responsibilities to consider how they actively contribute to or act as an obstacle to Wîtaskêwin. Are you standing on the side waiting for someone else to do the work or are you making every effort and action possible to make Treaty 6 territory a place where we bring the Plains Cree principals; Miyo-wîcêhtowin (Living together on the land), Wîtaskêwin (Getting along with others), and Pimâcihowin (Making a living) (Office of the Treaty Commissioner, 2008) and the spirit of the treaties to life? I encourage you to consider this closely.

As a final thought to this work, I caution others to look at and to consider the forest and the tree simultaneously in this work. It is very easy to ignore the roots when we are over-focused on the leaves, which to me, is the reality of the current iteration of the education sector and the IS educational policy in Treaty 6 territory and Saskatchewan. We seek results from exhausted, toxic soil, that once was rich and vibrant, but due to greed, jealousy, and hatred, has become depleted. Although sad, this is not a final fate, and like soil, our relationships and communities can be revitalized by offering them the nutrients they need to return to proper health. As long as the sun shines, the grass grows, and the river flows, the opportunity exists, the treaties command us, and the Plains Cree principles on which they were founded guide us.

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APPENDIX A: University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Approval & Ethics Course
Certificate of Completion



Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) 23-Feb-2024

Certificate of Approval

Application ID: 4547

Principal Investigator: Gordon Martell

Department: Department of Educational
Administration

Student(s): Charles Paul Bazin Webster

Funder(s):

Sponsor: University of Saskatchewan

Title: Investigating School Leaders Concrete Steps Towards Witaskewin in Treaty 6 Territory

Approved On: 22-Feb-2024

Expiry Date: 22-Feb-2025

Approval Of: Behavioural Research Ethics Application

Research invitation letter

Participant consent form

Transcript release form

Interview guide

Notice of research to representative organizations

Acknowledgment Of: TCPS2 CORE tutorial certificate: Charles Paul Bazin Webster

Review Type: Delegated Review

CERTIFICATION

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans TCPS 2 (2022). The University of Saskatchewan Beh-REB has reviewed the above-named project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this project, and for ensuring that the authorized project is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the current approved protocol. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol or consent process or documents.

ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures must be reported to the Chair through submission of an amendment for Beh-REB consideration in advance of implementation.

To remain in compliance, a status report (renewal of closure form) must be submitted to the Beh-REB Chair for consideration within one month prior to the current expiry date each year the project remains open, and upon project completion. Please refer to the Research Ethics Office website for further instructions and current forms.

Digitally Approved by Olga Lovick
Vice-Chair, Behavioural Research Ethics Board
University of Saskatchewan



Certificate of Completion

This document certifies that

Charles Paul Bazin Webster

*successfully completed the Course on Research Ethics based on
the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research
Involving Humans (TCPS 2: CORE 2022)*

Certificate # 0000923741

23 April, 2023

APPENDIX B: Participant Interview Guide

The problem of practice is the gap between ministerial policy and goals and Indigenous educational outcomes in Saskatchewan.

Inquiry question:

- How can SBLs successfully implement the IS policy to support the improvement of educational outcomes of Indigenous children learning in Treaty 6 territory?

Research questions:

- How do leadership actions, beliefs, and processes lead to policy success in public schools in Treaty 6 territory?
- How do barriers persist despite leadership actions, beliefs, and processes and limit policy success in public schools in Treaty 6 territory?
- Is the Inspiring Success educational policy a well-crafted remedy or a roadblock to the improvement of Indigenous learning rates and the treaty relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Saskatchewan?

Interview questions:

- How did you make sense of and implement the Inspiring Success educational policy? What supports were you offered/did you seek and from whom? What supports did you offer your staff?
- How does Inspiring Success fit with other policies that you are required to implement as a school-based leader?
- How do you support your teachers to achieve the Inspiring Success policy goals in your school?
- How do you and your staff determine what is appropriate for your students in these circumstances?
- How do leadership actions, beliefs, and processes lead to policy success in public schools in Treaty 6 territory?
- How do barriers persist despite leadership actions, beliefs, and processes and limit policy success in public schools in Treaty 6 territory?
- How would you describe your school community and municipal community's relationship(s) with Indigenous children and people?
- How would you explain and describe the Inspiring Success educational policy to a parent

(stakeholder) from your school or a person in the community?

- How has the Inspiring Success educational policy affected your organization, you as a leader, and the teachers in your school?
- What is needed to make the Inspiring Success educational policy successful? How do you know this?