Decolonizing Leadership Practices in Inner-City Schools Affected by Complex Poverty

A Dissertation Submitted to the

College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

In the Department of Educational Administration

University of Saskatchewan

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

By

Mickey Jutras

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Abstract

My experiences as an inner-city principal in an urban center in Saskatchewan illuminated the need to examine school leadership within this unique context. Poverty in Saskatchewan disproportionally impacts Indigenous peoples, many of whom concentrate into inner-city communities. Schools that serve these communities face significant challenges and a pronounced need to close persistent achievement gaps.

I adhered to an Indigenous research paradigm including the activation of a cultural advisory committee, ethical principles based on relationality, utilization of the conversation method for data collection, and centering both local tribal knowledge and decolonizing intentions in the study. Eleven participants, representing a variety of roles within and in support of an inner-city school and urban school division, generously shared their voices.

The study identified the clear existence of complex poverty and associated challenges in the participating school and school division. School-based leaders were seen as playing a pivotal role in ensuring success for Indigenous students within these schools and dispositional traits and important actions of leaders were advanced. It was understood that leadership within these schools needed to be differentiated from leadership in suburban schools. A conceptualization for leadership that was constructed specifically for the Saskatchewan inner-city context is presented. Through the study I tested and refined the leadership conceptualization with members of the school community. The study advances the notion that school leaders should work in partnership with their community to decolonize education in inner-city schools.

Acknowledgements

This study is representative of the collective commitment of many key contributors. I have been privileged to have received expert guidance from my supervisor Dr. Dawn Wallin. Dawn, thank you for extending my thinking, supporting the process, and for your friendship. I also owe a great deal to my committee members Dr. Jing Xiao (chair), Dr. Paul Newton, Dr. Michael Cottrell, and Dr. Debbie Pushor (cognate) for the guidance and support. You have each had a profound impact on this study and my learning. Thank you, Dr. Lyle Hamm, for serving as the external examiner; your feedback was greatly appreciated.

In addition to my committee members, a number of other individuals have had a special impact on this study. I have immense gratitude to those who have supported me throughout the study as cultural advisors. It is not a stretch to say that the knowledge that you have shared with me is worthy of an advanced degree. Your generous sharing has impacted the way I viewed the study and the world.

To the participants of the study, the opportunity to learn from you has been wonderful; I am better thanks to the gift of time and conversation that you have shared. I have done my best to ensure that your words have been well-represented.

Most importantly to my family, my wife Rosalyn and children Addison, Rylee, and Bryson, your support and patience through my doctoral journey has been both required and appreciated. Thank you for your unwavering love and support. I love you!

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Chapter One: Introduction, Background, and Context of the Study

Purpose

This opening chapter frames the study. The problem is introduced, followed by the research questions and the proposed significance of the study. I situate myself personally, professionally, and academically within the study and provide key definitions. The chapter concludes with an examination of delimitations and limitations as well as the organization of the remainder of the study.

Statement of Problem

Saskatchewan has a "wicked problem" (Rittell & Weber, 1973) of complex racialized poverty that differentially affects Indigenous children (Brittain & Blackstock, 2015; Gingrich et al., 2016; G. Hunter & Sanchez, 2017; Macdonald & Wilson, 2016). Complex racialized poverty leads to persistent educational, employment, and health gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (Cottrell & Orlowski, 2013; Howe, 2017; Orlowski & Cottrell, 2019; Richards, 2008, 2014), and is often associated with inadequate housing, racism, violence, unemployment, and mobility (Silver, 2014; 2016). The Canadian Government called citizens to action for a national poverty reduction strategy, stating clearly that "Canada can do better," particularly in relation to child poverty (Government of Canada, 2016, p. 3). This type of economic and psychologically debilitating poverty challenges those working in inner-city schools who are attempting to address differences in educational attainment between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2017). As an inner-city school principal, I have witnessed the negative effects of complex racialized poverty on Indigenous children and the burden it adds to their pursuit of education.

Fortunately, the deficit prediction of learning and achievement that is referenced in the literature is not inevitable. In fact, research indicates that school-based leadership is instrumental in fostering student success within high-poverty schools (Chenoweth, 2009; Leithwood & Straus, 2009). Principals who "turn around" the educational outcomes of high-poverty schools enact a number of leadership strategies with deliberate intent: they set direction for change (Bennett & Murakami, 2016; Connolly et al., 2005); they collaborate with parents and community (Kearney & Herrington, 2010; Parker & Flessa, 2011); they ensure high expectations for learning (Flessa et al., 2010; Ramalho et al., 2010); they use data to direct teaching and learning (Carter, 2000;

Chenoweth & Theokas, 2011); they create a culture of continuous improvement (Gaskell & Levin, 2012; Kearney et al., 2012); they utilize distributive leadership (Henchey, 2001; Jang & McDougall, 2007); and; they promote high levels of collaboration (Chenoweth, 2007; Reeves, 2003). Unfortunately, most of this research has been undertaken in the United States, or in inter-cultural Canadian contexts with little representation of Indigenous peoples. What also appears to be missing is an emphasis on culturally relevant teaching and learning. Given our country's national emphasis on the damaging effects of colonialism on Indigenous peoples and the need for reconciliation, and the plethora of research that has acknowledged the need to address the educational outcomes of Indigenous peoples, this study examines the under-researched intersection between school leadership in inner-city schools, complex racialized poverty, and the educational outcomes of Indigenous peoples.

Research Question

Given the desperate need to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students in Saskatchewan, the connection made through research between leadership and improved outcomes, and the many calls for decolonizing educational spaces, the primary research question for the study is: How can school leaders in inner-city schools in Saskatchewan decolonize their leadership practices to support the improvement of educational outcomes of Indigenous children living in communities affected by complex racialized poverty? In order to answer the primary research question, a number of secondary questions were addressed. These include:

- What barriers are present that inhibit the local school involvement of Indigenous parents and community members who live in communities of racialized poverty?
- How can school leaders more effectively create meaningful partnerships with diverse urban Indigenous peoples who live in communities affected by complex racialized poverty?
- What leadership actions serve to support the decolonization of inner-city school environments? What barriers and supports exist for leaders in inner-city schools as they work towards this end?
- How might inner-city school principals work with staff and Indigenous peoples who live in communities of poverty to create common understandings of educational success that are premised upon culturally relevant teaching and leadership practices?

Significance of the Study

The study offers a Saskatchewan conceptualization of school-based leadership that is responsive to the inner-city Indigenous context. Results of the study provide insight into an under researched area in which a deeper understanding is required. Saskatchewan has a complex racialized poverty problem that must be addressed if the province is to make meaningful steps towards reconciliation. Given the large, and growing, proportion of Indigenous people in Saskatchewan, Helin's (2006) foretelling of the "demographic tsunami" creates an imperative for school leaders to decolonize their leadership practices in order to more effectively engage Indigenous communities in educational and social change. The Saskatchewan Education Sector Strategic Plan (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2017) targets improved outcomes for Indigenous students. I believe it is imperative that school-based leaders work with Indigenous communities to decolonize their leadership practices if meaningful change is to be enacted. The implications for this study are profound because results of the study have the power to not only change what is conceived to be effective leadership practice, but it may provide insight into how to offset issues of poverty, the negative effects of colonization, and deficit models of educational attainment of Indigenous children and youth.

Further, this study sheds light on the intricacies of the role of inner-city school-based leaders and the dissonance they face when working to enact expectations placed upon them by provincial and local school divisions that may not be effective or appropriate for local spaces or populations. A greater understanding of the challenges that inner-city school-based leaders face may lead to more strategic resourcing, improved professional supports, and opportunities for enhanced professional and leadership development. These changes would add greater support to schools and leaders who greatly require them.

In the preface to Ma Rhae's (2015) *Leading and managing Indigenous education in the postcolonial world,* Ma Rhae states that the book:

> is written with the conviction that non-indigenous education administrators, school councils and principals, teachers and teacher educators are struggling to find ways to educate Indigenous children that do not simply reproduce old, colonial ways of dealing with the problem. In parallel Indigenous people are being kept out of large bureaucratic education systems by the same colonial logic. Failure has been endemic in these complex

> systems that seem unable to engage effectively with the rights and aspirations of Indigenous families and their children internationally. (p. x)

I am working from the assumption that colonization and associated intergenerational trauma, poverty, and racism have created dire consequences that have led to a failing educational system for Indigenous children and families (Manning et al., 2020). I also am working from the assumption that as Ma Rhae described, there is a desire in educational leadership to do better; I certainly have this desire to learn and to work differently.

Grande (2010) argued that colonization is the root of problems facing Indigenous peoples. The Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Center (2009) connected modern day ills to the process of colonization in its suggestion that “the colonization process has led directly to poverty, family and spousal violence, drug, chemical, and alcohol addictions for indigenous peoples all over the world” (p. 4). Writing of colonization in Australia, Ma Rhae (2015) noted that colonization severely impeded reproduction of traditional societal norms, indicating that colonization was about oppression and also dispossession (see also Grande, 2010). There is a need for disruption of systems or the destructive colonial status quo will continue to reproduce itself (Battiste, 2013; Grande, 2010; Khalifa et al., 2018; Ma Rhae, 2015). Ma Rhae (2015) cautioned that Indigenous peoples are minorities within postcolonial states and that the numerically dominant group will be difficult to influence into making required changes. It becomes the work of Indigenous and non-Indigenous allies to create spaces for change.

One such system in need of urgent reform is education. In 2013 Marie Battiste contended “it is well past time for Canada to accept its complicities with the failures in Aboriginal education” (p. 65). Battiste (2013) stated “that for more than a century, Indigenous students have been part of a forced assimilation plan - their heritage and knowledge rejected and suppressed, and ignored by the education system" (p. 23). She advanced that decolonization of education requires deconstructing and challenging cognitively imperialistic Eurocentric practices in tandem with advocating for the integration of diverse perspectives and knowledge into pedagogy and curricula in purposeful and meaningful ways. Research conducted in New Zealand, the United States, and Canada, three nations where colonialism remains pervasive, highlighted that schooling in these countries seldom includes Indigenous knowledge systems (J. Martin et al.,

2017; 2020). These thoughts have been echoed from an Australian Indigenous perspective by Ma Rhae (2015) who advised that triumphalist curricula need to be revised and that a critical examination of the "underlying intentions and commitments of norms, policies and objectives that have sustained the colonial, deficit thinking model of education" (p. 6) must take place.

Another important element in decolonization of education must be the awareness of complicity in colonization by educators and a willingness to unlearn damaging practices (Battiste, 2013; Grande, 2010; Ma Rhae, 2015). Battiste (2013) and Ma Rhae (2015) both advocate for educators to move towards Indigenist mindsets. Ma Rhae (2015) defines an Indigenist mindset as "the support for Indigenous rights and perspectives without implying that the supporter is Indigenous" (p. 154). Writing specifically about educational leaders, Ma Rhae identified four indicators of those with Indigenist mindsets: 1) empathy for Indigenous matters and a sense of social justice 2) commitment to the work that has changed all aspects of their lives 3) understanding of privilege and injustice, and 4) acknowledgement that educational models are failing Indigenous students. Ma Rhae urged for policy interventions to foster the efforts of Indigenist educational leaders.

Inextricably linked to decolonization of education is the requirement for supporting language reclamation (Battiste, 2010, 2013; Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Center, 2009). Colonization was intended to destroy Indigenous languages and ways of knowing (Battiste, 2013; Ma Rhae, 2015), and residential schools were charged with this purpose (Battiste, 2013). The Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Center holds "the recovery of our languages is one of the most powerful forms of self-determination and is necessary to reverse the effects of colonization" (p. 5). Battiste (2013) further illuminates this significant argument:

> Where Indigenous knowledge or epistemology survives, it is transmitted through the Indigenous languages. Aboriginal languages in Canada provide a direct and powerful means of understanding the legacy of Aboriginal knowledges and provide deep and lasting cognitive bonds, which affect all aspects of Aboriginal life. Through sharing a language, Aboriginal people create a shared belief of how the world works and what constitutes proper action. The sharing of these common ideals creates a collective

> cognitive experience for tribal societies that is understood as Aboriginal or Indigenous knowledge systems. (p. 33)

Further, Furita and colleagues assessed that overwhelmingly, research highlights the importance of language and cultural learning on improved Indigenous student learning outcomes (Furita et al., 2015). It should not be a surprise that there is widespread support for Indigenous language programs to be included as a vital part of public schooling (Aylward, 2007; Baydala et al., 2009; Canadian Council on Learning, 2007, 2009; Furita et al., 2015; Paris, 2012; Preston et al., 2012; Saul, 2014; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

Closely related to the need to decolonize educational practices is the need to work towards more robust engagement of Indigenous parents and communities in their children's education (Ma Rhae, 2015, J. Martin et al., 2017). Commonly in studies involving Indigenous education, educators raise concerns about the lack of involvement or the seeming lack of caring of Indigenous parents (Agbo, 2007), and Indigenous parents raise concerns about a lack of being authentically engaged (Pushor & Murphy, 2010). A large body of literature speaks to the need for educators to engage with parents in culturally appropriate ways that are meaningful and focus on growth and solutions (Agbo, 2007; Bell et al., 2004; Deer, 2014; Goulet & Goulet, 2014; Faircloth, 2011; Jaime & Russell, 2010; Ledoux, 2006; J. Martin et al., 2020; Pushor & Murphy, 2010; Saskatchewan Learning, 2004; Steeves et al, 2010). Ma Rhae (2015) took the notion of engagement further and advocated for the disruption of colonial education at the community level stating that "the foundation for the advancement of Indigenous people's education needs to be in the hands of Indigenous people" (p. 99). Notably in Canada the National Indian Brotherhood (1972) advocated for such control of education that five decades later has yet to be realized. Ma Rhae advanced a notion of community ownership of schools that would stem from deeply engaged parents and other community stakeholders.

Self-Situating

Researchers working from an Indigenous research paradigm must self-situate themselves (Aveling, 2013; Henhawk, 2013; Kovach, 2014, 2018; K. Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003). Self-situating my identity is important for this thesis so that readers can understand why I would study how to decolonize educational leadership in communities impacted by complex racialized

poverty. I am white and grew up with a white settler identity in an affluent neighbourhood in Saskatoon. I attended schools where the majority of students were also middle-class and white. Growing up in Saskatoon, I was oblivious to the level of poverty that existed within my city. Though I did not recognize it as a child or young adult, I now understand the immense privilege with which I was raised. My career as an educator afforded me the opportunity to remove the blinders that my privilege has granted me and develop a more accurate and complete view of Saskatoon. Through my school division I was introduced to Indigenous traditions and ceremonies by a number of Elders and Knowledge Keepers who have been patient with my learning, and who have helped me to see how racism and complex racialized poverty impact the lives of Indigenous students. This changed perspective has ignited a passion within me both professionally and academically. This passion, teamed with my recognition of the urgent need to transform leadership practice in order to more effectively serve Indigenous students who live in communities of complex racialized poverty, led me to my research question. In the following section I self-situate relative to my career as an educator, my cultural journey, and my academic preparation.

Career as an Educator

I consider myself fortunate to have experienced great variety in my professional assignments. For the past 17 years I have been employed by the Saskatoon Public School Division. Despite having worked within one school division only, I have worked with students from pre-kindergarten to grade 12, experienced a number of different roles, and have served in high schools and elementary schools in communities that represent extremes of social stratification.

I spent the early portion of my career as a high school physical education and history teacher at Marion Graham Collegiate, a school in the affluent north end of Saskatoon. The majority of students came from families that had significant social and financial capital. While not all students performed well academically, overall, the school had a strong reputation for academic success. Many of our students were also highly engaged in athletics and our sports teams were successful. This context shaped my self-esteem into what I believed to be a competent teacher and coach.

After six years I requested a transfer and asked my principal to see if he could acquire for me a placement in a school with a different demographic profile. I was transferred to a high school that primarily served students from Saskatoon's inner-city communities, Bedford Road Collegiate. I again taught physical education and history, and coached football and wrestling. Much of what I thought I knew about teaching and coaching was challenged. I found myself struggling to understand the various needs of my students. I became better at scaffolding assignments, differentiating work, and encouraging attendance and positive school behaviours. I taught at Bedford Road for only one year, but the experience left an imprint on me.

While transferring between two high schools challenged me to think differently about teaching, it was my placement the next year as vice principal of an inner-city elementary school that really astounded me. I quickly recognized that the neighbourhood in which I was working, Pleasant Hill, was unlike anything that I had ever experienced; the depth of poverty and the associated challenges were constantly visible. The city of Saskatoon uses census data to create yearly profiles of its neighbourhoods. These profiles include the percentage of homeownership in a neighbourhood as well as the median personal income. The city average for homeownership drawn from 2016 census data was 66.8% with a median personal income of $40,050. Of all neighbourhoods in Saskatoon, Pleasant Hill had the lowest median personal income at $21,230 and by far the lowest percentage of homeownership at 30.8% (City of Saskatoon, 2019). In reality, the data presented might not do full justice to the immense challenges facing the Pleasant Hill neighbourhood given the difficulty in eliciting census responses from individuals faced with the daily challenges presented by poverty (Macdonald & Wilson, 2016).

It was during my time working at Pleasant Hill Community School that I also became acutely aware of the racialization of poverty in Saskatoon. Our student population was quite fluid as families moved in and out of rental units; however, despite the consistent change in home space, one constant was that between 75%-85% of our students self-declared their ancestry as First Nations and Métis people. Clearly, Pleasant Hill was a racialized space as much as it was a community of poverty. It was also during these years that I came to appreciate the power of teacher and leader actions on student academic performance. On the first reading assessment in my first year at the school, only a small fraction of the students read at or above their grade level. As a staff we worked purposefully with a clear focus on improving students' abilities to read. We

were able to radically alter the reading performance of the school over the next four years to a point where the majority of students could read at or above grade level, including the vast majority of students who had attended the school for two or more years. I was fortunate during this time to transition from the vice-principal role to the principalship within the school and to work with a tremendously committed staff. One of my greatest joys is that despite the rapid growth in reading rates over the four years I worked at the school, student reading results continued to improve after I was transferred.

As joyous as it was to celebrate the incredible gains that students were making and the teamwork of staff that was supporting student growth, we experienced many deeply troubling times as well. The community was plagued by gang activity, violence, substance abuse issues, and prostitution. What our kids and their families had come to accept as normalized behavior at school and in the community was particularly worrisome. Of note, during my last spring at Pleasant Hill, there were a number of shootings and other weapons related events that took place in the vicinity of the school. This resulted in police cordoning off sections of streets or park area near the school and the school activating numerous perimeter lockdown procedures. Incredibly, parents never asked questions and kids would walk through or around police lines to get to school. At times I wondered if I was losing touch with my original conception of "normal".

My next administrative assignment took me École River Heights School, located in a neighbourhood with a very different profile. The River Heights neighbourhood has 80.2% home ownership and a median personal income of $47,010, both of which are well above the city average (City of Saskatoon, 2019). Not surprisingly student reading results at River Heights were much different than what I encountered when I first arrived at Pleasant Hill. The stark contrast between the two schools and the neighbourhoods that they served again caused tensions in my thoughts. I marveled at how different the same job could be at two different schools. These divergent experiences within the same school system caused me to experience cognitive dissonance that propelled me towards committing to becoming an ally and advocate of our inner-city children and families and ultimately towards furthering my education in hopes of being part of a solution on how to improve learning outcomes within schools like Pleasant Hill.

I was immensely fortunate after two years at River Heights, to be granted an educational leave from my school division. This leave permitted me to embark on a year of studies which I

address later in this chapter. Upon returning from my educational leave and having experienced rich learning opportunities that I believe have made me a more critical and reflective administrator, I requested the opportunity to return to an inner-city school. My request was granted and I became principal of Westmount Community School. The Westmount community has a homeownership rate of 67.7% and a median personal income of $32,150. Although the Westmount neighbourhood, along with Pleasant Hill, is considered one of Saskatoon's four core (or most inner-city) neighbourhoods it amazed me how different the two neighbourhoods were. This furthered my realization of the concentration of complex poverty into small pockets within cities. In the two years I served as principal of Westmount Community School I am proud of the work that we undertook focusing on formative assessment, differentiating instruction, and embedding supports within literacy blocks. I am also proud of the work we undertook with our Michif partners towards the creation of a Michif advisory committee for the school. Our staff were also proud of our efforts to create strong bonds with families. I was disappointed when the Covid-19 pandemic put a hold on our efforts.

I now have embarked on a new leadership role, serving as a leader at our school division office. In my new role my primary duties are supporting the development of leaders within the school division. I see this new role as an exceptional opportunity to activate my learning in authentic ways to support the development of impactful leadership within schools and to help leaders think differently about leadership. My diverse opportunities as an educator have provided me with a robust view of my school division and a calling to work to improve the system for our schools and students who require it most.

My Commitment to Cultural Learning and Engagement

As I have progressed through my career as an educator, I have been fortunate to have been provided the opportunity to walk another invigorating journey, one of developing a greater understanding and appreciation of Indigenous cultures. I was first exposed to First Nations ceremony when my father, then the director of my school division, was honoured by being given a Lakota name, Cante Waste Itancan (Good Hearted Leader). My younger brother and I joined our dad in a sweat lodge prior to the naming ceremony. I was nervous to enter the lodge and truly did not know what to expect. We were welcomed warmly and made to feel immediately at ease. I enjoyed the lodge, the teachings, and the feeling of community. Two weeks later I sweat again,

this time in a ceremony hosted by my school division. Since these first ceremonial opportunities I have maintained a commitment to ceremony. Prior to the pandemic, through my school division, I participated in the four seasonal pipe and sweat lodge ceremonies per year for more than a decade. I have enjoyed the chance to sit in the lodges of many nations and experience teachings from many Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and pipe carriers. In ceremony I have also found humour, friendship, a strong sense of community, and a deep appreciation for a knowledge system not my own.

While an administrator at Pleasant Hill I was honoured to be the carrier of the school's Eagle Staff. The Eagle Staff was passed to me through ceremony by the previous principal and teachings about Eagle Staffs were shared with me. I proudly carried the Eagle Staff for our school community and honoured it by attending every one of our school division's seasonal ceremonies for the four years that I worked at the school. As a school we fed the staff through a yearly traditional feast for the community. We alternated seasons for the feast each year and invited Elders from different nations to conduct the feast with their teachings. I felt a sense of loss when I passed the Eagle Staff to another male staff member as I departed the school.

As I was preparing to leave Pleasant Hill, I was honoured to be approached to be Fire Keeper for Saskatoon Public Schools for the 2015-16 school year. The Fire Keeper role afforded me incredible learning opportunities on the land with traditional practitioners; for these opportunities and teachings, I will forever be grateful. Through this role I supported the seasonal ceremonies by making preparations for the sweats. My collective cultural experiences have fostered in me an appreciation for Indigenous ways of being and knowing.

While ceremony and ceremonial roles have been impactful for my learning, importantly, my learning was also rooted in my work in schools and community. My learning was accelerated by my opportunity to work at Pleasant Hill. Pleasant Hill had long had one of the highest percentage of students in the school division who self-declared their ancestry as Indigenous people and as a result, previous school staffs had laid a solid foundation for cultural responsiveness at the school. When I started at Pleasant Hill, the school had an Elder who worked with students and families multiple days each week; a Cree language and culture classroom where students of all grades received lessons at least three times per week; a smudge each week for interested students, staff and community members; Powwow dancing and jigging

clubs; the school was fully adorned with murals painted by a local First Nations artist; staff engaged community members through sharing circles; and the school shared a close relationship with the school division's First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Education Unit. I was also very fortunate to work with several Indigenous staff members who embraced my willingness to learn. Being inserted as a leader of a school that was a model of cultural responsiveness in our school system, I was thrust into a position where I needed to engage in new cultural learning. I attribute much of the learning achievement results of our work to the culturally responsive ways in which children were taught and led.

Arriving at River Heights, I noted a near absence of work being done in the areas of culture and language. I saw this as an opportunity to enact my knowledge and passion and intended, with significant support, to make alterations to the look and feel of the school. Over the two years that I was principal of the school we were able to make some significant changes. Most of these changes stemmed from one key catalyst: the painting and raising of a Tipi on the front lawn of the school as a year-long outdoor classroom space.

The Tipi project officially started at the beginning of the 2016-17 school year, my second year at the school. In partnership with the Saskatoon Public School Division's First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Education Unit, our grade 7/8 English class met with Elders, artists, and Knowledge Keepers. Through a series of learning experiences, which included opportunities to engage in ceremony and to learn about the history and significance of Tipis, the students helped paint the Tipi canvas. Prior to raising the Tipi, I offered members of our staff the opportunity to come with me to a sweat lodge ceremony to offer cloth and tobacco on behalf of the school; I was floored by the strong response from our staff as more than a dozen joined me in the lodge; most were sweating for the first time. This initial sweat was a sign of the catalyzing nature of the Tipi. Once the Tipi was raised in early November it became used as a learning space on all but the very coldest of days. The grade 7/8 class who had led the work on behalf of the school became stewards of the Tipi. They led an assembly about their learning and visited classrooms to help deepen the learning. Learning activities in the Tipi often included sharing circles and storytelling. Importantly, many of our First Nations and Métis students and families visited me to share their pride in the Tipi; these sentiments were echoed by many of our non-Indigenous students and families as well.

My placement as principal of Westmount Community School, the home to the school division's only Métis Cultural Program, provided me with another rich cultural learning opportunity. At Westmount I benefited greatly from the rich partnerships formed by the school division and our staff with Métis Locals, Métis organizations, Elders, Michif speakers, and various other supporters. Engaging with Michif community members was an important aspect of my leadership role at Westmount. I learned immensely about Métis and Michif culture, language, and politics from Métis and Michif people. During my opportunity to lead at Westmount we strengthened our partnership with the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP) and formed an exciting new partnership with Métis Nation – Saskatchewan (MN-S).

Through my professional experiences and the relationships I have formed, as well as my commitment to develop greater cultural understanding, my Indigenous colleagues have identified me as an ally. I am honoured to be trusted and to have been invited into allyship. My academic preparation has further reinforced and helped me develop this disposition of ally.

Academic Preparation

My opportunity to reconvene my studies in a PhD program amplified my passion and has fostered a greater critical capacity that has propelled my thinking and actions. My doctoral coursework was purposefully selected to challenge my thinking and move me towards a place of greater allyship. Specifically, I expand on the impact of three courses in my academic preparation for this thesis.

In the spring of 2017, the first class that I undertook for my PhD was a reading class with my advisor Dr. Dawn Wallin. Given my research interests in school leadership within schools serving communities impacted by poverty, I undertook two literature reviews. The first was an examination of conceptualizations of poverty and the impact of poverty on education. The second literature review examined current conceptualizations of leadership and specifically leadership within high poverty schools. Given my learning within the first review about the significant racialization and spatial concentration of poverty within Saskatchewan, especially for Indigenous people, and within the second review about the dearth of recognition of the importance of being culturally responsive in school-based leadership literature, I found myself drawn towards decolonizing as a lens for my study.

That summer I took my second PhD course co-facilitated by Dr. Wallin and Dr. Sherry Peden (now deceased). The course was Onikaniwak (Cree term meaning “for those who lead”) which was offered on the Opaskwayak Cree Nation. During this powerful week-long learning opportunity participants heard from and interacted with Indigenous Elders, community and educational leaders, residential school survivors, and academics. Participants also had multiple opportunities to engage in ceremony and receive traditional teachings. Omnipresent themes of the course were the need to create alliances between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and to have non-Indigenous people see themselves as integral to reconciliation efforts. I left this course armed with the moral imperative to continue to develop as an ally.

During the fall term I took a course on Indigenous research methodologies from a leading scholar in this area, Dr. Maggie Kovach. From this course I learned valuable lessons about research with Indigenous peoples. I learned the importance of self-situating (Henhawk, 2013; Kovach, 2014, 2018; K. Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003). Further, the course taught me the necessity of becoming critically aware (Henhawk, 2013) as a means to examine my Western gaze (Kovach, 2018) if I am to be able to appropriately work in a decolonizing space. I learned that this process of raising critical awareness is incumbent upon me as a privileged non-Indigenous researcher who plans to work with Indigenous people in my research. This class led me to pledge to focus on strengths not deficits (Kovach, 2014; Wilson, 2008) and to follow protocols of ethical conduct (Kovach, 2018). Most importantly, the course affirmed my commitment, and the ethical necessity, to build relationships with Indigenous people, scholars, and communities as we work together to improve education.

Section Summary

My academic preparations, previous work experiences, and cultural learnings have all led me to this research question. Having been entrusted as an ally I feel a moral, cultural, and economic imperative to incorporate decolonizing strategies into my leadership practice that work against the harmful effects of complex racialized poverty, and that include Indigenous colleagues, students, and communities in efforts to increase educational outcomes (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Further, I am compelled to research and learn more in this important area.

Definition of Terms

A number of terms are utilized throughout the study. These terms are explored below in alphabetical order. However, I caveat the definitions of many of the terms related to Indigeneity by offering that most of these terms are fraught with contention and alternate conceptualizations. These definitions are based on how I use them in the text of this study and are not meant to suggest that all peoples from all territories agree with these definitions.

Community Education

Furman (2002) advocated for an ecological model of community education that bridged notions of school-community connections and school-as community to create a more robust view of schools with engaged parents and communities, shared ownership, integrated services, sense of community, and student achievement. Saskatchewan has a history of trying to realize the form of schools described by Furman. These attempts have been focused specifically on schools serving high-needs communities (Community Schools) and later for all schools within the province (SchoolPLUS). Central features of these attempts have remained, including parent and community engagement and intersectoral support. Current community education efforts in Saskatchewan include mandated School Community Councils (Amendt, 2018; Preston, 2011). For this study I hold that community education must go beyond having an active School Community Council and that stepping back into the history of education in the province provides a more aspirational view of what community education can, and should, be; one that is responsive and ethically committed to the cultural, economic, and social needs of the people in the local area.

Community Schools

In order to help address extenuating circumstances within higher needs communities in 1980, Saskatchewan piloted the Community School model within 11 inner-city elementary schools. The model was based on four primary components: the learning program, family and community engagement, integrated services, and community development (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004). The model showed significant initial promise and was expanded to 98 schools across the province by 2004, with the majority of these schools being urban elementary schools (Saskatchewan Association for Community Education, n.d.). The promise of the Community School model led Saskatchewan to call for adoption of the model in all schools under the banner

of SchoolPLUS, with Community Schools as the precursors for this new movement (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004; Tymchak, 2001). Elliot (2012) asserted that with the adoption of the model in all schools came the "rapid dilution of community schools" (p. 3-4) which has led to the model being "weakened and tilted towards tokenism and administrative control" (p. 10). In recent years this dissolution can be seen through the realignment of funding designated for Community Schools and the varied approaches to community schooling between Saskatchewan school divisions, including many school divisions eliminating positions formerly held as being imperative to the success of Community Schools (Elliot, 2012). While the term "Community School" is still utilized within many Saskatchewan divisions, the model and supports have clearly changed from their original intent and the title Community School is no longer granted.

School Community Councils

School Community Councils (SCCs) were mandated for all Saskatchewan schools in 2006 "during an upswing of community education and SchoolPLUS, and also within a context of school division amalgamations" (Amendt, 2018, p. 5). The purpose of SCCs was to "develop shared responsibility for the learning success and well-being of all children and youth, and encourage and facilitate parent and community engagement in school planning and improvement processes" (Saskatchewan Learning, 2005, p. 8). Preston (2011) stated that SCCs had become a central feature of education in Saskatchewan yet noted that the potential impact of SCCs had not been realized (see also Stelmach, 2016). Stelmach (2016) examined SCCs with a focus on the development of parental confidence and capacity for making educational decisions. She found that SCCs had barely made an incursion into traditional parent roles within schools. In her 2011 study aimed at understanding the role that SCCs played in fostering parent engagement in schools, Preston found that the majority of community members interviewed were not even aware of the existence of an SCC. Recent research conducted on behalf of the Saskatchewan School Boards Association found that most urban SCC members were not aware of the mandate of SCCs and that although the mandate was better understood by rural SCC members, there was still a significant level of misunderstanding (Amendt, 2018). This study also found that "where administrators and staff value the relationship with parents and the voice of parents, those SCC members are more likely to see themselves as engaged in the mandate of SCCs" (Amendt, 2018, p. 27). Specifically, the report highlighted the critical role of the principal. Amendt concluded the

report by stating that “it is time to pause and hit the reset button on SCCs” (p. 36) and made four recommendations to create stronger SCCs; these recommendations were similar to the model for Community School education and the philosophy of SchoolPLUS.

Martell (2008) critiqued Saskatchewan’s SCC model by arguing that “this new level of local school governance does not emphasize Aboriginal participation to the extent that is appropriate given the provincial context” (p. 20). Martell (2008) further concluded “that the School Community Council policy developers ignored the context of Aboriginal rights, failed to make an association between School Community Council policy and Aboriginal rights and ignored their own government’s requirements for consultation with Aboriginal peoples” (p. 35). Martell’s critiques should carry additional credence given the TRC’s *Calls to Action* (2015) and the incumbent need to authentically engage with Indigenous people in meaningful partnership.

Cultural Responsiveness

Disparity in performance of minority students with their peers from dominant cultural groups is well established (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; C. E. Gordon & White, 2014; Jones & Barber, 2019; Khalifa et al., 2016). It is also recognized that one significant enhancer of this discrepancy in achievement is the cultural misfit between Eurocentric school norms and curricula and the cultural backgrounds of minoritized students (Hammond, 2015; Khalifa et al., 2016). Among others, Castagno and Brayboy (2008) have called for educators and schools to adjust to the needs of their populations by arguing that “students will learn better and be more engaged in schooling when they can make connections to it” (p. 981). Castagno and Brayboy (2008) were decisive in asserting that a required criterion for creating culturally responsive schools and teachers was having culturally responsive leaders.

Culturally Responsive Leadership

Culturally responsive school leadership requires “leaders respond to minoritized or culturally unique school contexts” (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1). Khalifa and colleagues argue that there is a significant need to reform school leadership practices and school leadership preparation programs to ensure that school leaders are more responsive to their community contexts. A major premise of this study is that there exists the need to decolonize education. Attending to the provision of culturally responsive leadership within inner-city schools appears to be one important means to achieving this vital reform.

Decolonizing

Around the world scholars have made impassioned pleas to examine and combat the pervasive and damaging impacts of colonization on society, institutions, and people (Battiste, 2010, 2013; Brayboy, 2013, 2014; Grande, 2000, 2004, 2010; Ma Rhea, 2015; Mulcahy, 2017). In Canada, Marie Battiste (2010, 2013) advised the decolonizing of education through the deconstructing of accepted Eurocentric practices that have long propped up a purposeful system of cognitive imperialism that has privileged some and had harmful effects on others. This system, she argued, needs to be replaced by the inclusion of diverse perspectives and knowledges into educational systems and curriculum in intentionally meaningful ways. Goulet and Goulet (2014) argue that decolonizing education requires the deconstruction of current power imbalances and replacing these pervasive power structures with principles of equity. In this study decolonization is defined as intentional deconstruction of colonial structures, practices, and thinking.

Indigenous

"Indigenous" is an internationally accepted term that refers to people who were original inhabitants of lands prior to colonization (Vowel, 2016). This term is utilized to include all peoples of Canada with Aboriginal heritage. Because of the caution to avoid pan-Indigeneity in understanding or assumptions, more specific terms are utilized to reference specific groups of Indigenous peoples. Where possible throughout this study Indigenous peoples are identified as they choose to be identified, with traditional names of their peoples.

First Nations

This term refers to the largest group of Indigenous peoples of Canada and is a term applicable to both status and non-Status First Nations peoples, those who live both on or off reserve, and who represent diverse cultural groups across Canada (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; Vowel, 2016). This term is also used to apply to First Nations, sovereign nations governed by Chief and Council, of which there are 70 within the province of Saskatchewan.

Métis

The Métis are a people born of mixed Aboriginal and European descent who created settlements primarily in Western Canada (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; Vowel, 2016). A sign of the great diversity within this group is the growing number of Métis who now choose to

identify primarily with their language group as Michif (Faye Maurice, personal communication, September 2018), which is a language born primarily out of Nehiyaw (Cree) and French. However, even within the Michif community, dissention regarding dialect and proper language usage abounds.

Urban Indigenous Communities

Significant migration of Indigenous people from reservations to urban centers have created large and rapidly growing Indigenous populations in Canadian prairie cities, with significant clustering of the Indigenous population into certain neighbourhoods (Helin, 2006; Silver, 2009). Unlike First Nations communities where it is more common to find one primary heritage language and governance structure (though this cannot be generalized across all communities), urban communities are home to a diverse group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Many urban Indigenous people have a connection to a First Nation community, but many also come from multi-generation urban families and do not have a close connection with other Indigenous communities. This also means that many Indigenous peoples have been disconnected from their home territories and their traditional cultural teachings, so there is great diversity in viewpoint regarding the need (or desire) to emphasize language, culture and/or spirituality. Although it naturally leads to some dissention and conflict, the plurality within urban communities presents great opportunities to learn from and with one another. One objective of this study is to learn to better understand diverse urban Indigenous communities and to gain insight into forging meaningful partnerships with urban Indigenous people.

Leadership

I am working from the well supported premise that leadership matters, both in terms of supporting improved student educational outcomes (Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2020; Marzano et al., 2005; Robinson et al., 2008) and in terms of advancing work to support Indigenous students and communities (Ma Rhae, 2015; Peden, 2011; Richards et al., 2008). For the purpose of this study, I use this term to refer to the practices enacted by school-based personnel who have formal roles as principals and vice-principals; however, I affirm the significance of educational leadership at the levels of senior leadership and governance as well as at the classroom and community levels. Within a particular community of poverty, I worked with parents, community members and school staff to critique leadership practices and to gain

perspectives on alternative leadership practices that may be better suited for the specific community examined.

Low-Income

Canada did not have an accepted definition of poverty until 2018. Consequently, there was no official measure of poverty. Historic Canadian measurements were instead referred to as indicators of low-income (Raphael, 2011). These indicators included the low-income cut-off (LICO) and the low-income measure (LIM) which have been the primary measures utilized to examine low-income in Canada prior to 2018. The market basket measure (MBM) was also utilized as a low-income measure, however, it has since been renamed Canada's Official Poverty Line (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2018).

Low-Income Cut-Off

The primary low-income measure used in Canada, the LICO, is a Statistics Canada produced measure based on the average proportion of household income spent on essential items. Individuals or families spending 20% more of their household income on essentials than the Canadian average fall below the LICO line. LICO measures how less well off an individual or family is comparative to others (Fryer, 2009). LICO is adjusted for family and community size to reflect differing levels of need (Raphael, 2011). An advantage of LICO is that it accounts for the depth of poverty, measured as the total needed to meet the cut-off, to be examined (Raphael, 2011). There are significant critiques of the LICO measure. Critiques include the arbitrary nature of selecting 20% above the average (Fryer, 2009; Sharma, 2012) and the lack of annual revision (Citizens for Public Justice, 2013; Echenberg, 2009; Sharma, 2012; Silver, 2014). The LICO measure is only used in Canada, thus eliminating the ability for international comparison (G. Hunter, 2011). Further, the measure does not consider cost of living differences amongst regions (Citizens for Public Justice, 2013).

Low Income Measure

LIM is a measure conducted by Statistics Canada. This measure is also supported by the OECD. The LIM is the most oft utilized low-income measure for international comparisons (Raphael, 2011; Sharma, 2012). The LIM is fixed at 50% of median household income adjusted for family size, honouring the fact that family needs increase with the number of members (Raphael, 2011). Critics of the LICO measure due to its need of recalibration, celebrate that the

LIM is self-adjusting and updates itself annually after surveys are conducted about family income, ensuring that the measure is always current (Sharma, 2012). LIM can be calculated both before and after-tax income. The major critiques of this measure are that it measures income in relative not absolute terms (Citizens for Public Justice, 2013) and whether to use the measure before or after tax and transfer payments (Echenberg, 2009).

Neighbourhood

Within this study the term neighbourhood is used to describe a specific location outlined by municipal boundaries. The use of this term aids in examination of statistics that have been collected for that specific location. This term is not to be confused with the term community which is utilized in a broader sense to include those who live outside of the neighbourhood but have vested interests in students that attend the school and the school itself. Therefore, it is understood that school community members do not need to live in the neighbourhood where the school is located. The importance of understanding the neighbourhood in which the school is located was underscored by Hopson (2014) who stated that "studying classrooms and educational spaces without concomitant understanding of the dynamics and facets of neighborhood life render educational, political, and policy analyses potentially incomplete" (p. 993).

Inner-City

There term inner-city is regularly used within this study. This term is used to identify neighbourhoods which typically exist within older and more central neighbourhoods in urban settings, which have over time become settled in a manner that has led to a concentration of racialized poverty. The term is often used in educational settings to refer to neighbourhoods that have schools with a greater concentration of need.

Poverty

Poverty is a term associated with social stratification and specifically the lower class (Sharma, 2012). In the most rudimentary sense, poverty refers to a lack of necessities (Bradshaw, 2007); however, poverty is not just economic, it can also refer to deficits of social, political, and cultural capital (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2018). Despite this recognition, most measures of poverty are based on income.

In 2018, Canada officially accepted its first official poverty reduction strategy (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2018). This strategy was framed around the newly adopted definition of poverty that states "poverty is: the condition of a person who is deprived of the resources, means, choices and power necessary to acquire and maintain a basic level of living standards and to facilitate integration and participation in society" (p. 7). Critics of this strategy contend that the reduction targets are too low, that financial support is lacking, and that the wrong measure was selected to measure progress (Campaign 2000, 2020). Within the poverty reduction plan there is for the first time an official measure of poverty called Canada's Official Poverty Line.

Canada's Official Poverty Line

This measure was formerly called the Market Basket Measure (MBM). Developed by Human Resources Development Canada, the official poverty line refers to the cost associated with achieving a basic standard of living within one's community. This measure accounts for a minimum basket of goods and services that include items such as food, clothing, footwear, shelter, utilities, and nutritious foods. In response to the differing costs across Canada, expenses are examined based on the family's location, thus making the measure more sensitive to local circumstance (Raphael, 2011). The major criticisms of this measure are the subjectivity of what items are included in the basket (Campaign 2000; 2020; Fryer, 2009; G. Hunter & Sanchez, 2017; Lezubski et al., 2000), how easily it can be manipulated (Campaign 2000, 2020; Conway, 2003; G. Hunter, 2011; G. Hunter & Sanchez, 2017), inaccurate accounts of cost of living in some regions (Citizens for Public Justice, 2013; G. Hunter & Sanchez, 2017), and that it is not applicable to First Nations reserves or the territories (Campaign 2000; 2020; G. Hunter & Sanchez, 2017). Hunter and Sanchez (2017) are fierce critics of the measure and stated that the federal government's adoption of the MBM as the official poverty measure was a political ploy aimed at artificially diminishing "the incidence and depth of poverty in Canada" (p. 3). Campaign 2000 (2020) echoed this concern when they shared that Canada's Official Poverty Line measure has shown significant decline in Canadian poverty that this not evident in other measures; they conclude that the MBM should not be more than a supplementary tool.

Child/Family Poverty

Child poverty is a term that relates to the income levels of families with children. As such, the term "family poverty" is often used instead (Silver, 2014, 2016). Child/family poverty measures typically are adjusted based on the number of members of the family.

Complex Poverty

Complex poverty identifies that poverty can be multidimensional and includes lack of social, political, and cultural capital. The myriad of associated complicating factors make this form of poverty especially difficult to escape by individuals and for future generations (Rank, 2004; Silver, 2014; W. Wilson, 1987).

Spatially Concentrated Racialized Poverty

A term used by University of Winnipeg researcher Jim Silver to specifically describe the poverty present within Canadian Prairie cities such as Winnipeg and Saskatoon (Silver, 2009, 2014, 2016). The term refers to the concentration of Indigenous people living in poverty within inner-cities which is rooted in the colonial legacy and in-migration from reservations (Silver, 2009, 2016; Silver & Toews, 2009). Silver noted that the negative effects of this form of poverty are heightened by high levels of residential mobility and low levels of educational attainment (Silver, 2009, 2016). Silver (2009) argued that "this is a particularly damaging form of poverty. It is deeply–rooted. There is no simple, nor quick, nor unidimensional solutions" (p. 235). From my experience as an educator in inner-city Saskatoon, Silver's descriptions of spatially concentrated racialized poverty perfectly explain the devastating poverty to which I have been witness.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation is about acknowledging Canada's damaging colonial past and forging a better future (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, ND; Isaac, 2016; Saul, 2014). Isaac (2016) wrote that "reconciliation flows from the constitutionally protected rights of Aboriginal peoples and is inextricably tied to the honour of the Crown. Reconciliation must be grounded on practical actions" (p. 5). In 2015 the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada issued the *Calls to Action* that featured 94 pleas for immediate action by all Canadian citizens (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Calls 6-12 were made specifically for education, however, other calls are made that impact the education sector such as those calling for training

for public sector employees and education of reconciliation. At the heart of many of the calls is the need for collaboration and authentic partnerships with Indigenous peoples.

Assumptions

The following assumptions have been made about the current study. They are presented as delimitations and limitations.

Delimitations

The following delimitations were imposed on the study:

1. This study examined a proposed conceptual model of community school leadership based on interviews with teachers and leaders from an inner city school and an Indigenous Advisory Group consisting of a former elected Chief, Elder, Pipe Carriers, and teachers and educational leaders with experience in both pre-K-12 and post-secondary education. Members had extensive lived experience in an urban inner-city neighbourhood with a prevalence of spatially concentrated racialized poverty.
2. I worked with the guidance of a small group of Indigenous people from Treaty 6 and Treaty 4 territory who have advised me throughout the research process. Their cultural teachings, protocols, and experiences have shaped this research.
3. Relationality was a key factor in the study. I was fortunate to have previous relationships with some members of this community who became participants yet had to build relationships with others who acted as advisors and/or participants.
4. A further delimitation of this study was the limit of time imposed on me by my professional and family commitments. While this thesis has been a project with which I have had great passion, it has none-the-less been completed in a part-time fashion while I remained working as an inner-city principal and central office administrator.
5. An unforeseen delimitation was placed on the study by the Covid-19 Pandemic beginning in late 2019. The spread of the virus and the subsequent shut down of schools and society significantly altered aspects originally planned for the study. The protocols that had to be put in place due to COVID-19 prohibited me from being present within the school community and engaging significantly with members in that context. Rather than focusing on the school as a case study, the study focus shifted to an examination and elaboration of the conceptualization of the school community model informed by the

experiences of those working in the inner city context impacted by complex racialized poverty.

Limitations

The following are known limitations of the study:

1. The current study was my second foray into formal research. As a neophyte researcher I acknowledge the limits of my ability to tailor the research process and to effectively interpret participants' generous gifts of knowledge.
2. This study was purposefully situated within a targeted context; elementary schools within Saskatchewan urban neighbourhoods impacted by complex racialized poverty. Given the narrow scope of the research, findings of the study are not intended to be applied broadly to schools from contexts different from this study.
3. As a Non-Indigenous researcher embracing an Indigenous paradigm as the ontological and epistemological foundation of the study, I acknowledge that my upbringing and experiences have instilled me with privilege and disparate Western knowledge systems. Functioning with contrasting paradigms may have obscured my thinking. To offset this limitation, the study methods included multiple attempts to validate my findings in consultation with study participants, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers.
4. Further to the previous limitation, my positionality, as addressed earlier in this chapter, brought me to this study and this emic view of working within similar schools impacted interpretations and reporting of the data.
5. In this study, I worked towards changing and decolonizing leadership practices within a space that is highly colonial. Although it may be impossible to change all the structural colonial realities of the education system, it is possible to draw attention to and deconstruct hindering colonial structures, and to decolonize leadership practices in order to work more meaningfully with Indigenous communities, parents, and students.

Organization of the Report

This doctoral thesis is organized into six chapters. The current chapter serves as an introduction to the topic and the report. The second chapter introduces literature imperative to developing a greater understanding of the complexity of the topic and promising practices. The literature review focuses on four main areas of research. Poverty in the Canadian and

Saskatchewan context are explored as are theories of poverty and the impact of poverty on children's learning and schools serving large numbers of children living in poverty. Conceptualizations of school-based leadership are examined. This review includes a study of leadership styles and leadership frameworks. Studies that focused on high-performing high-poverty schools are examined and common themes from the studies are noted. The literature review also addresses a robust literature base that calls for schools, teachers, and leaders to be responsive to Indigenous peoples and to engage parents and families. Chapter two concludes with the presentation of a conceptual framework for school-based leadership in Saskatchewan's inner-city schools developed for the study which is created through a synthesis of the literature examined.

The third chapter examines choices made in the methodology of the study. Indigenous research methodology is explored. I situate myself within the research and paradigm I have chosen. The remainder of the chapter is committed to critical decisions I have made that guided the study. These decisions include the creation of a cultural advisory committee, honouring the importance of ceremony, data collection, selection of the research site and participants, analysis of data, measures taken to produce high levels of validity and reliability, and ethical considerations that I term relational axiology.

Chapter four provides a presentation of the research findings. The context for the study is addressed including the unforeseen seismic forces of Covid-19 and the *Black Lives Matter* movement that framed the backdrop of the study. Participants are introduced and research findings are shared in depth.

The proposed conceptualization of leadership is reexamined in chapter five. Participant thoughts about the conceptualization are shared and revisions and extensions to the model determined through the study are addressed.

Chapter six concludes the study by summarizing the findings, engaging in discussion, and making concluding statements. Implications for practice, theory, and further research are addressed.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to conduct a review of literature on topics imperative to understanding the proposed research questions. Five main research areas form the foundation of this chapter. First, I examine literature relevant to poverty. This exploration examines the impact of poverty generally as well as specifically on students' educational attainment, and how schools and school systems contribute to the perpetuation of the problem. The section also addresses previous efforts in Saskatchewan to address compounding issues of poverty. Secondly, the literature review examines school-based leadership practices. Examined are prominent leadership conceptualizations of instructional leadership, transformational leadership, leadership for learning, and transformative leadership. Thirdly, literature on high-performing high-poverty schools is examined. This examination includes exploration of individual studies and identifies common findings. This section concludes with identification of a glaring omission from this literature base. Fourth, literature on culturally responsive education is inspected, including significant calls to decolonize all aspects of education. Finally, literature on parent engagement is explored that calls for educators to work purposefully towards authentic learning centered partnerships with parents and families.

Once all areas of research examined are taken together, I conclude that literature is replete with enlightening supports for my study. I further conclude that while current literature helps to inform my study, there is a glaring gap in the current literature base that creates an urgent need for research. The chapter concludes with the conceptual framework for my study.

Poverty

Poverty is an incredibly complex and contested term. This section frames the complexities and provides an understanding of often used terms and measures as well as an understanding of the urgent need for change within Canada and specifically Saskatchewan. The impacts of poverty on education are also addressed.

Theories of Poverty

Any definition of poverty cannot be impartial as it is shaped by ideological perspectives (Bradshaw, 2007; W. Wilson, 1987). As with other ideologically disputed matters, people are passionate that their paradigm is accurate. Individuals are predisposed to select theories of

poverty that align with their worldview. Bradshaw (2007) identified five main theories of poverty, which provide insight to the politics of poverty.

The first main theory that Bradshaw examined is the theory of individual responsibility. This deficiency theory holds that individuals are unable to break from poverty due to personal failings such as IQ, language development, moral deficiencies, and abusive histories (Turner & Lehning, 2007) and/or lack of incentives (Bradshaw, 2007). This theory takes a critical stance against welfare and other social safety systems, instead placing the impetus to change on the individual (Bradshaw, 2007). The individual responsibility theory is reflective of conservative paradigms (Bradshaw, 2007) and is tied to other theories including moral exclusion theory and dehumanizing theory where upper class, mainly white, individuals see those in poverty as different or less than themselves, and therefore view poverty as being more acceptable (Turner & Lehning, 2007). Expression of this view of poverty has been especially damaging for Indigenous peoples as Brittain and Blackstock (2015) stated, "The myth that the poor are responsible for their own poverty is particularly virulent in relation to First Nations peoples in Canada" (p. 18).

The second theory of poverty explored by Bradshaw (2007) is the culture of poverty theory. This widely held theory is premised on the transmission over generations of socially produced beliefs and values (W. Wilson, 1987). It is not individuals who are to blame for their poverty but their dysfunctional culture of affiliation (Turner & Lehning, 2007). Bradshaw (2007) indicated that this view of poverty is reflective of a liberal ideology.

The third view of poverty that Bradshaw (2007) described is the structure of poverty. This socially progressive view looks not at the individual as the cause of poverty but at economic, social, and political systems in which they are forced to interact. This theory is premised on the understanding that structures within society are unfairly constructed to maintain privilege of many and preserve the marginality of others (Turner & Lehning 2007).

Bradshaw (2007) also examined theories related to geographical impact on poverty. Geographical theories can be used to explain poverty in regions where resources required to create revenue are deficient within the capitalist system. Poverty within rural areas and inner-city communities in Saskatchewan can be informed by examining geographical theories.

Finally, Bradshaw examined a more complex theory of poverty: cumulative and cyclical interdependencies theory. This theory builds upon components of the other theories and "looks at

the individual and their community as caught in a spiral of opportunity and problems, and that once problems dominate they close other opportunities and create a cumulative set of problems that make any effective response nearly impossible" (p. 20). Turner and Lehning (2007) note that those in poverty often lack empowerment, security, and/or opportunity, all of which are required to break from poverty. Bradshaw (2007) definitively states that this final theory of poverty provides the best explanation. Other scholars and agencies agree that more complex views of poverty must be taken (Silver, 2014, 2016; Turner & Lehning, 2007; Wacquant, 2008).

Impacts of Poverty

While debate continues around theorizations of poverty, the deleterious social and psychological impacts on individuals living in poverty are well known. Poverty has been linked to lower levels of high school graduation (Hernandez, 2011; Martens et al., 2010; Rank, 2004; Silver, 2014; Wodtke et al., 2011), higher levels of involvement in the justice system, and incarceration (Rank, 2004; Schissel, 2011; Silver, 2014). Poverty is associated with health inequity (Lemstra & Neudorf, 2008; Martens et al., 2010; Rank, 2004; Silver, 2014). This inequity includes more negative outcomes including: early childhood dental extraction, chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease, and mental illness (Lemstra & Neudorf, 2008; Martens et al., 2010; Rank, 2004). Other notable social issues with significant discrepancies in rate between affluent and poor Canadians include teen pregnancy, injury, under five mortality rate, and suicide attempts and deaths (Lemstra & Neudorf, 2008; Martens et al., 2010). Martens et al. (2010) noted that with each increasing quintile health outcomes improve. Lemstra and Neudorf (2008) contrasted health outcomes between residents of the six lowest income neighbourhoods of Saskatoon and residents from the rest of the city. They found that "although disparity in health outcomes by socioeconomic status is well known, the magnitude of the disparity in health outcomes found in Saskatoon is shocking for a city in the western world" (p. 3). The findings of Martens et al., (2010), and Lemstra and Neudorf (2008) validate Rank's (2004) assertion that by reducing poverty, we can proactively alleviate social and health problems. The massive amounts of money spent responding to costs associated with poverty would be much better spent by proactively planning to alleviate poverty (Rank, 2004; Silver, 2014).

Racialization of Canadian Poverty

Statistics reveal a significant racialization of Canadian poverty (Beedie et al., 2019; Fong & Shibuya, 2000; Galabuzi, 2001; Raphael, 2011; Sharma, 2012; Silver, 2014). Sharma (2012) noted that in "Canada poverty is not a problem of the population at large. Instead, it is restricted to people within specific demographic groups, such as certain ethnic groups" (p. 12). Using Statistics Canada data, Galabuzi (2001) showed the racialization of income in Canada with racialized groups' incomes being a full 20% less than white Canadians. This data also revealed that 35.6% of racialized Canadians lived below the poverty line compared to 17.6% white Canadians. Galabuzi (2001) argued that these statistics are reflective of systemic racism in Canada especially in the labour market where "racialised group members are often trapped in the lowest jobs and occupations in terms of economic and social ranking. They are ghettoized in sectors of the economy that pay the least and have the worst conditions" (p. 50). This low-level employment as well as higher levels of unemployment for visible minority Canadians persist even though many visible minority groups in Canada are better educated than the general population (Sharma, 2012 citing Kelly 1995). Among Canadian racialized groups, some are much worse off than others with regards to levels of poverty. One group with very high rates of poverty in Canada are those who identify as Indigenous (Beddie et al., 2019; Raphael, 2011; Sharma, 2012; Silver, 2014).

Indigenous Poverty in Canada

In Canada, the Indigenous population is growing rapidly (Sharma, 2012). The Indigenous population is unevenly distributed across the country with high percentages of Indigenous peoples in the North (Nunavut 85%, Northwest Territories 50%, and Yukon 25%) and the Prairie Provinces (Manitoba 15%, Saskatchewan 15%, and Alberta 5%) and less than 3% of the population in the other provinces (Sharma, 2012). Indigenous people earn less and are more likely to live in poverty than non-Indigenous Canadians (Raphael, 2011; Sharma, 2012; Silver, 2014). Data from 2006 showed that 31.2% of Indigenous Canadians living in families were living in poverty compared with the general population of 12.9% (Raphael, 2011). For single Indigenous people, 55.9% were living in poverty compared with the non-Indigenous single population of 38% (Raphael, 2011). Indigenous poverty is even more pronounced when child poverty rates are examined.

Canadian Child/Family Poverty

Silver (2014) challenged the use of the term child poverty. He contended that children's circumstance are not in their control and that they are relegated to their financial status by factors impacting their family units; therefore, the term "child poverty" is misleading. Given this, Silver 2014) advocates for the use of the more appropriate term "family poverty." No matter what it is termed, child or family poverty, the statistics remain appalling for Canadian children. This is especially true for children of Indigenous ancestry, and particularly for status First Nations children.

In Canada, the child poverty rate as measured by the AT-LIM is 18% (Macdonald & Wilson, 2016). Once data from reservations and the territories are included, Canada ranks 27th out of the 34 OECD nations (Macdonald & Wilson, 2016) for its rates of child/family poverty. Similar to overall poverty, there are marked differences in poverty rates once data are desegregated by ethnic groups (Beedie et al., 2019; MacDonald & Wilson, 2013, 2016). Beedie et al. (2019) identified three distinct tiers for child poverty in Canada. Tier 1 is the lowest level of poverty at 12% and is comprised of non-immigrant, non-visible minority Canadian children. The second tier is comprised of a number of distinct groups with similar child poverty rates: racialized children with a rate of 22%; Métis, non-status, and Inuit children ranging between 22% and 32%; and first-generation immigrant children at 35%. The third tier with the highest poverty rate by far is status First Nations children with a poverty rate of 47%. Status First Nations child poverty can be further broken down to on and off-reserve poverty. On-reserve rates are 53% and off-reserve rates are 41%. There are wide variances between provinces in the rates for child poverty for the groups represented in each of the three tiers. Manitoba and Saskatchewan stand out as the provinces with the widest gaps between child poverty rates for Indigenous and non-Indigenous children (Macdonald & Wilson, 2016)

Macdonald and Wilson (2016) examined the Canadian census data from 2005 and compared them to the data collected in 2010 to look for trends. The child poverty rate increased one full point during this time from 17% to 18% (Macdonald & Wilson, 2013, 2016). There was an overall reduction in Indigenous poverty from 35% to 31% that they attributed more to increased self-declaration (the number of Métis and non-status First Nations children grew at a rate that it could only in part be attributed to birth rate) than improved economic positioning. The

status First Nations poverty rate grew by one percentage point, the rate for racialized children held at 22%, and the rate for non-racialized non-immigrant children grew by one point. In a follow-up study which examined census data from 2006-2016, Beddie et al., (2019), found that there have been some improvements in Indigenous child poverty metrics; however, on-Reserve Indigenous children remain by far the most poverty-stricken group in Canada.

Canadian Racial Concentration of Poverty

Changes to Canadian immigration policies have resulted in a much more racially diversified country, especially in the largest urban centers (Ades et al., 2012; Balakrishnan et al., 2005; Fong & Shibuya, 2000; Galabuzi, 2001). There have been studies of the concentration of minority groups within Canadian urban centers. Balakrishnan et al. (2005) examined segregation and income in Canada's three largest cities. They saw the persistence of established ethnic enclaves within the cities, especially for Jewish Canadians, as evidence of segregation through voluntary means and not forced choice. They concluded that residential choice appeared to be more closely related to cultural preferences than discrimination. In contrast, Fong and Shibuya (2000) used Canadian census data to examine the racial and income segregation of 22 large Canadian Cities. They concluded that "poor visible minorities have few choices but to cluster in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods" (p. 457). Galabuzi (2001) reviewed a number of studies and concluded that Canadian housing is segregated with Asian and black Canadians living in inferior housing. Acknowledging that urban segregation does exist within Canada, Walks and Bourne (2006) borrowed an American neighbourhood classification system to review the extent of Canadian ghetto formation. The selected neighbourhood classification tool breaks neighbourhoods into a variety of classifications based on the percentage of minorities in residence; however, no income measure was utilized for neighbourhood classification. After neighbourhoods were classified, the authors did use income measures to examine the neighbourhood classifications and found that "it is the increasingly concentrated visible minority neighbourhoods that suffer disproportionately from factors related to poverty" (p. 290). Through this study, Walks and Bourne identified the most worrying Canadian urban segregation patterns as existing in Winnipeg, Montreal, Saskatoon, Edmonton, and Regina.

In the cities of the most concern for residential segregation, Walks and Bourne (2006) identified four of the worst five cities as Western-Canadian centers. While Walks and Bourne

examined prairie cities and Indigenous isolation within these cities, many authors (Ades et al., 2012; Balakrishnan et al., 2005; Fong & Shibuya, 2000; Galabuzi, 2001) focus more on larger urban centers and recent immigrant populations and seem oblivious to prairie issues. As Walks and Bourne (2006) established, prairie city poverty deserves special attention. Silver (2009) used Saskatoon and Winnipeg as examples as he wrote about the significant issues related to the concentration of poverty within prairie cities. Silver (2009) stated that Saskatoon and Winnipeg's inner-cities exemplify an especially damaging form of poverty "spatially concentrated racialized poverty" (p. 228). Fong and Shibuya (2000) stated "Canadian cities appear to have entered extremes in terms of neighbourhood wealth" (p. 457). This trend towards increased segregation of poverty in Canadian cities has been continually found (Ades et al., 2012; Walks, 2013).

There is also a significant concentration of poverty on Canada's reservations (Macdonald, 2015), although the actual level of poverty and joblessness is difficult to grasp as it is not officially measured by Statistics Canada (Macdonald, 2015). Macdonald (2015) places blame on both Statistics Canada and the Federal Government for not measuring these statistics on Canada's reservations due to costs associated with collecting the data. Because of the level of desperation on many reserves in Canada, many First Nations people continue to move to urban centers to seek a better life (J. Brown et al., 2005; Helin, 2006; Richards, 2014; Richards et al., 2009). This movement from reservations into prairie cities appears likely to continue to exacerbate the problems of spatially concentrated racialized poverty (Helin, 2006).

Saskatchewan Context

In 2016 Saskatchewan became the second last province to create an official poverty reduction strategy (Gingrich et al., 2016); leaving British Columbia as the sole province without a strategy (Silver, 2014). This poverty reduction strategy was created by the Saskatchewan Advisory Group on Poverty Reduction and is called the Saskatchewan Poverty Reduction Strategy (SPRS). Given the high prevalence of poverty in Saskatchewan, especially child poverty, this strategy is sorely required. While the data collected on Saskatchewan poverty and child poverty rates are troubling, Macdonald and Wilson (2016) wonder if Saskatchewan's reality is actually worse than the collected statistics show. The authors base this query on the high non-response rate in areas known to have large off-reserve Indigenous populations.

Gingrich et al. (2016) created a report that shared metrics of poverty in Saskatchewan. Overall the Saskatchewan poverty rate using LIM-AT was 14.8% compared to the Canadian average of 14.4%. Gingrich et al. (2016) also noted that the depth of poverty for Saskatchewan was much greater than the Canadian average, stating that half of Saskatchewan families living in poverty averaged between $12,000 and $14,000 less than the LIM-AT line. Gingrich et al. (2016) desegregated poverty data by federal electoral districts to determine that there are differences within Saskatchewan communities. They stated that "regional poverty rates help illustrate why poverty might not be seen by some residents of the province" (p. 10). This is supported by Silver (2009) who used Saskatoon as an example of the concentration of poverty in the inner-city. He compared inner-city data to the data of the rest of Saskatoon and found that in 2001 the core neighbourhoods of Saskatoon had 21% of families earning less than $20,000 compared to the city average of 9%. He also found that the average family income in these core neighbourhoods was $32,475 compared to the city family income average of $63,451.

Gingrich et al. (2016) shared that Saskatchewan poverty concentrates in inner-city neighbourhoods, some small towns and rural areas, and northern areas. Of Saskatchewan cities, the highest poverty rates are in Prince Albert (19%), North Battleford (17%), Saskatoon (12%), Regina (12%), and Yorkton (11%). The lowest poverty rates are in the small southern cities of Estevan (5%) and Swift Current (7%). Although they do not desegregate data for areas outside of Saskatchewan's nine largest cities, Gingrich et al. (2016) do highlight that the areas outside of the large cities collectively have poverty rates comparable to Prince Albert. In all areas of the province, child poverty rates exceed the poverty rate for the general population.

Child/Family Poverty in Saskatchewan

Gingrich, et al. (2016) examined Saskatchewan child poverty using the LIM-AT as their measure. At 24.6%, Saskatchewan child poverty rates were well above the Canadian average of 18.5% and the third worst in the country, trailing only Nunavut and Manitoba. Saskatchewan's child poverty rate, when compared to OECD countries, was the second worst, only slightly better than Turkey. The child poverty rate was far in excess of the rates for the general population (14.8%) and for senior citizens (4.3%). Of the cities, child poverty was exceptionally high in Prince Albert (33%), North Battleford (28%), Saskatoon (18%), Regina (18%), and Yorkton

(18%). Similar to the poverty rate for all ages, the child poverty rate was lowest in the small southern cities of Estevan (7%) and Swift Current (9%).

Gingrich, et al., (2016) also clearly articulated the racialization of Saskatchewan child poverty. Métis children had a poverty rate of 26%, recent immigrants 27%, and visible minorities where at least one parent was born in Canada 19%. First Nations children had a poverty rate of 57%, with an on-reserve poverty rate of 69% and an off-reserve rate of 36%. The white child poverty rate was 12%. Macdonald and Wilson (2016) reviewed Saskatchewan's child poverty data and noted that Saskatchewan had the second highest on-reserve child poverty rate and the lowest non-Indigenous child poverty rate of any province "constituting the greatest disparity between non-Indigenous and Status First Nations children anywhere in the country" (p. 15). Howe (2006) noted that Saskatchewan had a huge issue with a rapidly growing marginalized population of Indigenous people.

Complex Poverty in Saskatchewan

The concentration of Saskatchewan's poor and the significant impoverishment of Saskatchewan's Indigenous people hint strongly at the concentration of impoverished Indigenous people in certain areas. Silver (2009) made this connection when he noted that in 2001, 26% of residents of Saskatoon's core neighborhoods self-identified as Indigenous people compared to the city average of 10%. He added that this pattern of racial segregation was replicable in other prairie cities. While Silver did not speak specifically of smaller Saskatchewan cities, it is not a stretch to view the poverty data for cities like Prince Albert and North Battleford and see the concentration of impoverished Indigenous people within those cities as well. Of the spatially concentrated racialized poverty characteristic of Saskatchewan cities, Silver (2009) stated that it "is about much more than a shortage of income and that it is deeply entrenched and resistant to quick or easy solutions" (p. 227).

As discussed earlier, there is a need to view poverty through the lens of more complex theories (Bradshaw, 2007; Echenberg, 2009; Raphael, 2011; Sharma, 2012; Silver, 2014; Turner & Lehning, 2007; Wacquant, 2008). Bradshaw (2007) supported using cumulative and cyclical interdependencies theory that built on other theories of poverty but highlighted the cyclical nature of poverty, the lack of empowerment, and other complexities that those in poverty face. Silver (2014) described complexities faced by individuals living in poverty:

> Complex poverty tends to be deep and long lasting and is often psychologically debilitating. Those who experience complex poverty suffer not just a shortage of income, as debilitating alone can be in a monetized society, but also a host of other casually inter-related consequences such as inadequate housing, low levels of educational attainment, poor health, racism of various kinds in many cases, a relatively high incidence of violence via street gang activity and the illegal drug trade, and perhaps most importantly, high levels of unemployment and low levels of labour force participation. These factors feed on each other and create a deep and often intractable form of poverty. (p. 66)

Lezubski et al. (2000) noted another interrelated consequence: "high rates of unemployment and poverty very likely contribute to the high degree of mobility" (p.38). They go on to link mobility to decreased educational attainment and determined that mobility is "yet another factor adding to the perpetuation of poverty" (p. 38). The intractability of complex poverty is intergenerational and it is known that poverty tends to reproduce itself in future generations (Anyon, 2005; Rank, 2004; Silver, 2014, 2016; W. Wilson, 1987). Silver (2016), warned of the potential for complex poverty to worsen in prairie cities based on a rapidly growing Indigenous population and continued low educational attainment for the poor.

Saskatchewan has a poverty problem. Education is routinely emphasized in literature about poverty and poverty reduction plans as one means to break free from the cycle of poverty (Anyon, 2005; Freire, 1970; Howe, 2006; Noguera, 2003; Richards, 2008; Silver, 2014). However, issues of poverty complicate education and have led to persistent gaps between poor students and their more advantaged peers (Barone, 2006; Hattie, 2008; Jensen, 2009; Levin, 1995; Noguera, 2003; Parker & Flessa, 2011; Reeves, 2004; Sharma, 2012; Silver, 2016). This is especially true in cases where spatially concentrated racialized poverty has created racially segregated impoverished schools (Anyon, 2005; Carter, 2000; Chenoweth, 2007; Haberman, 1991; Noguera, 2003; Parker & Flessa, 2011; Schissel, 2011; Schissel & Schissel, 2008). Policy makers and educators need to be able to respond to these challenges.

Impacts of Poverty on Education

The harmful social and psychological impacts on individuals living in poverty have been previously discussed; however, the impact of poverty on children and the impact on their learning deserves special attention. Gaskell and Levin (2012) strongly state that poverty is the

“single most powerful factor correlated with educational and other life outcomes” (p. 12). Nogeura (2011) clarified “research never suggests that poor children are incapable of learning or that poverty should be regarded as a learning disability. Rather, research suggests that poor children encounter obstacles that often adversely affect their development and learning outcomes” (p. 10). Jensen (2009) wrote about the incredible impacts of poverty on children and their potential to learn. He stated “poverty penetrates deeper into the body, brain, and soul than most of us realize” (p. 45). Jensen notes four areas where research is clear about the negative impacts of poverty on children’s development and schooling: emotional and social challenges, acute and chronic stress, cognitive lags, and health and safety issues. Jensen (2009) shared that emotional and social challenges can manifest themselves in many ways including becoming easily frustrated, having difficulty working in groups, impulsivity, acting-out behaviours, gaps in politeness, inappropriate emotional responses, and little empathy shown towards others. Acute and chronic stress can create a host of undesirable outcomes including frequent school absences, lack of creativity, impaired attention and concentration, reduced social judgment and social skills, reduced motivation and effort, and reduced growth of new brain cells. Cognitive lags can also result from poverty in most measures of cognitive development; this can have a significant impact on developing reading skills. Finally, children in poverty are subjected to health and safety issues that can create school absence, tardiness, as well as challenges related to illness. Jensen (2009) clearly showed how school success can be far more difficult for students living in poverty.

Rawlinson (2007) used the term poverty mindset to indicate thinking patterns of those plagued by poverty for long durations. She determined that this mindset enters the classroom with children from all backgrounds who are exposed to long-term poverty. Rawlinson (2007) noted that many of the self-defeating and self-destructive behaviours that students exhibit, often to the great frustration of teachers, are tied to this mindset and their previous experiences. The poverty mindset often reveals itself in non-compliance due to anger, lack of effort due to knowledge of scarcity, lack of attendance due to escaping from stress, and awareness of unfairness due to frequent exposure to unfair situations.

Hattie (2008) synthesized research on students’ socio-economic status and concluded that there is a significant effect size on students’ academic achievement associated with their parents’

level of education, occupation, and income. Hattie (2008) also noted that the impact of socio-economic factors appears prior to the school years; this is due largely to lack of exposure to language. Hattie (2008) cited Hart and Risley (1995) who found that students from low socio-economic backgrounds begin school behind their peers. Anyon (2005) shared that after controlling for a child's race, that at age five, children from high socio-economic status homes have cognitive abilities that are 60% higher on average than children living in low socio-economic homes.

School mobility is often cited as both an outcome of poverty and also a factor that contributes to lower school achievement and the cyclical nature of poverty (Gruman et al., 2008; Lezubski, et al., 2000; Temple & Reynolds, 2000). Temple and Reynolds (2000) conducted a longitudinal study of over 1000 children in Chicago and examined the students' reading and math scores over time against the number of moves that a child had made. They found that the first move did not seem to have a detrimental impact of the child's learning; however, additional moves created achievement concerns. They also found that a child's academic achievement prior to moving could mitigate the negative impacts of frequent moving. In another longitudinal study of over 1000 students, Gruman et al. (2008), similarly found little impact of a single move but stated that "when moves accrue, their impact can be highly significant" (p. 14). They noted significant decreases in classroom participation as well as academic performance with multiple moves. The issue of school mobility is compounded because families that are most disadvantaged tend to be the most frequent movers (Temple & Reynolds, 1999).

Impact of Spatially Concentrated Racialized Poverty on Education

Given the impacts of poverty on individual students, it is not surprising that schools that serve student bodies where large percentages of students live in poverty do not perform as well as schools with wealthier students. Hattie (2008) stated that the impacts of poverty are greater at the school level then they are for individuals, indicating increased challenges for schools charged with educating large numbers of students from impoverished backgrounds. Willms (2010) examined school contextual factors and noted that there is a significant relationship between socio-economic status and literacy skills. Parker and Flessa (2011) stated that:

> There are two undeniable empirical realities. First, multiple sources of evidence show schools for poor children overall doing poorly. Second, there is significant variability

> among schools serving low-income communities; some schools have shown remarkable success. Policymakers have shown particular interest in research that can help explain why some schools in similar circumstances do better than others and how those lessons can be applied to more schools. (p. 15)

It is promising to know that some schools perform better in these circumstances, but it is important to know what practices are prevalent in many schools that serve communities of poverty and continue to produce poor results. In 1970, Freire wrote about what he termed the banking system of education. The banking system of education mirrored oppressive society and ensured the continued relationship of domination. He specified that the banking system was comprised of a number of key elements in which the teacher was always the active participant and the pupil was a passive recipient. Freire (1970) determined that authentic pedagogy that empowers just education could not be conducted by the teacher for the child but had to be a partnership that would challenge both. Freire (1970) exclaimed that the banking system of education had to be rejected in its entirety.

Twenty-one years later, Haberman (1991) wrote about the scourge of education in America's inner-cities. What he described was a system eerily similar to Freire (1970), a system that was founded on the principles of control and low-expectations. He termed the pedagogy of poverty as a set of teaching acts that constitute the core function of teaching in impoverished communities. Haberman identified that these acts are performed at the exclusion of other more impactful teaching strategies. Haberman (1991) noted that the pedagogy of poverty clearly did not work for students academically and often led to student resentment or overt resistance. Despite the obvious failings of the strategies encapsulated by the pedagogy of poverty, Haberman (1991) noted that they were held as sanctimonious, and teachers refused to change and argued that it was the students who needed to change to succeed within the system. Haberman (1991) concluded that "in reality, the pedagogy of poverty, is not a professional methodology at all. It is not supported by research, by theory, or by the best practice of superior urban teachers" (p. 292).

Sadly, the traditional teaching acts that Freire (1970) and Haberman (1991) decried are still prevalent in many impoverished communities. Jensen (2009), in writing what worked for students living in poverty, also wrote about what practices did not work. His lists of futile and

damaging practices incorporated many of the same teaching actions described by Freire (1970) and Haberman (1991). Klecker and Pollock (2005), examined teaching practices in high and low achieving schools and noted a distinct difference between the pedagogy occurring in the two different groups of schools; high achieving schools used superior pedagogy. Jensen's (2009) action steps for teachers were based on relationship building, deep learning, and empowerment. Good teaching has been identified as the most impactful thing for students' successful learning (Gaskell & Levin, 2012; Hattie, 2008; Levin, 1995; Willms, 2010) and the need to improve teaching practice within impoverished schools has been routinely raised as a requirement to improve student outcomes (Gaskell & Levin, 2012; Levin, 1995; Wiliam, 2011; Willms, 2010).

Saskatchewan Community School Model

In response to the prevalence of concentrated inner-city poverty and the associated educational challenges, in 1980, eleven Saskatchewan schools in inner-city neighbourhoods in Prince Albert, Saskatoon, and Regina were designated community schools. This designation was made directly to "address issues of urban Aboriginal poverty" (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004, p. 1). The vision for community schools was to be:

> centres of learning and hope for their families and communities. The diverse learning needs of children and youth are met by incorporating a comprehensive range of effective educational practices. Community Schools are responsive, inclusive, culturally affirming, and academically challenging. The learning program and environment effectively build on strengths to address the needs of the communities they serve. As hubs for the delivery of an array of services and supports, Community Schools use collaborative approaches to achieve learning excellence and wellbeing for the entire community. (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004, p. 4)

From the beginning, the Community School vision was supported with the allocation of funds targeted at supporting student learning, attendance, and nutrition (Elliot, 2012).

In 1996 a conceptual framework for community schools was created called *Building Communities of Hope* (with a second version published in 2004). This framework called for Community Schools to be places where people were culturally affirmed, included partnership with families, had respectful school cultures, purposefully enhanced involvement of Indigenous

peoples, provided high quality educational programs, monitored progress, provided integrated services, and aimed to develop and improve the community (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004).

Success of the Community School model led to rapid expansion. In 1999, a task force was created to engage in public dialogue on the role of schools in Saskatchewan. Through a significant consultation with educational stakeholders from across Saskatchewan, the task force found that there was a seismic shift happening. This shift forced schools to function differently than they had decades before. In 2001, the task force released their final report *Task Force and Public Dialogue on the Role of the School: SchoolPlus – A Vision for Children and Youth.* Using the metaphor of an earthquake, the task force noted that amongst the factors acting on schools were the rapid increases in numbers of Indigenous students, poverty, student mobility, students at risk, as well as cross-cultural issues and racism (Tymchak, 2001). These factors were already known in Community Schools. The task force also identified other factors that were shifting the Saskatchewan education landscape including the significant rise in special needs, depopulation of rural schools, impact of the informational age, and curriculum reform (Tymchak, 2001). Given the increased needs in all schools, the task force looked to the promise of the Community School model and stated that their consultations "served to confirm our commitment to the wisdom of the Community School approach, and our vision of Community Schools as a vanguard of the SchoolPLUS concept" (Tymchak, 2001, p. 46). The task force recommended the model for all Saskatchewan schools. Further recommendations included renaming the funding associated with Community Schools, the separation of the term Community School from specific funding, and incremental increases in funding for schools with high numbers of students at risk (Tymchak, 2001).

The vision of SchoolPLUS called for the adoption of a philosophy based on Community School beliefs. This vision held that schools were a vital part of the community; the community, businesses, and agencies were valuable resources; schools needed to reflect the culture of the community; the school needed to be available to the community; and parents were valuable educational partners. Though the Community School model had been primarily applied to elementary schools, the philosophy was also to be adopted by high schools (Tymchak, 2001). Further, the task force called for a fundamental redesign of schools into fully integrated spaces:

> SchoolPLUS, once fully developed, will be a matrix organization that will draw all of its resources from existing governmental and non-governmental agencies, but it will coordinate and integrate those resources in relation to the needs of children and youth (Tymchak, 2001, p. 59).

It was noted that to realize this philosophy in all schools would require vision, will, and resources. In 2007, the Saskatchewan Rivers School Division explored various documents created by Saskatchewan Learning and assessed the current state of partnership and integrated service delivery in their communities. They utilized a continuum created by Saskatchewan Learning in 1994 which presented a progression from fragmented to fully integrated service delivery. In their assessment the Saskatchewan Rivers School Division (2007) noted that the province had yet to create the fundamental change in schools and in the service delivery model.

The recommendations of SchoolPLUS were replete with challenges that needed to be overcome. Amongst the required changes was the need for significant support from governmental agencies as well as community organizations and businesses, ideally within the school. Challenges also included the significant changes to the way that schools and educators worked and needed to be supported and trained. Perhaps one of the most significant challenges that led to the demise of the Community School philosophy was the perception of competing interests between the focus on academic learning and the beliefs of SchoolPLUS. This competition was well summarized in a Saskatchewan Rivers School Division (2007) document that reviewed Community School and SchoolPLUS literature and concluded "we must not be totally consumed by the important work of the Continuous Improvement Framework but need also direct attention to developing a fully integrated human service delivery system in Saskatchewan" (p. 16). Elliot (2012) observed that throughout Saskatchewan the administrative focus on academic achievement took away from community development aspects of the work, often restricting parents and community members from authentic participation.

The universal adoption of the Community School model under the banner of SchoolPLUS was the demise of the once promising community school model (Elliot 2012) as funding became too widely dispersed to be sustainable. Targeted supports aimed directly at inner-city schools are no longer provincially funded. School divisions may at their discretion allocate funds from a general funding pot titled "supports for learning" to inner-city schools

(Elliot, 2012). Given this discretion, many school divisions have moved away from supporting key positions in Community Schools including school community coordinators, once a hallmark of the Community School model (Saskatchewan Association for Community Education, n.d.).

The Community School model, while no longer implemented, provides an historic example of targeted action and leadership aimed at improving education in communities impacted by complex poverty. Elliot (2012) reflected on the promise and demise of the Saskatchewan Community School model and summarized:

> Recent history does not mean community schooling cannot or should not be restored to its original purpose – namely, to allow communities to regain control of their destinies and to reshape an education system that has stubborn roots in a long history of colonialism and racism. (p. 10)

The demise of the model has contributed to ongoing concerns that were foreboded in the concluding comments made by the task force:

> We are persuaded that the issues we have identified call for decisive and determined intervention. We fear that the failure to grasp the urgency and significance of the moment, the magnitude of the concerns we have raised and the responses they invite, could result in serious long-term consequences for our province. (Tymchak, 2001, p. 113)

These ongoing concerns have been exacerbated, as instead of replacing or augmenting the Community School model with other promising ideas, the education sector has been significantly defunded at the same time as the seismic forces noted by the task force continue to increase. The Community School model requires consideration when examining inner-city schools and leadership.

Notably, both the Community School model and SchoolPLUS identified the importance of leadership. The Community School Model called for leadership teams comprised of school administration, the school community coordinator, and the School Community Council (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004). Community school principals were required to be "dynamic, innovative, and committed professional(s)…The role demands leadership capability in community development processes and superior collaborative and interpersonal skills"

(Saskatchewan Learning, 2004, p. 28). SchoolPLUS called for educational leaders who sought collaboration, shared power, valued team work, consulted students, valued parents, and saw the community as a resource (Tymchak, 2001).

Section Summary

Complex poverty in the form of spatially concentrated racialized poverty exists within Saskatchewan's inner-cities. Individual student's learning is impacted by poverty and schools that serve large numbers of students living in poverty are profoundly impacted. Saskatchewan's inner-city teachers and administrators face a daunting challenge of increasing student success in the face of the complex poverty that characterizes the neighbourhoods in which the schools are situated. The Saskatchewan Community School model attempted to address challenges of poverty and showed initial promise. However, its vision to spread its conceptualization and benefits to all schools essentially led the to the demise of its sustainability. Today, the Community School model has waned to near non-existence.

School-Based Leadership

Research has shown that school-based leadership has an indirect yet significant impact on student learning (Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2004, 2018, 2020; Marzano et al., 2005; Robinson, 2011; Robinson et al., 2008; Shatzer et al., 2014). Leithwood et al. (2004) wrote "while the evidence shows small but significant effects of leadership across the spectrum of schools, existing research also shows that demonstrated effects of successful leadership are considerably greater in schools that are in more difficult circumstances" (p. 3). Because of the identified power of leadership practice especially in disadvantaged schools, Leithwood et al. (2004) urged school divisions to consider creating greater leadership capacity within underperforming schools as a crucial aspect of division improvement efforts. In summarizing leadership in schools that had made significant academic progress Leithwood and Straus (2009) powerfully stated that the "literature is unambiguous in its claim that leadership is the pivotal explanation for success" (p. 26). Given the potential power of school-based leadership, this section explores contemporary conceptualizations of leadership including leadership styles and leadership frameworks.

Instructional Leadership

This conception of leadership was born from studies of effective principals and was solidified as a dominant paradigm through the effective schools studies of the 1980s; it has been held as a dominant view of leadership in the field of educational administration for decades (Hallinger, 2003, 2015). Hallinger defined instructional leadership as leadership where the principal primarily focuses on the "coordinating, controlling, supervising, and developing curriculum and instruction in the school" (2003, p. 331). Hallinger's (2000) model had three leadership dimensions including: defining the school's mission (framing the school's goals, and communicating the goals), managing the instructional program (supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating the curriculum, and monitoring student progress), and promoting a positive school learning climate (protecting instructional time, promoting professional development, maintaining high visibility, providing incentives for teachers, and providing incentives for learning). These dimensions were further broken into ten instructional leadership functions noted previously in parenthesis. Hallinger (2003) noted that a major challenge of this conceptualization of leadership is "trying to carry the burden alone" (p. 343).

Criticisms of traditional instructional leadership are many and largely stem from the transactional nature inherent in a model that promoted the principal as the lone leader. Notably the time required by an individual school-leader to engage in instructional leadership practices has been repeatedly shown to be difficult to attain given myriad competing aspects of the role that often appear to be more pressing (Blakesley, 2011; Lashway, 2003; Scott, 2017; Wallin et al., 2019). This appears to be especially true for school leaders working in Canadian schools with a high percentage of Indigenous students (Blakesley, 2011; Scott, 2017). Other criticisms of this leadership conceptualization challenge that notion that any leader could have the required expertise in all areas to truly actualize instructional leadership (Stewart, 2006). These first two critiques taken together highlight that it would be a near impossible task for any leader in isolation to be effective in this model (Hattie, 2017; Printy & Marks, 2006).

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership was advanced as a superior model of leadership that aimed to replace the hierarchical and transactional leadership associated with instructional leadership models with a more appropriate facilitative leadership practice (Leithwood & Poplin, 1992).

Stewart (2006) defined transformational leadership as the focus on restructuring the school to make improvements to the conditions for learning ultimately leading towards improved organizational effectiveness. This model of leadership is premised on collaboration and sharing leadership (Leithwood & Poplin, 1992; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Stewart, 2006) and thus improving the capacity and commitment of the team within the school (Leithwood & Poplin, 1992; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). The transformational paradigm had a profound effect on the field of educational administration noted by a significant trend towards shared leadership (Shatzer et al., 2014). The major critique of transformational leadership was that it was appropriated from the business sector and therefore had deficiencies in lacking a clear emphasis on improving teaching and learning (Marks & Printy, 2003; Stewart, 2006).

Shared Instructional Leadership

The challenge presented by transformational leadership to instructional leadership paradigms resulted in a period in educational administration that has been termed the paradigm wars (Hallinger, 2015). Studies have sought to measure the impact of leadership actions on student learning and have concluded that there is more power in leadership actions traditionally associated with instructional leadership; leadership actions associated with transformational leadership accounted for some student learning increases yet were not as significant (Robinson et al., 2008; Shatzer et al., 2014). Researchers have noted significance of both leadership conceptualizations and have moved towards creating models that encompass powerful leadership actions from both leadership understandings (Hallinger, 2003; Marks & Printy, 2003; Printy & Marks, 2006). Scholars (Hallinger, 2003; Marks & Printy, 2003; Printy & Marks, 2006) have coupled the competing leadership paradigms and advocated for an integrated model of shared instructional leadership which essentially is a less hierarchical form of instructional leadership. Marks and Printy (2003) defined their leadership conceptualization as an "active collaboration of principal and teachers on curriculum, instruction, and assessment" (p. 371). Marks and Printy (2003) studied 24 schools across 16 American states and noted that shared instructional leadership yielded higher pedagogical quality and higher achievement than schools where this style of leadership was not displayed. Printy and Marks (2006) definitively stated "our investigations of shared instructional leadership show that principals alone cannot provide sufficient leadership influence to systematically improve the quality of instruction or the level of

student achievement" (p. 130). Further, they argued that the "best results occur in schools where principals are strong leaders who also facilitate leadership by teachers; that is, principals are active in instructional matters in concert with teachers whom they regard as professionals and full partners" (Printy & Marks, 2006, p. 130). Hallinger (2015) noted that in using this renewed vision of shared instructional leadership "one can conclude that instructional leadership has been accepted as a core element of school leadership in a wider array of contexts around the world than was the case even as recently as a decade ago" (p. 15).

Transformative/Social Justice Leadership

A significant criticism of traditional leadership understandings has been its role in the maintenance of advantage and marginalization (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Ottmann, 2009; Shields, 2004; Theoharis, 2007; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). These criticisms contributed to the development of a robust body of scholarly work that aimed to morally reframe leadership to focus on advancing equity. This field of work advocates for equity-centered leadership under the names of social justice leadership (Capper & Young, 2014; Lindsey et al., 2011; Marshall, 2004; Theoharis, 2007, 2010), transformative leadership (Archambault & Garon, 2013; Shields, 2004, 2010), and equity-oriented leadership (Theoharis & Brooks, 2012). Theoharis (2007) defined this form of leadership as one in which "principals make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions…central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision…This definition centers on addressing and eliminating marginalization in schools" (p. 223).

Leadership actions advocated for within this field of scholarship are diverse. Some commonly advocated practices include: inclusion, critical self-reflection, challenging power and privilege, challenging narrow notions of success, developing allies, and creating a representative workforce. It is noteworthy that studies in this field do report disappointing findings in terms of the number of leaders who are found to be leading in this manner including a Canadian study that revealed that of 45 participants "social justice was not a concern of the principals" (Archambault & Garon, 2013, p. 52). Capper and Young (2014) argued for the need for leaders to lead in a manner in line with the principles of social justice. Further they advanced that there are four changes needed within the field of social justice leadership if it was to be more widely adopted. First, they called for a common definition of social justice leadership. Secondly, they

argued that the central work of social justice leadership must center on student learning and achievement. Third, they reasoned that educators for social justice must understand the wide variance of student differences including the many various intersections of difference. Finally, they contended that notions of heroic leaders are detrimental to the work and instead there is a need to focus efforts on shared leadership models that include school-based leadership teams and community members.

Leadership for Learning

The paradigm wars between instructional and transformational leadership conceptualizations seemingly created a new space to examine school leadership in a different manner. Recent literature has moved from promoting leadership conceptualizations towards promoting impactful leadership practices (Hallinger, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2018, 2020; Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Robinson, 2011). Hallinger (2010) noted that actions from each of the leadership styles are included within these impactful leadership practices. Robinson et al. (2008) argued for the need to examine leadership through practices as opposed to theories when they wrote "abstract leadership theories provide poor guides to the specific leadership practices that have greater impacts on student outcomes" (p. 658). Robinson (2011) further argued for the movement towards leadership for learning practices when she noted that the impact of leadership actions could be even greater if leaders focus on specific research proven actions. Few leadership actions associated with transformative leadership reside within these impactful leadership practices.

Standards-Based Leadership

A growing body of literature focuses on specific leadership actions that school-based leaders can use to create greater impact on student learning (Hall et al., 2016; Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2004, 2020; Marzano et al., 2005; Reeves, 2011; Robinson, 2011; Robinson et al., 2008). In recent years, in response to the findings from these studies, there have been a number of leadership frameworks developed that focus on improving student learning through standardized leadership practices. Although these frameworks differ in their construction, there are significant similarities in their content. A sample of these frameworks is examined below.

In 2004, Leithwood et al., stated that “there is compelling evidence of a common core of practices that any successful school leader calls on” (p. 6). In particular, they identified three categories of powerful practices: setting direction, developing people, and redesigning the organization. Of the three core practices, the authors identify that the area that “accounts for the largest proportion of a leader’s impact” (p. 6) is setting direction. This core practice includes setting mission and goals that focus on student achievement and ensuring that the charted direction is steadfastly followed. They also note the substantial impacts developing the staff have on student learning and make special note that professional development efforts are cost-effective means to improve schools. The core practice of redesigning the organization includes work to strengthen the culture within the school with a heavy emphasis on teacher collaboration and restructuring the school to ensure that collaboration occurs (see also Leithwood, 2012). The framework was later revised to add a fourth core practice of improving the instructional program (Leithwood, 2012; Leithwood & Straus, 2009). Leithwood (2012) noted that the actions in this new core practice have the greatest direct impact on student learning. Specific leadership actions in this area include staffing, instructional supports, monitoring, and providing resources. Leithwood et al. (2004) also stated that in addition to the core practices, leaders need to develop a large repertoire of leadership practices that they can use as required in different circumstances and contexts. Leithwood and Straus (2009) used the framework to examine the phenomenon of low performing schools that were able to progress to places of greater student learning. They found that effective leadership was required to turn around a school and that there was a strong correlation between the core leadership practices and turnaround schools. Leithwood (2008) noted that “especially challenging schools and those in need of being turned around require adaptation of “basic’ leadership practices, as well as judicious additions to such practices” (p. 111).

Another framework for leadership was developed in 2011 when Robinson published the results of a meta-analysis of leadership practices and produced effect sizes for the impact of the actions. In doing so she was able to draw attention to the most impactful actions that leaders could take. From this research, she created a leadership framework with five dimensions. Within each of the five dimensions were three capabilities that leaders needed to harness to successfully work within the domains. The leadership capabilities were: applying relevant knowledge, solving

complex problems, and building relational trust. The first of her five dimensions with a moderate effect size of .42 was establishing goals and expectations. The second dimension of resourcing strategically had an effect size of .31. With an effect size of .42 the third dimension was ensuring quality teaching. The fourth dimension, leading teacher learning and development, had an immense effect size of .84. Her final dimension with the smallest effect on student learning of .27 was ensuring a safe and orderly environment.

Reeves (2011) wrote about clusters of leadership practices. He stated that leadership focus, monitoring, and efficacy each had significant impact on student learning. He indicated that diffusion of school focus to more than six areas would lead to confusion and decreased results; yet, the benefits of tight focus on few goals is great. Therefore, it is critical for administrators to focus on "weeding the garden" (p. 48) by actively seeking to remove distractions and keep the focus on the school's primary goals. He wrote of the importance of leaders monitoring with teachers their student results, and therefore by extension, staff actions. Also, important in monitoring is the provision of frequent descriptive feedback to teachers based on clearly defined expectations of effective practice. Efficacy refers to the beliefs of administrators and teachers that their purposeful actions have significant impact on their students' learning; through purposeful action a school-based leader can foster the development of efficacy within their teachers. Reeves wrote that each of the leadership clusters has its own benefit, but when all three are present in a leader's actions "you will have big results" (p. 27).

Fullan (2014) shared that given the move to leadership practices from leadership styles, the role of principal was learnable and achievable. He referred to three key roles of the principal: learning leader, system player, and change agent. Inherent in all three of the roles is a developmental approach to administration and teaching that emphasizes collaboration and working in unison within systems. Tied to the emphasis on collaboration, Fullan rejected old notions of teacher appraisal processes where the administrator focuses exceptional effort on improving the practice of a few. He instead urged for administrator time and effort be put into the more powerful practice of collaboration that will benefit all teachers. Fullan also advocated strongly that the administrator, through the key role of learning leader, be an active learner alongside his/her staff in pursuit of a few focused goals. The notion of system player, referring to the leader actively contributing to the betterment of other schools, thereby moves the belief in

principal autonomy toward reliance upon supportive systems that create inter-school coherence. Being a change agent includes challenging the status quo, building trust through clear expectations and communication, creating group ownership for improvement plans, putting the team ahead of one's self, committing to continuous and sustainable improvement, and building networks and partnerships to support the work.

In 2016, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development created a framework for developing leadership capacity in school administrators that focused on four key areas: the principal as visionary, as instructional leader, as engager, and as learner and collaborator (Hall et al., 2016). They saw the principal as visionary in the critical practices of communicating and collaboratively leading the implementation of the school's mission as well as basing all decisions on the mission. The principal's role as instructional leader includes developing the individual and collective capacity of the staff, ensuring alignment of curricula, implementation of research-based practices and comprehensive assessment, as well as monitoring and providing feedback to individual teachers and the school team. The principal as engager referred to a commitment to support the whole-child, creating partnerships with parents and community, striving for positive change, appreciating and supporting diversity, and fostering reflective skills in staff. The principal as learner and collaborator was the final key role and included the establishment of on-going job-embedded professional learning opportunities, fostering distributive leadership, modeling reflective practice and continuous growth, and participating in professional learning as well as leadership networks. They also identified two pathways for leadership development. The first is individual professional growth, and the second is through sustainable district-level development. The individual growth pathway is based on reflection to create a clear plan for professional growth. The authors see the district-level leadership development pathway as a clear means to creating succession plans within school systems.

Given their prevalence, it is no surprise that efforts have been made to examine leadership frameworks in an attempt to unify understanding (Dempster, 2009; Hitt & Tucker, 2016). Dempster (2009) synthesized five research reports on leadership that had positive impacts on student learning, including one that he had participated in generating, and created a framework based on his findings. He contended that there are "three leadership fundamentals"

(p. 2) which all "lie at the centre of leadership for learning" (p. 2). These fundamentals are: purpose, human agency, and context. Hitt and Tucker (2016) examined three leadership frameworks along with 56 empirical studies that purported to connect leadership actions and student learning in an attempt to create a unified understanding of impactful leadership practices. Hitt and Tucker (2016) found evidence of five leadership domains: establishing and conveying a vision, building professional capacity, creating a supportive organization for learning, facilitating quality student experience, and connecting with partners. Lambert and Bouchamma (2019) examined competency-based leadership frameworks from four jurisdictions (Alberta, Quebec, Australia, and the United States). They found a clear congruence in leadership understanding across the four jurisdictions (Lambert & Bouchamma, 2019). The findings of Dempster, Hitt and Tucker, and Lambert and Bouchamma hint at a growing acceptance in research and practice of the notion of competency-based leadership. Riveros and colleagues (Riveros et al., 2016) stated that "it is clear to us that the discourses on leadership standards are here to stay" (p. 605); however, they along with others caution the adoption of such standards based on inadvertent ramifications.

Critiques of Leadership Frameworks

As promising as leadership frameworks are, there are significant limitations inherent within them; most notably the Eurocentric assumptions on which they are underpinned (Cranston & Whitford, 2018; Ma Rhae, 2015). In 1998, two prominent leadership scholars co-authored a paper to draw attention to the alarming international pervasiveness of Western notions of leadership (Hallinger & Leithwood, 1998). They advanced that "theories of educational leadership have been dominated by Western cultural and intellectual frameworks and have ignored a range of other frameworks" (p. 126). The authors questioned the appropriateness of the imposition of Western leadership approaches in non-Western nations and Indigenous settings. Both Leithwood and Hallinger have continued to publish extensively using the Eurocentric notions they critiqued; however, it should be noted that both continue to declare the importance of context when enacting leadership (Hallinger, 2015; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Hallinger & Murphy, 2012; Leithwood, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2020). The domination of Eurocentric notions of leadership remain pervasive (Battiste, 2013; Blackmore, 2006; Blakesley, 2011; Cranston & Whitford, 2018; Fallon & Paquette, 2014; Khalifa et al., 2013; Khalifa et al., 2016;

Khalifa et al., 2018; Ma Rhae, 2015; MacKinnon, 2000; Marshall, 2004). In advocating for leadership actions appropriate for schools with high Indigenous populations, Joseph Martin and colleagues (2017) argued that many of the recommendations they made diverged from those typically included in leadership standards; this led the authors to question the validity of frameworks purporting to be able to break leadership into distinct assessable behaviours. The typical lack of inclusion of leadership standards associated with equity led Galloway and Ishimaru (2017) to develop a set of leadership standards centered specifically on enhancing equity. The implantation of provincial leadership standards in Ontario led to mechanistic implementation which has undermined critical reflection of leaders (Riveros et al., 2016). Given the links between leadership and learning success (Hallinger, 2015; Leithwood, 2008) we must also accept that leadership is also linked to learning failure. To that end, school leaders need to consider the extent to which current colonial decontextualized enactments of leadership are complicit in creating failing conditions for inner-city Indigenous students. There must be a better way.

Section Summary

Literature presented in this section provides evidence of the continuing evolution of our understanding of effective school-based leadership. While the movement towards connecting leadership actions and student learning improvement should be commended, we must also pause and reflect on critiques leveled against current conceptualizations of leadership. We must integrate principles of equity put forth by scholars in the area of social justice leadership that have not been adequately included in recently developed leadership frameworks. Consideration of the hegemonic nature of leadership understandings that have been created by a dominant cultural understanding must also be questioned so that culturally appropriate leadership understandings can be established.

High-Performing High-Poverty Schools

For the purpose of this literature review, 14 studies were examined that met two criteria. Firstly, the studies examined schools where there were high levels of poverty. Secondly, the schools examined were identified for their high levels of student achievement or their identified trend of improving performance. Of the 14 studies, the lone study from outside of North America was conducted in Wales (Connolly et al., 2005), nine were from the United States (Bennett &

Murakami, 2016; Carter, 1999, 2000; Chenoweth, 2007, 2009; Chenoweth & Theokas, 2011; Kearney & Herrington, 2010; Kearney et al., 2012; Reeves, 2003), and four studies were from Canada (Henchey, 2001) with three of these focused on Ontario schools (Flessa et al., 2010; Jang & McDougall, 2007; Parker & Flessa, 2010). Collectively the studies examined elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools; they ranged from studying between one and 21 schools; they encompassed three countries as well as many provinces and states; and in some cases were funded by agencies that are politically at odds with each other. Despite these differences in context, there was much commonalty in the findings between the studies. Although most of the studies did not focus specifically on leadership, each of the studies identified that leadership was an important factor in the high performing high poverty schools examined, supporting Leithwood and Straus's (2009) claim that leadership was pivotal in turnaround schools.

The leadership themes that emerged as common from the studies are well supported by the frameworks previously examined in this review, as well as by other researchers and authors. Common themes from the high performing high poverty schools literature are: setting direction, collaboration with parents and community, ensuring high expectations for learning, use of data, creating a culture of continuous improvement, distributive leadership, and high levels of collaboration. Many of these themes are deeply interwoven. Surprisingly absent from the literature, given the racialization of poverty in Canada and the United States, were meaningful conversations about culturally responsive leadership. This will be addressed at the conclusion of this section.

Setting Direction

A significant theme in seven of the 14 studies was the need for school leaders to set a clear vision and goals for student learning (Bennett & Murakami, 2016; Carter 1999, 2000; Chenoweth, 2009; Connolly et al., 2005; Kearney & Herrington, 2010; Reeves, 2003). Reeves (2003) found that high performing high poverty schools had a "laser-like focus" (p. 5) on academic achievement especially in the core areas of reading, writing, and math. Carter (1999) concluded that "tangible and unyielding goals are the focus of high-performing schools" (p. 9). Kearney and Herrington (2010) noted the importance of leaders clearly communicating a vision

and focusing on a small number of goals. These findings are consistent with the emphasis in the leadership frameworks examined that highlighted the important role that leaders play in focusing school team actions on student learning. This theme is also well supported by additional leadership research.

Reeves (2004, 2011) advocated that schools focus on a small number of goals. Flowers and Carpenter (2009) emphasized the need for goals to be realistic, actionable, and measurable. Reeves (2011) identified a focus variable and studied its impacts on schools. He found correlation between the level of focus on student achievement goals and the level of student achievement. Sharratt and Fullan (2009) examined a division level improvement initiative and determined that the schools with the greatest focus on student learning made the greatest improvements. This finding included the fact that the highest focus schools were initially amongst the lowest performing in the system and yet made dramatic improvements in a period of only a few years. Reeves (2011) stated that when focus is joined by other leadership actions, student learning will accelerate. Reeves' point is important in that vision in itself will likely accomplish little; however, leadership vision appears to be a necessary foundation for further leadership practices and school improvement initiatives.

High Expectations

Related to the need for the school leaders to set a clear vision for student learning is the requirement to set high expectations for learning. Nine of the 14 studies identified the need for the school team to have high expectations for student learning (Bennett & Murakami, 2016; Carter, 1999, 2000; Chenoweth, 2007, 2009; Flessa et al., 2010; Henchey, 2001; Parker & Flessa, 2011; Reeves, 2003). Chenoweth (2007, 2009; Chenoweth & Theokas, 2011) repeatedly concluded that a common trait of high performing high poverty schools is the high expectations for learning by all students. Carter (1999, 2000) wrote of using high expectations to create a culture of achievement and that high expectations for learning also become the key to discipline in high functioning schools. Henchey (2001) made high expectations the first listed common element for success in secondary schools in low-income settings. He further noted that high expectations need to be paired with warm relationships to optimize learning. The need for high expectations is well documented elsewhere in educational literature.

There is a clear need for educators to reject deficit theories that imply that students living in poverty cannot achieve academic success (Barone, 2006; Dweck, 2006; Jensen, 2009; Leithwood, 2008; Levin, 1995; Noguera, 2003; Ramahlo et al., 2010; Sharratt & Fullan, 2009, 2012). Unfortunately, teachers' low expectations of their students persist in many urban schools (Carter, 1999, 2000; Levin, 1995; Noguera, 2003; Reeves, 2011; Riley & Ungerleider, 2012) and these low expectations can lead to an accumulation where these expectations become self-fulfilling and perpetual (Riley & Ungerleider, 2012). Reeves (2011) wrote that research has led to the "inescapable conclusion that the beliefs of teachers and school leaders have a significant effect, for better or worse, on the performance of students" (p. 31). Fisher, Frey, and Hattie (2016) found a medium effect size of .43 for teacher expectations for student learning. They reported a massive effect size for the student's own expectations of learning of 1.44. These two findings clearly indicate the immense power of ensuring that staff have high expectations for student learning that should be regularly shared with the students. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) shared an answer to the perplexing problem of persistent low expectations in schools with significant poverty and how leaders can have a direct role in rejecting deficit theorizing:

> What do you do when teachers in high-poverty schools believe that their children can't learn? Show them that they can. And do so in a way that the teacher is part of the solution, equipped with new experiences that enable him or her to realize success of a kind that hadn't been thought possible. (p. 55)

Data Usage and Monitoring Success

Ten of the 14 studies highlighted the important role that school data play in high performing high poverty schools (Carter, 1999, 2000; Chenoweth, 2007, 2009; Chenoweth & Theokas, 2011; Connolly et al., 2005; Henchey, 2001; Jang & McDougall, 2007; Parker & Flessa, 2011; Reeves, 2003). Data can be utilized in different ways to support student and staff learning. Chenoweth (2007, 2009) noted that high performing high poverty schools emphasize data driven instruction on an individual student level. Reeves (2003) wrote that the focus of high performing high poverty schools can be seen throughout the school in charts, graphs, and other student achievement data being displayed. Henchey et al. (2001) noted that high performing high poverty schools regularly review data to inform of progress towards goals. These findings are supported by the leadership frameworks and by additional literature.

Data leadership has become a prominent feature of the principalship in Canada (Newton et al., 2010). Principal leadership is critical to proper use of data to drive student and staff learning at the school level (Heppen et al., 2011; Newton et al., 2010). Ezarik (2002) stated that the need for data-based decision making is even greater for at-risk students. Heppen et al. (2011) identified that data can be used at the school and classroom level. Sharratt and Fullan (2012) emphasized data usage as the primary means to create an emotional commitment to effective instruction. There is a need to examine data usage at the school level and at the classroom level.

Closely connected to the literature on setting vision, data should be used by leaders to help determine and then monitor progress towards school goals. Flowers and Carpenter (2009) shared that data must be part of school improvement plans. There is a significant consensus that teachers need to be involved in examining school data (Ezarik, 2002; Flowers & Carpenter, 2009; Heppen et al., 2011; Sharratt & Fullan, 2009, 2012; van Geel et al., 2016). Reeves (2004) stated that the most important rule of assessment is that "it is more important and accurate to measure a few things frequently and consistently than to measure many things once" (p. 25). Data should be used to drive ongoing professional learning. Sharratt and Fullan (2012) found that school data must be used to "define the precise and intensive support for instructional improvement that is needed" (p. 12). It is also clear that a powerful leadership action is to ensure that classroom teachers focus on individual student data.

Data can be utilized to develop a sense of efficacy amongst staff members (Donohoo, 2017; Donohoo et al., 2018; Larrick, 2004). Larrick (2004) studied the effects of collective teacher efficacy on student achievement and found that schools with higher levels of efficacy also had higher achievement in reading and mathematics. Fisher et al. (2016) note the significant impact of collective teacher efficacy at a 1.57 effect size, the highest effect size ever reported by researcher John Hattie. The power of collective teacher efficacy is apparent; the efficacy of a leader also matters. Leithwood, Mascall, and Jantzi (2012) wrote that "leader efficacy explains significant variation in annual achievement scores" (p. 115). Larrick (2004) cited the work of Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy, and Hoy (1998) who stated that as achievement increases so will the collective efficacy of the staff which will then serve to further improve student learning. This finding indicates that collectively monitoring student data and celebrating the successes will lead to the development of greater efficacy and continued impact on student learning outcomes.

Reeves (2004) noted a need for schools to track qualitative and quantitative data especially in regards to the learning of individual students. Heppen et al. (2011) stated that collecting data has no purpose unless there are changes made to instructional practice in response to the data. They note that appropriate responses include: differentiated instruction, reviewing or reteaching material, creating student groupings, identification for intervention, and sharing results with students. Fisher et al. (2016) wrote that "teaching is about making adjustments and trying to determine what will work for a particular group of students" (p. 142). Wiliam (2011) stated that students in classrooms where regular formative assessment was utilized made nearly twice the academic progress over the school year as students in rooms where these practices did not exist. To maximize the learning benefits for children, formative assessment needs to result in feedback that is specific, actionable, and invokes student thinking (Fisher et al., 2016; Van Geel et al., 2016; Wiliam, 2007, 2011). Van Geel et al. (2016) conducted a study of the impact of a school and classroom level data usage in 53 elementary schools in the Netherlands. They found that the data intervention was highly effective for the lowest achieving schools and schools with high percentages of students from low socio-economic backgrounds. Given the close relationship to school goals and improved teacher practice, data usage is closely related to the creation of a culture of continuous improvement.

Culture of Continuous Improvement

A common leadership theme that emerged from all 14 studies was the impact of continuous professional development aimed at improving student learning results. This theme was present, either directly or indirectly, in each of the 14 studies and is closely related to other themes including data usage, setting a vision, and collaboration. This theme also emerged as a common theme from the leadership frameworks examined. Researchers made powerful statements about the power of good teaching in high poverty schools. Carter (1999) wrote that "improving the quality of instruction is the only way to improve overall student achievement" (p. 10). Researchers from the studies also noted the importance of school leaders inducting new teachers to the staff, both novice and veteran, to facilitate their teaching in the manner in which their school expects (Carter, 1999; Chenoweth, 2007; Chenoweth & Theokas, 2011). Schools' purposeful planning of professional development based on identified student needs also arose in multiple studies (Kearney & Herrington, 2010; Parker & Flessa, 2011). Kearney et al. (2012)

found that the principal of one high performing school planned, with other school leaders, for an embedded professional learning plan that created what the principal termed “a 185 day staff development program” (p. 241). This theme is further supported by significant research on the impact of teachers as well as much other literature.

Wiliam (2011) wrote that research has repeatedly shown that the impact of teaching on student learning is huge, with the best teachers accounting for learning outcomes well beyond the one grade level expected in a year and the poorest teachers accounting for much less learning. He further stated that the impact of high-quality teaching is amplified for low achieving students and that it is through ensuring that the lowest achieving students get the best quality teaching that equitable outcomes become achievable. Many others agree with Wiliam (2007, 2011) that the best way to improve academic outcomes in impoverished schools is through improving teacher practice (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Gaskell & Levin, 2012; Levin, 1995; Noguera, 2003). While some argue for firing teachers who are not as successful (Carter, 1999, 2000; Haberman, 1995), others reject that strategy and instead adamantly support the development of teachers already in the system (Gaskell & Levin, 2012; Wiliam, 2011). Gaskell and Levin (2012) wrote:

> Canada has approximately 500,000 teachers. Education must be able to operate effectively with a considerable number of people who are relatively ordinary, but who receive excellent preparation and support. Teachers, like anyone else, can get better at their work, and facilitating this improvement should be a major focus. (p. 177)

Wiliam (2011) wrote the improvement of our teaching workforce was “a vital economic necessity” (p. 26) as improved educational outcomes for the disadvantaged will be achieved through better teaching.

Wiliam (2007) stated that student learning can best be impacted by making changes to what happens in the classroom. In particular, he noted the importance of professional development being focused on high yield practices. Klecker and Pollock (2005) studied the teaching practices used in high and low performing schools on reading assessments and found that the high achieving schools utilized different teaching practices. These findings indicate that there are impactful teaching practices that can be learned and implemented by school teams. Administrators need to participate in professional learning with their staff (Robinson, 2010;

Sharratt & Fullan, 2012). Robinson (2010) identified that leaders learning alongside their staff had the largest effect size of any leadership action that she studied.

Fullan and Hargreaves (2016) differentiated between professional development (personal development of character and virtues) and professional learning (deliberately structured learning aimed at achieving outcomes) and noted that it is the thoughtful integration of the two that will have the greatest impact on teaching. They strongly argued for collaborative professionalism as the best means to create ongoing professional learning. Ongoing embedded professional learning appears especially impactful. Kimball (2011) wrote that teachers of all career stages value performance feedback. The importance of staff receiving regular descriptive feedback has been often noted. It has often been referenced that this feedback is very impactful when delivered by other teachers (Cheliotes and Reilly, 2010; Kimball, 2011; Knight, 2011; Reeves, 2008, 2011; Sharratt & Fullan, 2009, 2012). Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) shared that it is not important what happens at professional development workshops; what is important is what happens after them. This notion is closely related to the theme of collaboration.

Collaboration

This theme featured prominently in nine of the studies where it was clear that schools utilized teacher collaborative teams and lead teachers to facilitate ongoing professional learning related to school goals (Connolly et al., 2001; Chenoweth, 2007, 2009; Chenoweth & Theokas, 2011; Flessa et al., 2010; Henchey, 2001; Kearney & Herrington, 2010; Parker & Flessa, 2011; Reeves, 2003). It appears that leaders play a prominent role in establishing the culture and expectations for meaningful collaboration aimed at improving student learning. Chenoweth (2009) noted that a critical aspect of professional learning in high performing high poverty schools was the purposeful collaboration aimed at improving instruction. She noted that leaders facilitated this collaboration by providing time for observations and meetings, establishing norms for working together, and sharing common goals. Flessa et al. (2010) found that teachers in their study frequently attributed their school's success to high quality teaching resulting from high quality collaboration. Reeves (2003) revealed a common aspect of the schools he studied to be collaborative marking of student work. This theme of collaboration was common in the leadership frameworks and is supported by a substantial body of literature.

Elmore (2000) stated "isolation is the enemy of improvement" (p. 20).

There is a growing literature base that supports the need to remove individualism from schools and create collaborative cultures (Dufour, 2004; Elmore, 2000; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, 2016; Knight, 2011; Sharratt & Fullan, 2009, 2012; Reeves, 2008). Reeves (2008) found that teachers exerted significant influence on one another, and when this power is correctly harnessed it can dramatically improve student learning. Troen and Boles (2011) wrote about the fallacy that just putting teachers in teams would make them more effective. They identified a number of barriers that would prevent teacher teams from having an impact on student learning including lack of administrative knowledge on process, lack of clarity of goals, lack of accountability, and lack of time and poor usage of what little time is given. In contrast, they present five conditions for effective collaboration that can be facilitated by administrators. First, the group must be focused on a goal aimed at improving student learning. Second, there is leadership from within the group by all group members. Third, that there be a collaborative climate built on trust and communication. Fourth, that there be a sense of professional accountability based on improved performance. Finally, that there are structures and processes in place to enable the team to meet the goals.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) and Fullan and Hargreaves (2016) argue that the biggest goal within education needs to be the development of all teachers to ensure that children are not stuck having a great teacher every few years, but a good one each year. To meet this goal, they believe that the strongest tool available is what they term professional capital. Professional capital is activated when school staff work together towards common goals, ensuring that they continually focus on improving their practice and lifting the overall performance of the school team. Fullan and Hargreaves (2016) noted that professional capital is also paramount at system levels and that teachers and administrators need to be encouraged and supported in collaborating and sharing with staff from other schools. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) noted that just as it is important for teachers to learn from and with each other, it is also paramount that principals create networks which empower collaboration and growth.

When done right, professional capital leads to a sharing of best practices and can facilitate the creation of consistent practices within schools. Barone (2006) studied a high poverty elementary school in Nevada and determined that to close the literacy gap between impoverished schools and more affluent ones that the high poverty schools require continuity in

curriculum and classroom practice. There are many advocates for schools (and jurisdictions) to move to common research-based practices (Elmore, 2000; Gaskell & Levin, 2012; Kimball, 2011; Sharratt & Fullan, 2009, 2012). Powerful collaboration includes being in each other's rooms through co-teaching, co-planning, and co-reflection (Knight, 2011; Sharratt & Fullan, 2012). This form of collaboration relies heavily upon teacher leaders to facilitate the collective staff development, which is connected to the theme of distributed leadership.

Distributed Leadership

A significant theme in the high performing high poverty school studies was the need to empower others and grow the leadership of the school team (Bennett & Murakami, 2016; Carter, 2000; Chenoweth, 2007, 2009; Connolly et al., 2005; Flessa et al., 2010; Henchey, 2001; Jang & McDougall, 2007; Kearney & Herrington, 2010; Parker & Flessa, 2011). This theme was present in ten of the 14 studies. Henchey (2001) wrote "principals should see their primary responsibility as fostering leadership beyond their office" (p. 70). Chenoweth (2007) noted the important role that principals played in the high performing high poverty schools she studied, but she noted that they are not the only leaders. Parker and Flessa (2011) noted that the schools that appeared to have powerful practices most deeply embedded in the culture of the school had a variety of educators serving in different leadership roles. They wrote "one remarkably consistent finding across our diverse sample of schools was the fact that participants always identified a handful of key individuals" (p. 96) who led various school initiatives and professional learning. Bennett and Murakami (2016) shared that the leader's role includes being the final decision maker who determines what tasks to distribute and to whom. This theme has significant support from other leadership literature.

Elmore (2002) defined distributive leadership as "knowledge and practice get stretched across roles rather than being inherent in one role or another" (p. 24). Elmore believed that the complex work of improving teaching required distributive leadership. Leithwood et al. (2020) concluded that school leadership is especially effective for improving student learning when leadership is distributed in alignment with staff expertise. Leithwood, et al. (2004) found that "successful leaders develop and count on contributions from many others in their organizations" (p. 5). Anderson (2012) noted that patterns of teacher leadership were evident in schools with higher student achievement. He noted that the most powerful pattern was one in which the

principal was highly influential and exercised this influence through planned collaboration with teacher leaders. Louis and Wahlstrom (2012) stated when leadership is shared, relationships between administrators and staff are improved, thereby creating better work conditions that indirectly result in improved student learning. Through collaborative culture, leadership stability is enhanced as the mission of the school is collectively owned, ensuring that initiatives can survive the loss of the principal (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Creating a collaborative culture with distributive leadership is one important way that leaders can restructure the school for maximum effect on student learning.

Parent and Community Connectedness

Prevalent in the studies on high performing high poverty schools was the theme of parent and community connectedness (Carter, 1999, 2000; Chenoweth, 2007; Connolly et al., 2005; Flessa at al., 2010; Kearney & Herrington, 2010; Kearney et al., 2012; Parker & Flessa, 2011). Flessa et al. (2010) noted that all of their case study schools made attempts to engage parents and community. Parker and Flessa (2011) shared that each of the schools they examined clearly articulated the need for community and parent connection, yet all schools also indicated that creating this connectedness was one of the school's greatest challenges. Studies noted that schools looked for non-traditional ways to engage the community, often through fun events (Kearney et al., 2012; Parker & Flessa, 2011). This theme is not common in the leadership frameworks, but it is supported by a significant literature base. Research has shown strong evidence that relationships with parents and community have powerful effects on student learning (Evans, 2013; Goodall, 2017; Hattie, 2008; Ishimaru, 2013; Leithwood et al., 2004). Parent engagement literature is more thoroughly addressed later in this chapter.

Section Summary

Common themes emerged from the examination of high-functioning high-poverty schools. Themes of setting direction, collaboration with parents and community, ensuring high expectations for learning, use of data, creating a culture of continuous improvement, distributive leadership, and high levels of collaboration are also supported by actions described in recently created leadership frameworks. Similar to leadership frameworks, it appears that little or no emphasis has been placed on understanding culture within the research on high-functioning high-poverty schools; this leads me to an examination of culturally responsive leadership. The

prevalence of parent engagement within the high-functioning high-poverty schools literature and its less prominent role within leadership frameworks also warrants a deeper exploration.

A Glaring Omission: Cultural Responsivity

As with dominant leadership understandings, culturally responsive leadership does not feature significantly in the leadership frameworks and is nearly absent, in a meaningful way, from the studies of high functioning high poverty schools examined. The near omission of cultural responsivity is surprising given the racialization of poverty in North America and the wealth of literature on the need for schools and leaders to be culturally responsive. The absence of cultural responsiveness from the high performing high poverty school studies could in part be due to the schools studied having a greater diversity of minority populations. Perhaps schools were not responsive to any one specific culture and/or it was a taken-for-granted assumption. Similarly, another possible explanation is that many studies examined many schools from diverse regions, and therefore could have been examining schools with significantly different cultural backgrounds. It could also be that the researchers were looking for evidence that had clear direct connections to basic skills as measured by standardized assessments, and did not look as deeply at culturally responsive pedagogy, curricular choices, and other cultural events and activities. Regardless of the reason for the omission of cultural responsiveness and culturally responsive leadership from the studies, the wealth of additional literature on the topic warrants examination.

While cultural responsiveness did not emerge as a theme, a few of the studies noted schools' and leaders' social justice stance (Bennett & Murakami, 2016; Flessa et al., 2010; Henchey, 2001). Primarily this minor theme focused on providing equitable learning outcomes for minority students and the impoverished. Blackmore (2006) stated that leaders need to ensure more equitable outcomes for learners from diverse backgrounds and indicated that there are still imbalances in school systems that impede this goal (see also MacKinnon, 2000). For this reason, Blackmore urged social justice be central to an administrator's work. However, culturally responsive leadership is about much more than ensuring equitable outcomes as is addressed in the next section.

Culturally Responsive Leadership

Literature abounds on the failures of the Canadian educational system to meet the needs of Indigenous learners and there have been many calls for an overhaul of this colonial system of education (Battiste, 2010, 2013; Ledoux, 2006). Research highlights that school-based leaders play a key role in the cultural responsiveness within their schools. This section of the literature review is narrowed to focus on the importance of school-based leadership in creating culturally responsive learning environments. The literature review also focuses on specific actions identified from literature that have been impactful for improving the learning outcomes of Indigenous students.

Ample literature points to the importance of principal leadership in advancing cultural responsiveness work within a school and specifically the impact on teacher implementation of these important policies and practices (Bell et al., 2004; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Wallin & Peden, 2014). When examining studies of schools where culturally responsive education had taken hold, Castagno and Brayboy (2008) noted that supportive administrators were one critical attribute of these successful schools. Peden (2011) noted that neophyte teachers who had completed a university course that equipped them to teach with Indigenous worldviews and pedagogies only did so if their principal appeared to support this work. Through a literature review of culturally responsive school leadership, Khalifa and colleagues (2016) concluded "research suggests that unless promoted by the principal, implementation of cultural responsiveness can run the risk of being disjointed or short-lived in a school, and conversely, district-level mandates are only effective to the extent they are locally enforced" (p. 3). This quotation speaks to the power of a skilled and caring leader and also to the importance of planning for sustainability of culturally responsive efforts in the absence of that leader. Studies have found a detrimental impact on cultural responsiveness efforts and program implementation when a strong advocate principal leaves a school and the successor does not share the same passion (Bishop et al., 2014). Distributive leadership models empower many members of the school community and therefore make sustainability of efforts more achievable with the departure of any one leader (Jang & McDougall, 2007; Robinson, 2011).

Scott (2017) stated "it is time to study a more culturally relevant type of leadership" (p. 140). Blakesley (2011) was critical of university leadership preparation programs and notes that

"where do non-Indigenous leaders in Indigenous contexts locate themselves in such confusing and contested terrain?" (p. 11). The predominance of European leadership conceptions that have been transferred with little thought to non-European settings have been challenged (Blakesley, 2011; Cranston & Whitford, 2018; Ma Rhae, 2015). Blakesley stated that leadership ought to be culturally and contextually situated which conflicts with notions of reduction of leadership to competencies and standardization across contexts. Blakesley (2011) noted that "the under-emphasis of culture and context with respect to how educational leadership is construed and understood gives cause for concern" (p. 13). Blakesley (2011) argued that Indigenous school contexts "have remained on the margins of any systematic consideration" (p. 13). An initiative was launched in 2018 in Saskatchewan, called *Leading to Learn*, which recognized the need to enhance Saskatchewan school leaders' cultural understanding and self-awareness to elevate the learning of the provinces Indigenous students (Saskatchewan Teachers Federation, 2019b).

Critical Race Theory and Tribal Critical Race Theory

Racism remains pervasive in North America (Battiste, 2013; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Cranston, 2020; Singleton, 2015; St. Denis, 2007; West, 2017; Young & Liable, 2000). Critical Race Theory (CRT) was created to shed light on the injustices perpetrated against racialized Americans in the court system but has since been expanded to other sectors including education (K. Brown & Jackson, 2013). Key tenets of CRT include interest convergence, where the dominant majority acquiesces on those issues in which there is a perceived mutual benefit; the precept of neutrality, through which the sentiments of the majority are obscured; racial realism, which holds that racism is a deeply embedded feature of society; and the role of perspective, which informs us that action without malice can still perpetuate domination (K. Brown & Jackson, 2013). Built on the foundation of CRT, Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) focuses on the impact of colonization on Indigenous peoples (Brayboy, 2005, 2013, 2014). The tenets of TribalCrit include the desire to forge autonomy, push back against assimilative policies, the realness of stories, and the centrality of traditional ways of knowing and being in creating a new future (Brayboy, 2005). Compelling arguments have been made as to the necessity to view education through racial (Cole, 2012; Dantley, 1990; Khalifa et al., 2013; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and decolonizing lenses (Aylward, 2007; Brayboy, 2005; Grande, 2004, 2008, 2010). TribalCrit and Western educational notions regarding leadership frameworks are founded

on immensely divergent paradigms. The difference between Indigenous and Western paradigms have been explored (Battiste, 2010, 2013; Goulet & Goulet, 2014; L. T. Smith, 2013) as has the dominance of the Western paradigm in educational research, policy, and leadership (Battiste, 2010, 2013; Fallon & Paquette, 2014; Khalifa et al., 2013; Kovach, 2009; Martell, 2016). Juxtaposing leadership frameworks to the tenets of TribalCrit clearly highlights the damaging aspects of Western conceptualizations of leadership within highly Indigenous contexts.

Parent Engagement

As previously noted, significant literature speaks to the positive impacts of engaging parents in their children's schooling (Evans, 2013; Goodall, 2017; Hattie, 2008; Henderson et al., 2007; Ishimaru, 2013; Leithwood et al., 2004). Goodall (2017) referenced the overarching importance of parent engagement in all students' learning, however, she powerfully pointed out the importance of parent engagement as "one of the best levers available for supporting raised achievement among students, particularly those who tend to underachieve in the current schooling system" (p. 2). Given this importance, as well as the discrepancy in the prominence of parent engagement between the high-performing high-poverty schools studies examined and the leadership frameworks explored, parent engagement will be more deeply explored. Critical elements of this section include critiques of current educational and leadership practices from a parent engagement perspective, exploring what parent engagement is and is not, and fostering partnerships with families.

Critiques of Educational and Leadership Practices from a Parent Engagement Perspective

Similar to the hegemonic understanding of education exposed through the lenses of CRT and TribalCrit, researchers working in the area of parent engagement level scathing reviews of current educational practices that uphold the power of formal educational institutions and educators at the expense of parent and community engagement (Cranston & Crook, 2020; Faircloth, 2011; Goodall, 2017; Graue & Hawkins, 2010; Fitzgerald & Militello, 2016; Hands & Hubbard, 2011; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Pushor, 2010, 2015; Pushor & Amendt, 2018). These critiques center on two major areas of concern: traditional views of parent involvement and educators looking outward. If left unchecked these concerns will prevent the creation of spaces for more authentic learning centered parent-school partnerships.

Parent Involvement

After undertaking an extensive literature review in the area of parent engagement, Evans (2013) noted that "this examination of the literature revealed little consistency with regard to definitions of family engagement. In fact, the broad range of activities and contexts described suggests that a new emphasis on relationship building is slowly starting to replace more technical approaches" (p. 125). The more technical approaches that Evans wrote about are those which have long dominated the school landscape and have been termed schoolcentric (Goodall, 2017; Graue & Hawkins, 2010; Pushor, 2013a; Pushor & Amendt, 2018). Goodall (2017) highlighted the one-sided transactional nature of traditional parent involvement in schools by examining Freire's notion of the banking system of education and applied it to parent-teacher relations. Goodall's insights painted a troubling picture of disenfranchised parents:

> The teacher knows a very great deal about the child's learning and the parents know (almost) nothing…the teacher acts and the parents have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher…the teacher chooses the programme content and the parents (who are not consulted) adapt to it (p. 9).

These traditional roles assigned to parents by schools can at best be described as passive support (Ishimaru et al., 2016). Parent involvement activities prescribed by schools such as fundraising, volunteering, and attending parent-teacher conferences limit the manner in which parents can be involved to activities on the periphery of their child's learning (Henderson et al., 2007; Mapp, 2003; Stelmach, 2016). Even parent councils appear to be little more than tokenistic as educators often bring forward ideas for approval after actions have already been determined (Stelmach & Preston, 2008; Stelmach, 2016). Pushor (2010) argued that these longstanding parent involvement practices are taken for granted and rarely questioned. Yet these practices create hierarchies of power and exclusion that maintain the hegemonic and discursive authority of the school while positioning parents on the periphery of reciprocal and respectful decision making and engagement.

Educators Looking Outward

Schools prescribing passive involvement roles to parents often align with another troubling practice associated with deficit theorizing, looking outward. This often leads to blame being placed on parents, especially parents of a non-dominant background, who do not conform to schoolcentric norms of involvement (Auerbach, 2009; Cranston & Crook, 2020; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Shumow & DeFrates-Densch, 2013) and can lead to misinterpreting lack of involvement as lack of support (Jaime & Russell, 2010; Mapp, 2003). Auerbach (2009) noted that it is highly problematic when educators focus on external factors instead of factors under their control. Looking outward leads to one-way communication with parents (Graue & Hawkins, 2010). Stelmach (2016) identified similar one-way controlled communication from school and district leaders to parent council members. She "interpreted the controlled flow of information through school and district leaders as emerging from a perceived need to be protective and pre-emptive" (p. 281). Graue and Hawkins (2010) argued that "a one-way relationship isn't much of a relationship at all" (p. 123).

Interrupting Traditional Practices

There is agreement amongst researchers in the field of parent engagement that interrupting problematic dispositions and practices of educators is the foundation for moving towards more authentic engagement of parents (Evans, 2013; Faircloth, 2011; Fitgerald & Militello, 2016; Goodall, 2017; Graue & Hawkins, 2010; Henderson et al., 2007; Ishimaru et al., 2019; Mapp & Bergman, 2019; Pushor & Amendt, 2018; Stelmach, 2016). Central to the required stance of working with parents is critically reflecting on one's own biases and position (Evans, 2013; Faircloth, 2011; Fitgerald & Militello, 2016; Pushor, 2013b). Recent literature highlights that across North American there is inadequate training provided to preservice teachers to prepare them to interact meaningfully with parents (Evans, 2013; Ishimaru, 2013; Pushor et al., 2005) although promising preparation programs are emerging at undergraduate and graduate levels (Evans, 2013; Pushor, 2013b).

The required shift in educators' paradigms and actions must be supported by school administrators (Fitzgerald & Militello, 2016; Ishimaru, 2013, Ishimaru et al., 2016; Pushor & Amendt, 2018). Pushor and Amendt (2018) stated that a "critical piece in the work to engage

parents has been the provision of leadership to facilitate school staffs' deep and honest examination of their beliefs about parents, and about the place and voice of parents in schools" (p. 203). Similar to literature that identified a lack of adequate preparation for teachers to engage parents, leadership preparation programs have been found lacking in producing leaders with understanding of parent engagement (Fitzgerald & Militello, 2016; Ishimaru, 2013, Pushor & Amendt, 2018).

Parent Engagement

In recent literature, the term parent engagement is utilized to identify more powerful and collaborative approaches to working with parents (Auerbach, 2009; Fitzgerald & Militello, 2016; Goodall, 2017; Graue & Hawkins, 2010; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Pushor, 2013a; Pushor & Amendt, 2018). Parent engagement, as opposed to parent involvement, is familycentric, involves educators looking inwards, and is reciprocal in nature. Familycentricity is founded on the belief that educators are but one piece in the picture of the child's overall development and that parent knowledge and support is essential for effective schooling (Ishimaru et al., 2016; Pushor, 2013a; Pushor, 2015). Familycentric educators rely on two-way communication with parents and invite parents into their child's learning at school in meaningful ways while also centering parent's knowledge and the child's learning at home (Fitzgerald & Militello, 2016; Graue & Hawkins, 2010; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Pushor, 2010; Pushor, 2013a). Another critical element of parent engagement is educators shifting their stance to looking inward at their own beliefs and actions (Auerbach, 2009; Pushor & Amendt, 2018). Educators who look inwards are likely to change their practices to better facilitate authentic partnerships with parents and improved approaches to communication. Parent engagement is relational and is reciprocal (Hands, 2014; Henderson et al., 2007; Ishimaru, 2013; Mapp & Bergman, 2019; S. Smith, 2013; Pushor, 2010; Pushor et al, 2005). Relationships with parents must be intentionally built and be based on mutual trust (Henderson et al., 2007; Mapp & Bergman, 2019; Pushor, 2010). Supporting the reciprocal nature of the partnership is the two-way flow of communication and the honouring of each-others' knowledge (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Goodall, 2017; Mapp & Bergman, 2019; Pushor, 2015). The partnerships that arise between parents and educators are enacted to positively impact learning, not dabble on the periphery (Goodall, 2017; Henderson et al., 2007). Parent involvement activities may exist in tandem with deeper parent engagement, but importantly

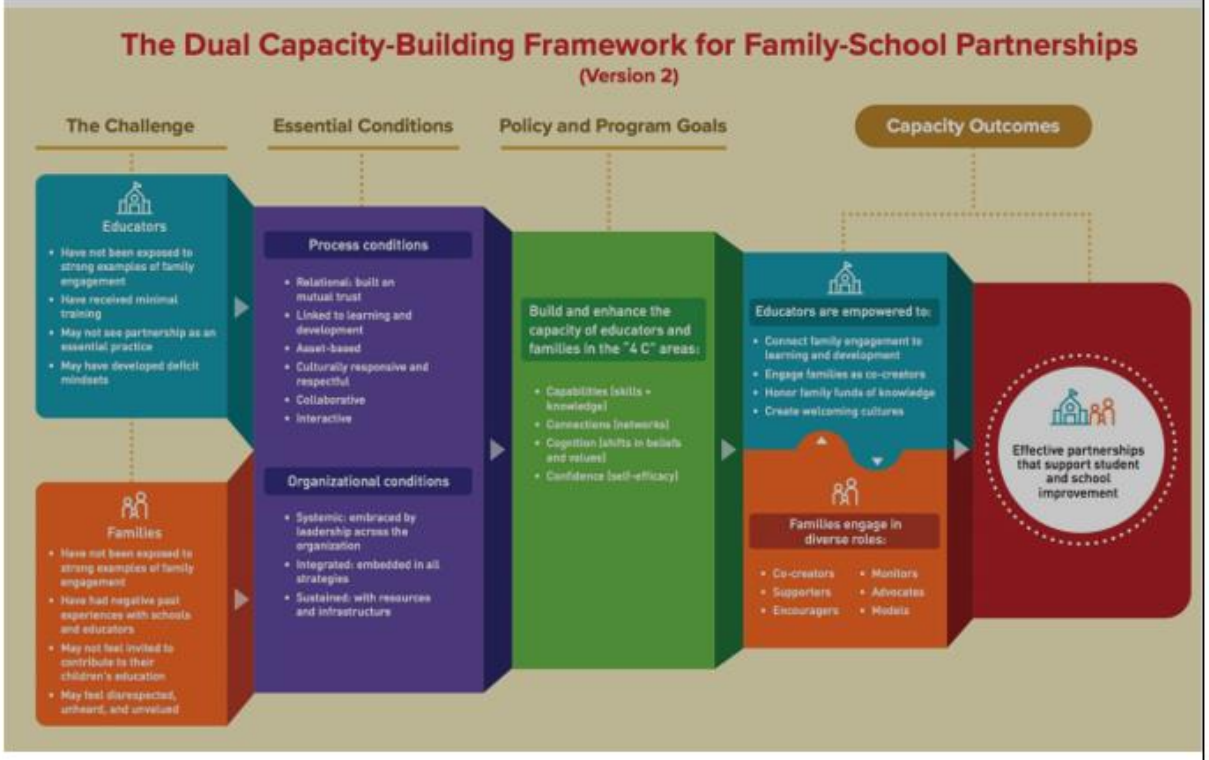
purposeful processes must be put in place to ensure movement on a continuum towards a prevalence of more robust learning-centered parent-school partnerships (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Goodall, 2017; Mapp & Bergman, 2019). It is important to note that progress may not be on a linear trajectory as there are likely be disruptions such as staff and community movement, which may complicate matters (Pushor et al., 2005).

Fostering Family-School Partnerships

Significant literature exists aimed at supporting educators in creating and strengthening partnerships with parents and community members (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Hands & Hubbard, 2011; Hubbard & Hands, 2011; Henderson et al., 2007; Ishimaru et al, 2019; Mapp & Bergman, 2019). In order to foster deep learning-centered partnerships with parents many issues need to be addressed including structures, culture, and agency (Henderson et al., 2007; Hubbard & Hands, 2011). Hubbard and Hands (2011) asserted "without the creation of policies and structures designed to promote collaboration among all constituents, any actions aimed at constructing improved academic outcomes and family-school-community relationships will be limited at best" (p. 64). A promising framework for family-school partnerships has been advanced by Mapp and Bergman (2019) titled the Dual Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships; the framework is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Mapp and Bergman (2019) Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Version 2).



Mapp and Bergman begin their model by identifying challenges and barriers preventing educators (including lack of exposure to family engagement, lack of training, and deficit mindsets) and parents (including lack of exposure to family engagement, negative past school experiences, and feeling unwelcome or disrespected) from investing deeply in partnership efforts. They then address a series of essential conditions that lay the foundation for partnership. These conditions include process conditions including the need to be relational, linked to learning, asset-based, culturally responsive, collaborative, and interactive. Organizational conditions are also addressed; they include the need to be systemic, integrated into all aspects of the organization, and resourced appropriately for sustainability. Building from that foundation, the policy and program goals can be addressed: these goals are building school and family capacity in what they term the 4 C areas: capabilities, connections, cognition, and confidence.

The ultimate goal of the framework is to advance partnership to capacity outcomes for educators (including creating welcoming climates, honouring family knowledge, and activating families as co-creators), families (holding diverse roles including co-creators, advocates, and monitors), and school (effective partnerships aimed at improving learning). Notably they state that the framework is not a blueprint to be exactly followed but rather a compass that provides direction through conditions and goals that should be designed for specific school contexts.

A number of easily actionable steps towards parent engagement have been advanced in literature aimed at supporting educators and are prominent in literature aimed at improving preparation programs for teachers and administrators. Multiple authors proport the value of home visits as a means to get to know families and build trust (Evans, 2013; Henderson et al., 2007; Pushor, 2013b, Pushor & Amendt, 2018; S. Smith, 2013). Well-thought-out community walks have promise for supporting educators in the important work of shifting disposition (Evans, 2013; Fitzgerald & Militello, 2016; Pushor 2013b; Pushor & Amendt, 2018). Authentic learning opportunities in the community with community members, if appropriately scaffolded, may serve to break down stereotypes and challenge assumptions (Auerbach, 2009; Evans, 2013; Faircloth, 2011; Fitzgerald & Militello, 2016; Ishimaru, 2013; Pushor, 2013b; Pushor & Amendt, 2018). Modifying school environmental factors to create a greater sense of warmth and welcome is also an important step (Faircloth, 2011; Hands, 2014; Hands & Hubbard, 2011; Henderson et al., 2007; Pushor et al., 2005).

Engaging Indigenous Families

As with most educational practices, traditional notions of parent and community involvement mirror white middle-class values (Cranston & Crook, 2020; Fitzgerald & Militello, 2016; Faircloth, 2011; Goodall, 2017; Ishimaru et al., 2016). Ishimaru and colleagues (2016) identified a divide between schools and non-dominant families who often feel as though they have less currency and/or understanding of the system. Cranston and Crook (2020) challenged hegemonic educational policies that impose middle-class white parenting values onto all families. Literature exists that is specific to developing relationships and partnerships with Indigenous families (Faircloth, 2011; Jaime & Russell, 2010; Pushor & Murphy, 2010). This literature base identifies systemic barriers unique to Indigenous people based on a history of

government and school policies that have created significant distrust with schools (Faircloth, 2011; Jaime & Russell, 2010; Pushor & Murphy, 2010). Of particular note is the legacy of residential schools in Canada that has created intergenerational trauma that impacts Indigenous people in many ways, including their connections with schools (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, n.d.). Given the way schools were weaponized against Indigenous peoples and the continual failure to address the persistent educational gaps between Indigenous students and their non-Indigenous peers, it is little surprise that Indigenous families may be suspicious of educators and schools.

Pushor and Murphy (2010) shared the experiences of mothers who felt unwelcome based on paternalistic and negative overtones from their school. Educators working with Indigenous children should make extra effort to get to know families (Faircloth, 2011; Jaime & Russell, 2010), understand and acknowledge broader familiar structures common in Indigenous communities (Faircloth, 2011; Jaime & Russell, 2010, recognize the diversity of Indigenous people (Faircloth, 2011), and encourage family voice and agency (Faircloth, 2011; Jaime & Russell, 2011; Pushor & Murphy, 2010; Stelmach, 2005).

Section Summary

Much is known about the positive impacts of parent engagement and how to foster partnerships between parents and schools. However, as Stelmach (2016) pointed out, the "rhetoric does not trump practice" (p. 286): identifying that what is written about parent engagement is seldom occurring and that more traditional forms of parent involvement are still prevalent. A common finding across the literature on parent engagement is that school-based leadership is vital in transitioning from parent involvement towards parent engagement (Auerbach, 2009; Hands, 2014; Hubbard & Hands, 2011; Pushor & Amendt, 2018).

Literature Gap

While school leadership, high-functioning high-poverty schools, poverty, culturally responsive leadership, and authentic parent engagement have been and continue to be deeply researched, and decolonizing education has been significantly theorized, these factors have not been studied together within the Saskatchewan inner-city context. The paucity of research in the Saskatchewan inner-city context is highly problematic as the urgent need for change is so

distinct. It is also notable that the clear majority of school leaders working within the inner-cities of Saskatchewan are non-Indigenous, further making this an under researched area. As Blakesley (2011) stated "studies specifically examining non-Indigenous educational leaders working in Indigenous contexts are rare" (p. 33). I hope to provide a valuable contribution to research in this vitally important area.

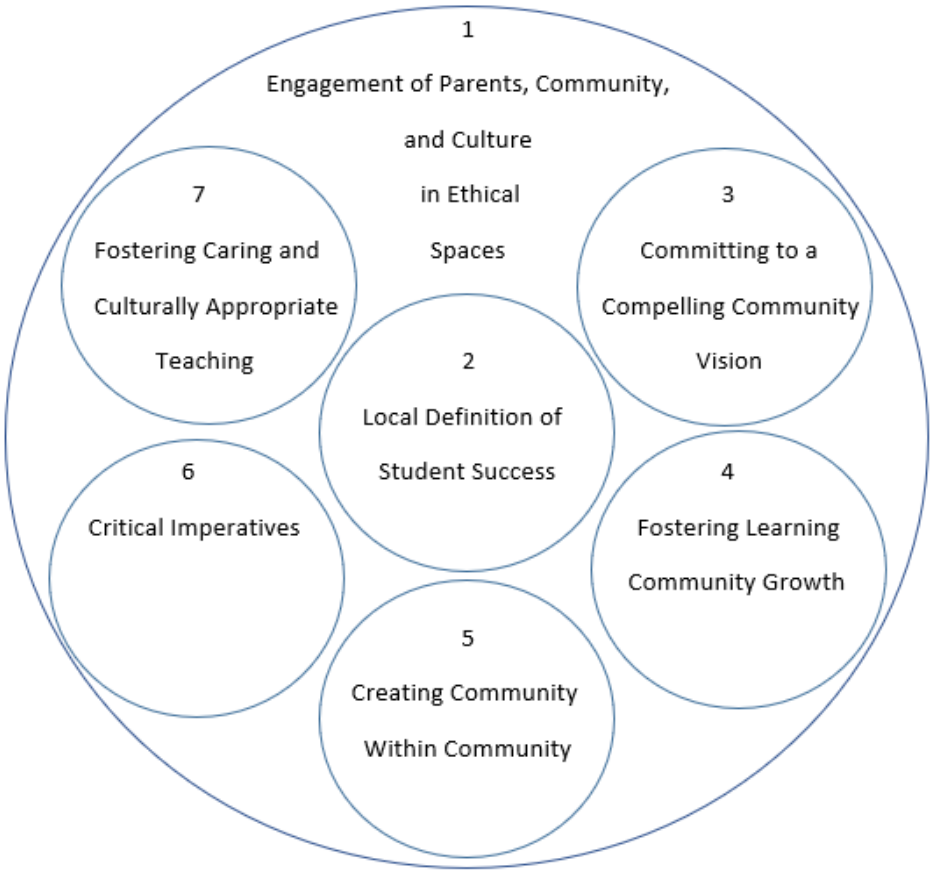
Conceptual Framework of the Study

To answer the research question: how can school leaders in inner-city schools in Saskatchewan decolonize their leadership practices to support the improvement of educational outcomes of Indigenous children living in communities affected by complex racialized poverty? I proposed the following conceptual framework that was arrived at through critical reflection on my own leadership experiences, immersion in current research, as well as insights and supportive feedback provided by Indigenous colleagues and Elders. I advance that the notions held within the following section warrant consideration and scrutiny. The proposed conceptualization of leadership should not be considered a leadership checklist that needs to be thoughtlessly enacted. Based on variance between inner-city communities and the need for communities to be authentically engaged in setting the learning vision for their schools, this conceptualization of leadership must be grounded in community, and specifically, in the community where the leaders serve.

Similar to Western notions of leadership, the proposed conceptualization of leadership is centered on student success constituted by a vision of success in which the community is authentically engaged in creating. Divergent from Western leadership models, it does not consider context as an afterthought: its foundation is culture and community. This contextually engaged leadership contains many contributions prominent in Western enactments of leadership; however, these actions grow from the foundation of culture and community and are thus informed by and accountable to the communities served. As Robinson's (2011) dimensions have been reimagined and practices within them reframed and/or regrouped, the dimensions have been renamed to more accurately represent the important actions that they hold and to lessen their paternalistic overtones. There is also a wealth of informative literature that is imperative to successful leadership within Saskatchewan's inner-city schools that is not represented in Western leadership frameworks: this collection of principles have been imagined together and are

conceived as a leadership dimension that I term “critical imperatives.” In constructing this conceptualization of leadership, I reflected on and attempted to embed the spirit of reconciliation; I believe that any educational decisions must be made in harmony with the *Calls to Action* (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). The following conversation expands on the two essential aspects of the contextually engaged conceptualization of leadership: engagement of parents, culture, and community in ethical spaces, and a local definition of student success. The five reimagined leadership dimensions are also expanded: committing to a compelling community vision, fostering learning community growth, creating community within community, the critical imperatives, and fostering caring and culturally appropriate teaching. My conceptualization is presented in Figure 2. It is notable that this conceptualization of leadership appears aligned with Saskatchewan’s previous vision of Community Schools. This was an initial conceptualization. Through the study I tested and refined the framework with members of the school community, coming to a conceptualization of leadership that is purposefully created with and for the community.

Figure 2. Initial Conceptual Model for Leadership for Saskatchewan Inner-City Schools



Engagement of Parents, Community, and Culture in Ethical Spaces

This conceptualization of leadership is premised on the requirement for the authentic activation of cultural, community, and parent knowledge in the creation and delivery of educational programs (Agbo, 2007; Anuik et al., 2010; Aylward, 2007; Battiste, 2010; Bell et al., 2004; Buckmiller, 2015; Ermine, 2007; Frawley & Fasoli, 2012; Freire, 1970; Henderson et al., 2007; Ignas, 2004; Khalifa et al., 2016; Ottmann, 2009; Paris, 2012; Priest et al., 2008; Richards et al., 2008; Saskatchewan Learning, 2004; Tenorio, 2011; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). This robust body of literature was well summarized by Baydala

et al. (2009) who stated that “Indigenous people from diverse regions of the world have documented the value of a participatory approach to educational policy and curriculum development that involves Aboriginal people’s knowledge, culture, language, and pedagogy in all aspects of decision-making” (p. 79). Tenorio (2011) argued that leadership of schooling exercised by Indigenous people living in urban settings “is imperative to the future of tribal nation sovereignty and self-determination” (p. 36). Richards et al. (2008) identified joint decision-making bodies as a key feature of British Columbia Provincial school districts that were achieving higher levels of Indigenous student success. Henderson et al (2007) argued that effective power sharing partnerships between school staff, parents, and communities are required for school improvement; additionally, the authors noted that additional attention must be given if the school staff differs from their community in race, culture, and/or social class. While it is clear that creating a state of shared ownership of the school is desirable and should positively impact educational outcomes and reconciliation efforts, welcoming Indigenous community members into an ownership role may well require additional effort given the intergenerational mistrust that many Indigenous people feel for educational systems (Agbo, 2007; Anuik & Bellehumeur-Kearns, 2014; Goulet & Goulet, 2014; Pushor, 2007) as well as current power-imbalances between educators and Indigenous parents (Faircloth, 2011; Jaime & Russell, 2010; Pushor & Murphy, 2010). Transitioning to such an approach requires a fundamental shift in community-school partnerships (Baydala et al., 2009; Ermine, 2007; Frawley & Fasoli, 2012; Freire, 1970; Ishimaru et al., 2019; G. Johnson et al., 2013; Mapp & Bergman, 2019; Paris, 2012; Priest et al., 2008; Tenorio, 2011). Reflecting on her experiences at a Saskatchewan inner-city school, Pushor (2007) called for a break from the dominant narrative of educators as the holders of information to one of educators as the guest-hosts of the community where educators stand alongside parents. Similarly, G. Johnson et al. (2018) noted that a significant challenge facing schools in remote Australian Indigenous communities was the desire for principals to come to their schools with the intention to put their personal stamp on the school. G. Johnson et al. (2018) reject this idea and argue that given the brief tenure of most principals, it is more important for school leaders to consider who has the longest tenure, the community members, and to help them make their mark on their school.

It is important to note that within inner-city communities there is a great plurality of Indigenous peoples. The plural term of “spaces” is purposely used to indicate the need to ensure recognition of important differences amongst Indigenous peoples and that all people can engage within these spaces. In order to create and maintain spaces for open, honest, and ongoing dialogue, attention must be paid to the creation of meaningful relationships as well as ensuring that voices are heard and honoured (Dempster et al., 2016; Ermine, 2007; Fulford et al., 2007; Frawley & Fasoli, 2012; G. Johnson et al., 2018; Ottmann, 2009). Partnership models have been advanced that encourage harmony between Indigenous and Western peoples and knowledges (Ermine, 2007; Frawley & Fasoli, 2012). Ermine (2007) stated that “the new partnership model of the ethical space, in a cooperative spirit between Indigenous peoples and Western institutions, will create new currents of thought that flow in different directions and overrun the old ways of thinking” (p. 203). Through these ethical spaces of engaged partnership Western notions of primacy will be appropriately challenged, creating opportunities for inclusion of Indigenous ways of knowing and being (Ermine, 2007).

It is within community-school partnerships established on the principle of ethical spaces that the power of this leadership conceptualization can be realized. In working with inner-city communities, a generative model (Ball, 2004) can be partially realized. In the honesty that must underpin community-school relations, administrators of inner-city schools need to be transparent on their dual responsibilities to both the community that they serve and to the systems in which they function. I used the term “partially realized” to note that as schools governed by both local boards of education and the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, there is a requirement to adhere to policies including provincial curricula, the Education Sector Strategic Plan, and division policies. However, there continues to remain ample scope for community leadership in influential decisions such as defining success, setting school goals, establishing norms, and influencing resource allocation which will fundamentally influence the manner in which leadership is enacted within the school (Buckmiller, 2015). This level of engagement goes beyond the current mandate of School Community Councils to a much deeper level of community engagement than is currently practiced (Preston, 2011). G. Johnson et al. (2018) argued that such authentic partnerships between Indigenous peoples and school leaders are “vital, if we want to enhance the impact of leadership activity on Indigenous children’s

achievement" (p. 7). Importantly, when students are mature enough to articulate their needs and desires they should also be engaged in this ethical dialogue about their education (Berryman et al., 2014; Freire, 1970; Quijida Cercecer, 2013).

Local Definition of Student Success

As the leadership conceptualization is centered on student success, a seminal mission for the community will be establishing its vision of success. It has been identified that traditional views of success, which are narrowed specifically to academic success, support assimilative agendas and that many families from non-dominant backgrounds support more expansive views of success (Ishimaru et al., 2016). The Canadian Council on Learning (2007, 2009) recognized a need to expand Western notions of success and created with Indigenous peoples more robust frameworks for Indigenous success. Strong recommendations from the Canadian Council on Learning (2009) included the requirement for such visions of success to be holistic, life-long, strength-based, and include elements of community wellbeing. The vison of success should be seen as a living and evolving vision that is a continually held at the center of community-school communication. One example of a more holistic view of success was offered by Brendtro and Brokenleg (2009). Brendtro and Brokenleg advanced a view of success based upon the medicine wheel which advocated for success to be based upon the interconnected notions of generosity, mastery, independence, and belonging. Importantly the vision of success must be well understood by all members of the school community as it will profoundly impact the enactment of all other leadership dimensions and the overall operations of the school.

Committing to a Compelling Community Vision

Commencing from an understanding of the community definition of success, school leaders must work with community to co-construct a compelling vision for the school. As indicated in the name of this leadership dimension, parents and community members must be authentically engaged in determining the vision for the school and thus setting direction for the educators, including school leaders. Calling upon our understanding of powerful practices from Western academics and maintaining a foundation of parent and community engagement, this leadership dimension is filled by actions of stimulating commitment to a small number of goals, monitoring progress towards goals, and holding high expectations. Importantly parents, community members, and school leaders will work in unison to develop and maintain high levels

of commitment of all community and school stakeholders to a small number of clearly articulated goals (Reeves, 2011; Sharratt & Fullan, 2009, 2012; Steeves et al., 2012; Tenorio, 2011). Working together, parents, community members, and school leaders will monitor progress towards the goals by regularly tracking progress (Flowers & Carpenter, 2009; Reeves, 2004) utilizing agreed upon assessments that may be broader in scope than typical standardized assessments (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007, 2009). It has been well documented that low-expectations of student learning are pervasive and self-fulfilling in inner-city contexts (Barone, 2006; Jensen, 2009; Leithwood, 2008; Quijida Cerecer, 2013). Together parents, community members, and school staff must harness the immense power of holding high expectations for learning (Bergstrom et al., 2003; Fisher et al., 2016; Khalifa et al., 2016) through regularly communicating high-expectations; a message that will be given strength through the common messaging from the home, community, and school.

Fostering Learning Community Growth

This important dimension includes a number of practices identified as being particularly powerful in Western research, however, I will expand these terms to more broadly reflect the desired level of community engagement in leading the school. Specifically, I use the term learning community as a comprehensive term to include all school stakeholders. A strong association has been made between the development of collective efficacy of a school's staff and their students' learning (Donohoo, 2017; Donohoo et al., 2018; Larrick, 2004). Collective efficacy is created when clear connections are made between educators' shared and purposeful actions and evidence of student learning (Donohoo, 2017; Donohoo et al., 2018). Through purposeful actions aligned with the compelling community vision, collective efficacy should be extended beyond the staff to include sharing with the community how their vision is being realized and how their contributions have been aligned with student success. If collective efficacy of a staff is so clearly linked to improved student learning, does an efficacious community not also potentially hold great promise?

Collaborative cultures should be cultivated within Saskatchewan's inner-city schools. An important aspect of a leader's role has been identified as the creation of culture and conditions in which collaborative cultures can flourish (Elmore, 2000, 2011; Flessa et al., 2010; Troen & Boles, 2011). Within this contextualization of leadership I broaden the understanding of

collaborative cultures beyond the scope of professional learning to include the important notion of the school, parents, and community working together and learning from each-other for mutual benefit (Ermine, 2007; Frawley & Fasoli, 2012; G. Johnson et al., 2018). Speaking of educators working within silos in their schools, Elmore (2000) stated that "isolation is the enemy of improvement" (p. 21). I believe it is fair to say that isolation between the school and community has impeded educational progress within inner-city communities. Collaboration appears to hold significant promise both for improved learning outcomes and also for improved relationships and understanding. Leaders will organize the learning communities' continuous growth on the compelling community vision and base it on active collaborative processes (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2016; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Mapp & Bergman, 2019).

This conceptualization of leadership is more participatory than authoritative and as such strict supervisory practices are replaced with collaborative opportunities for growth. This is consistent with relational worldview of Indigenous cultures (Kovach, 2009; S. Wilson, 2008) and with recent Western appeals (Fullan, 2014; Fullan & Hargreaves, 2016; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Western scholars have identified the significant importance of school leaders learning alongside their staff (Fullan, 2014; Robinson, 2011). Within this conceptualization the school leader will place importance on learning alongside parents, community members, and staff.

As alluded to by my use of the term school leaders, distributed leadership features prominently in this conceptualization. I use this term to mean activating the leadership of various members of the community-school team. School leaders who purposefully share leadership in areas related to student learning have been shown to have positive impacts on student learning (Leithwood et al., 2020; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2012; Robinson, 2011). In broadening the scope of the active participants in improving student learning, I believe that distributive leadership becomes paramount. As described in the Community School model (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004) leaders must be activated both from the community and the school staff. Culturally responsive leadership efforts are closely tied to the actions of school leaders and the departure of a committed leader often begins the demise of initiatives they supported (Khalifa et al., 2016). To ensure sustainability of efforts it will be imperative to ensure that the important leadership work within this conceptualization be passionately shared amongst numerous individuals from the community and staff to ensure durability even if a key leader departs.

Creating Community within Community

This leadership dimension includes important actions of creating a safe and culturally affirming school community that is embedded within and supported by the broader community. Agbo (2007) noted that schools continued to serve as colonial symbols. School leaders who embrace their role as guest-hosts (Pushor, 2007) and who work with parents and community members in an ethical space (Buckmiller, 2015; Ermine, 2007; Faircloth, 2011; Tenorio, 2011) have potential to ease colonial perceptions. However, if leaders are to change colonial perceptions, the prevalent Western underpinnings of school operation must be reconstituted. Culturally and parent affirming spaces must be created in these schools through the community shaping the expectations of the school in a manner that is congruent with cultural and community norms (Tymchak, 2001). Tied to the need for infusion of cultural and community norms is the need to focus on relationships with students and families.

Recent research conducted in Saskatchewan argues for significant attention to be paid to staff relationships with Indigenous students (Berryman et al., 2014; Stelmach et al., 2017). These findings are reinforced by international literature that also trumpet the significance of trusting, supportive, and caring relationships between teachers and Indigenous students (Bell et al., 2004; Bergstrom et al., 2004; Bishop et al., 2014). In her framework for transformative leadership, Shields (2004) included the concept of pedagogy of care to highlight the importance of relationships in successful schooling for marginalized students. She contended that relationships need to be central to our understanding of education; this concept is pertinent to the Saskatchewan inner-city context.

Another important leadership action towards blending the school into the community is the activation of the community as resources for their own school (Anuik et al., 2010; Deer, 2014; FitzGerald & Militello, 2016; H. Hunter, 2000; Ignas, 2004; Saskatchewan Learning, 2004). Attention needs to be paid to the gifts of parents, community members, and partner organizations and how they can support the growth of students and staff. Additionally, in working with the community's definition of success it will be important to create with parents and community members programs that are in alignment with the pursuit of goals. There is a growing literature base that highlights the power of programs created and conducted with Indigenous communities that target specific learning outcomes (Ball, 2004; Timmons et al.,

2008; G. Johnson et al., 2018). Parents and community members should also be involved in allocating resources assigned to the school to foster alignment with their vision.

Critical Imperatives

This dimension has been termed the critical imperatives because the actions that comprise this dimension are both critical in importance and require ongoing critical reflection particularly for leaders who are non-Indigenous. The composition of current Saskatchewan inner-city staffs does situate them well to assent to Western notions of success, accountability, parent involvement, and leadership. This necessitates higher levels of reflection and criticality for leaders and teachers alike. This dimension combines important concepts that have been well documented in literature including the need to identify bias and privilege, champion anti-racist education, be inclusive, develop cultural proficiencies and responsiveness, facilitate parent engagement, support transitioning students and families, and be trauma informed.

Young and Liable (2000) stated that "white racism is a monstrous disease" (p. 45) and they called for a greater understanding of white dominance. Cranston (2020) stated unequivocally that racism is not history but a still lived experience that plagues individuals and institutions. The need for schools to challenge wide-spread individual, institutional, and societal racism has been well documented (Battiste, 2010; Burleigh & Burm, 2014; Cranston, 2020; Khalifa et al., 2013; McIntosh, 1988; Pete et al., 2013; Peters, 2015; Quijida Cerecer, 2013; Singleton, 2015; St. Denis, 2007, 2010; Young & Liable, 2000). In order to be allies in this important work, school leaders must continually identify, critically reflect on, and challenge their own biases, privileges, and assumptions and be cognizant of these when making decisions (Cranston, 2020; MacKinnon, 2000; Peters, 2015; Shields, 2004; Singleton, 2015; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011; Wallin & Peden, 2014). Through acknowledging racism and actively working against it, school leaders can honour diversity and promote healthy inclusion (Battiste, 2010; Blackmore, 2006).

It is established that school leaders need to be culturally competent and culturally responsive (Agbo, 2007; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Furita et al., 2015; Khalifa et al., 2016; Lindsey et al., 2011; Quijida Cerecer, 2013; Steeves et al., 2012; Wallin & Peden, 2014). Despite the abundant literature on the importance of cultural responsiveness, this vital area is nearly absent in leadership frameworks and in literature on high-functioning high-poverty schools and

turnaround schools. Within my conceptualization of inner-city Saskatchewan leadership, culturally competent and culturally responsive leadership are paramount. This is fundamentally important given research findings that teachers are more likely to be culturally responsive if they have supportive administrators (Bell et al., 2004; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Khalifa et al., 2016; Peden, 2011; St. Denis, 2010). In developing cultural competence, school leaders should regularly engage with their community, seek cultural learning events, and share conversations with knowledgeable others while always maintaining an open heart and mind. School leaders can support cultural responsiveness in their schools through securing resources, supporting professional development, strategic hiring, and modelling responsiveness (Khalifa et al., 2016). Given the importance of cultural responsiveness, school leaders must make "a serious and sustained commitment" (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 982) to its enactment especially within racialized contexts such as Saskatchewan's inner-cities.

Priority must be placed on harnessing the immense power of parent engagement. School leaders must ensure sustained commitment to creating conditions which will allow for permanent shifts in paradigms held by all staff members away from those that sustain marginalizing passive parent involvement roles towards empowering familycentric parent engagement (Ishimaru et al., 2016; Pushor, 2013a; Pushor, 2015). This will require school leaders prioritizing this work and creating ongoing critical spaces for staff members to examine beliefs, biases, and practices (Evans, 2013; Faircloth, 2011; Fitzgerald & Militello, 2016; Pushor, 2013b). This significant paradigm shift requires a relational approach built on mutual trust that includes two-way communication (Fitzgerald & Militello, 2016; Graue & Hawkins, 2010; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Pushor, 2013a) as well as an appreciation for the diversity of child-rearing customs and family traditions and knowledge (Faircloth, 2011; Jaime & Russell, 2010). New paradigms must also be premised on educators looking inward to challenge themselves to consider how they will meaningfully collaborate with parents to accentuate parent knowledge in children's learning at school (Auerbach, 2009; Henderson et al., 2007; Pushor & Amendt, 2018). School leadership will be critical to ensuring this important paradigmatic and pedagogical shift occurs and is sustained (Hands, 2014; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Pushor & Amendt, 2018).

In addition to being consistently mindful of parent knowledge, privilege, racism, and culture, Saskatchewan inner-city administrators must also understand and reflect on aspects of

complex poverty. Significantly, poverty within this context includes housing instability (Brittain & Blackstock, 2015; Government of Saskatchewan, 2016; D. Smith, 1999) which in turn has led to many inner-city home insecure students transferring schools (D. Smith, 1999; Phillips, 2008). Research on school transfers highlight the deleterious effects of transfer on schooling outcomes, especially when transfers compound (Gruman et al., 2008; Temple & Reynolds, 2000). Community and school leaders will need to work together to determine community specific supports for both families in jeopardy of unwanted relocation and families who have recently joined the community. These supports should be holistic and should emphasize the importance of minimizing disruption to the development of the children.

Closely connected to poverty, there is a growing understanding of the deleterious impacts of trauma (Aguiar & Halseth, 2015; Berger & Quiros, 2014; Blitz et al., 2016; Ko et al., 2008). Given the significant trauma faced by many individuals living within impoverished communities, it is vital that educators working within Saskatchewan inner-city schools also understand and implement trauma informed practices. Ko et al., (2008) identified that individuals working in the education sector have traditionally received little or no training on trauma informed practices. The need to develop these understandings and practices is heightened within inner-city communities where community members may be living with chronic stress associated with poverty (Blitz et al., 2016) and intergenerational transmission of trauma including that stemming from attending residential schools (Aguiar & Halseth, 2015). It is also critical for school-based leaders to be aware of secondary trauma associated with the emotional burden of caring for those who have faced/are facing trauma (Berger & Quiros, 2014; Blitz et al., 2016) so that they might better look after their own and their staffs' mental health.

Fostering Caring and Culturally Appropriate Teaching

Leadership in this dimension requires working with parents, community members, and school staff to support the realization of the community vision. Well-developed literature bases guide the formation of teaching practices that should be fostered within Saskatchewan's inner-city schools. Quality teaching within this context hinges on relationships with students, families, and community, infusing Indigenous ways of knowing and being, enacting anti-racist practices, maintaining high expectations, and supporting each child as a unique individual (Goulet & Goulet, 2014; J. Martin et al., 2020). As this paper focuses on leadership in this context, rather

than teaching, each of these important areas will be only briefly addressed. As previously noted, this conceptualization of leadership is based on relationality and, therefore, development of educator's practices should be supported by the learning community as a whole. School leaders should make teacher growth a priority as teaching has a direct impact on students' learning (Gaskell & Levin, 2012; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hattie 2008; Leithwood et al., 2020; Wiliam, 2011).

There are promising models for teaching that were created for Saskatchewan students and teachers which align closely with the recommendations addressed within this dimension. *Following their Voices* is an initiative aimed at increasing educational attainment of Indigenous students through changing teacher practice (Following their Voices, n.d.). Based on the *Seeking their Voices* research project which sought to learn from Saskatchewan students and parents (Berryman et al., 2014), the *Following their Voices* initiative calls upon schools to create leadership teams focused on the purposeful improvement of relationships and pedagogy. The initiative, which began in 2014, has provided positive results and continues to expand (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2019). Goulet and Goulet's (2014) model for effective teaching was also created in Saskatchewan through interviewing and observing 15 teachers, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, who had strong reputations for supporting Indigenous student success. Saskatchewan's history of Community School education also provides clear calls for responsive instruction in caring environments (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004). I contend that Goulet and Goulet's teaching model, the teaching practices promoted by the *Following Their Voices* initiative and Saskatchewan's Community School model warrant consideration for any educator working within Saskatchewan's inner-city schools.

Given the significant percentage of Indigenous students within Saskatchewan's inner-city schools there is a need to go beyond mandated teaching of Treaty Education and tokenistic teaching of Indigenous content. Culture and language development as well as Indigenous knowledges and perspectives should be deeply embedded within pedagogy, extra-curricular activities, and community programming to the point that they are normalized in the school (Battiste 2010; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Furita et al., 2015; Goulet & Goulet, 2014; Ignas, 2004; Preston & Claypool, 2013; Preston et al., 2012; Saskatchewan Learning, 2004).

Teachers in classrooms in Saskatchewan's inner-cities must address racism. Similar to the need for school leaders to be consistently critically reflecting on their biases and privilege, it is extremely important for teachers to do so as well (Higgins et al., 2015; Korteweg & Fiddler, 2018; McIntosh, 1988; Pete et al., 2013; Peters, 2010; St. Denis, 2007). This matter is made urgent given the majority of teachers across Canada are white (Ryan et al., 2009). Korteweg and Fiddler (2018) stated "reconciliation means non-Indigenous Canadians must be held accountable by addressing ongoing settler-colonial dominance and oppression" (p. 257), specifically the authors stressed the important role that settler teachers must take in this work. Enacting an anti-racist teaching stance should allow educators to interact with the community they serve in a good way. Anti-racist teaching requires deep personal reflection on race, having respect for people of all races, understanding students and families of colour, creating classroom conditions that embrace diversity, ensuring that needs of students and families of colour are made central, holding high expectations, and implementing impactful instructional practices with a clear purpose of eliminating educational gaps (Singleton, 2015).

School leaders must work in concert with parents, community members, and school staff to ensure that Indigenous culture permeates every aspect of the school. Abundant literature identifies the importance of teachers being deeply connected to their student's families and honouring parent knowledge (Evans, 2013; Goodall, 2017; Ishimaru, 2013; Ishamaru et al., 2019; Jaime & Russell, 2010; Mapp & Bergman, 2019; Pushor, 2013a). Professional development and resources should be allocated to support staff in regularly engaging with their parents and broader classroom communities in meaningful ways (Auerbach, 2009; Evans, 2013; Faircloth, 2011; Fitzgerald & Militello, 2016; Ishimaru, 2013; Pushor, 2013b, Pushor & Amendt, 2018; S. Smith, 2013). If this conceptualization is realized, then school leaders will be knowledgeable in these areas.

School leaders must also model high expectations for learning and use formative data to drive individualized instruction. Low expectations continue to plague many schools in impoverished settings that serve primarily minority students and these low expectations are self-fulfilling (Haberman, 1995; Riley & Ungerleider, 2012). These low expectations must be checked with educators' biases and firmly dismissed (Bell et al., 2004; Bishop et al., 2014; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; D. Smith, 1999; Steeves et al., 2010). Educators must hold high

expectations for their students in a kind, yet challenging way (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Goulet & Goulet, 2014). The variance of student proficiency within each classroom necessitates the regular use of formative assessment that produces specific and actionable information to each student and subsequent differentiation of instruction to ensure student growth (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Chenoweth, 2009; Fisher et al., 2016; Goulet & Goulet, 2014; van Geel et al., 2016; Wiliam, 2011). School leaders need to support teachers in their use of data to drive student learning (Heppen et al., 2012; Newton et al., 2010; Sackney, 2011). Also important for teacher growth is the previously specified obligation for teachers to develop relationships with their students.

Chapter Summary

This chapter examined literature required to develop a greater understanding of the complexities faced by schools serving neighbourhoods in inner-cities within Saskatchewan. The review of literature highlights a paucity of literature examining the research question as well as an urgent need to conduct research in this area. The major themes examined highlight many promising practices and theories which I attempted to converge to create a proposed conceptualization of leadership created specifically for Saskatchewan inner-city schools.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

Within this chapter I describe the methodological decisions made for guiding the study. The chapter explores these decisions through my personal positioning and my understanding of Indigenous research methodology. Important areas focused on within this chapter include the formation and role of a cultural advisory committee, the role of ceremony, sources of data, the research environment, site and participant selection, data analysis, validity and reliability, and relational axiology.

Indigenous Research Methodology

While the terms Indigenous research and Indigenous methodologies may appear similar, they are not equivalent. Kovach (2018) uses the term Indigenous research as an umbrella term for any research conducted that includes Indigenous matters and as such it can be research by, for, or with Indigenous people. Indigenous research may be, and often is, conducted using Western research paradigms. Kovach (2018) identifies that Indigenous methodologies are situated under the umbrella of Indigenous research yet are distinct from other modes of inquiry.

Indigenous methodologies are fundamentally different from Western research because they are founded on the principles of Indigenous ways of being and knowing (Aveling, 2013; Kovach, 2009, 2014, 2018; S. Wilson, 2008). The tools utilized within Indigenous methodologies are based on tribal Indigenous knowledges, which have been defined as "local, culturally specific knowledge unique to a particular Indigenous population" (Castledon et al., 2008, p. 1401). Indigenous methodologies must "be and feel Indigenous" (Kovach, 2018, p. 221). Kovach (2018) stated "If you want to do Indigenous methodologies right, uphold tribal knowledge and honour the Indigenous laws of love, respect, kindness, honesty, generosity, reciprocity, and caring in your research" (p. 230). Kovach (2009, 2018) and Wilson (2008) advocate strongly for Indigenous methodologies to be understood as distinctive and robust inquiry methodologies that are feasible alternatives to Western methodologies stemming from Western paradigms.

Aveling (2013) undertook a significant literature review of work by leading Indigenous researchers from around the world. Through this she identified common themes; however, she did identify that although common, the points are not universal. Researchers need to be aware of

statements that may lead to pan-Indigenous thinking. The nine features of an Indigenous methodology identified by Aveling are: 1) research stems from Indigenous epistemology; 2) Indigenous voice is privileged; 3) research is intended to decolonize; 4) the research upholds and respects tribal knowledges; 5) cultural protocols are observed; 6) research is collaborative with and for the benefit of Indigenous peoples; 7) Indigenous methods are utilized; 8) research gives back to the communities, and; 9) self-situating within written reports is important. Each of these features are addressed within this chapter, though not in the order provided by Aveling.

Researcher Positioning

As stated in the first chapter, academic work undertaken from an Indigenous paradigm should begin with a situating of self (Aveling, 2013; Henhawk, 2013; Kovach, 2014, 2018; K. Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003). As I have already situated myself professionally and academically, here I situate myself as a critically aware non-Indigenous ally (Aveling, 2013; Peters, 2015).

Critical Awareness

Within this study I acknowledge that I am paradoxically both knowledgeable and unenlightened. My experience as a school-based leader within inner-city schools in Saskatchewan provided me with an emic view of schools and their functioning. I acknowledge, however, that working from my Western understanding of education in this study may well have provided me with similar findings to other studies that call for Westernized leadership practices that preserve detrimental practices for Indigenous students. I therefore assumed an etic view for this study by stepping back from my privileged knowledge and instead grounding the study on an Indigenous paradigm. This required both a high level of critical awareness as well as ongoing reflexivity (Henhawk, 2013; K. Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Stelmach, 2009). K. Martin and Mirraboopa (2003) stated that “reflexivity challenges us to claim our shortcomings, misunderstandings, oversights and mistakes, to re-claim our lives and make strong changes to our current realities. Being reflexive ensures we do not compromise our identity whilst undertaking research” (p. 212).

The Indigenous paradigm which I viewed as essential for this study is fundamentally different than Western ontology and epistemology (K. Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Kovach, 2009, 2018; L. Smith, 2013; Stelmach, 2009). Indigenous paradigms “ought to unsettle” the Western gaze and create opportunities to view knowledge and knowledge creation in

fundamentally different ways (Kovach, 2018). Indigenous paradigms are required to ensure that Indigenous knowledges are no longer suppressed by privileged Western knowledge systems (Kovach, 2009).

Henhawk (2013) advised the importance of locating oneself within discourses of colonization and/or decolonization and that this process creates opportunities for an awakening of critical awareness. I identified this need and interrogated my Western gaze (Kovach, 2018) which allowed me to work in a decolonizing space informed by tribal knowledge. This process of raising critical awareness was incumbent upon me as a privileged non-Indigenous researcher who worked with Indigenous people in my research (Stelmach, 2009). Western researchers have earned the mistrust of Indigenous people through "unrelenting research of a profoundly exploitative nature" (L. Smith, 2013, p. 45). I focused on individual and community strengths not deficits (Kovach, 2014; S. Wilson, 2008) and followed protocols of ethical conduct (Kovach, 2018). Most importantly I committed to building relationships with Indigenous people and communities. Incumbent upon me within this research was ensuring that I was not seen to be appropriating Indigenous culture, but rather appreciated and acknowledged the need to do the work with Indigenous community members in a good way. I ensured that I was not appropriating by always acknowledging the source of the information and always situating myself and my knowledge system within the work.

Cultural Advisory

Casteledon and colleagues, including members of the First Nation with whom they were working, (2008) recommended advisory committees be formed to represent the community as a means to ensure greater understanding and respect on the part of researchers who are not members of that community. The authors advised that cultural advisory committees can be powerful tools to understand protocols, build relationships, and create community-wide ownership over research projects (Castledon et al., 2008). Additionally, they shared that members of the advisory committee can vouch for researchers within the community and, therefore, help foster the development of relationships between the researchers and other community members. A complicator to working within inner-city contexts where there is a confluence of people from many nations is that there is no formal body or person from which to seek approval or clearly defined group with whom to engage in research development, support

with protocols, and foster relationships (Maggie Kovach, personal communication, October 6, 2017). I was challenged to look beyond a formal body, if none existed, to consult with local community members who are as representative as possible of the communities with whom I engaged (Maggie Kovach, personal communication, November 4, 2017).

Meetings and communications with members of my cultural advisory committee were utilized to help me check my own assumptions and to center tribal knowledge. Careful consideration was placed on assembling this group of advisors. My initial advisory was comprised of five individuals with whom I had previous relationships. These people together represent many nations and had significant experience working within and in support of local education systems. These individuals all resided on Treaty 6 or Treaty 4 territory. The accomplished group together included a former elected Chief, Elder, Pipe Carriers, and teachers and educational leaders with experience in both pre-K-12 and post-secondary education. Members of the cultural advisory committee played a vital role in helping guide the research process. Prior to beginning the research, conversations with advisors helped guide the design of the research as well as the formation of the initial proposed conceptualization, provided relationship support within the community, and guided my understanding of cultural protocols and ceremonies.

Once a research site was identified, two additional advisors were invited to support the study. These additional advisory members were a recognized community Elder and a parent of a local school. I had not met either of these new advisors prior to inviting them to support the study. Relationships were fostered with these community specific advisors over regular phone calls and Zoom meetings in the month before data collection began. In addition to the supports provided by the original cultural advisors, the community specific advisors also supported my understandings of the community and helped me identify areas of importance to explore.

During the collection and analysis of data I presented members of the advisory with insights from the study and asked for their thoughts on developing findings; however, they did not have access to any data or confidential information related to research participants. Once the research site was selected a few advisors also agreed to engage in the study as participants.

Starting with Ceremony

In early June 2018, weeks after finishing my comprehensive examination and before beginning the writing of this thesis, I approached a friend who is a Lakota pipe carrier with tobacco and asked for his assistance and guidance. The bond that this pipe carrier and I share has been forged over the course of many years and he has had a profound personal impact on me as my primary guide on my journey of cultural learning. For years he has called me cousin and through the closeness of our relationship I too view him as a relative. My cousin and I had a lengthy conversation around my research topic and question: he shared with me a great many insights. We discussed the need for me to develop a cultural advisory committee comprised of individuals who represented the diversity of urban Indigenous populations and had expertise in fields such as leadership, education, and culture. We also discussed a culturally appropriate manner to begin my research. A week later he and I sat together early in the morning and held a pipe ceremony where I offered tobacco and cloth and we shared prayers. Thus, began my research journey.

Sources of Data

The major distinguishing factor separating Indigenous methodologies from Western methodologies of inquiry is the paradigm on which they are founded. Kovach (2014) wrote that the term Indigenous paradigm is used to articulate an Indigenous belief system which is both ancient and evolving. Indigenous methodologies build upon Indigenous ontology which is holistic in nature and Indigenous epistemology that understands that knowledge can be created through experiential, sensory, and metaphysical means (Castellano, 2000; Kovach, 2018; Little Bear, 2014; S. Wilson, 2008). Additionally, Indigenous epistemology acknowledges that there is great interconnectivity and fluidity in knowledge and that knowledge can arise from multiple sources including non-human entities (Kovach, 2018; Little Bear, 2014). Wilson (2008) stated that our belief systems influence the way that we do things which includes our research methodologies. Wilson (2008) reasoned that “as long as the methods fit the ontology, epistemology and axiology of the Indigenous paradigm, they can be borrowed from other suitable research paradigms” (p. 39). Therefore, the true difference in studies employing Indigenous methodologies is not necessarily the research tools ultimately selected for the

purpose of the study but rather the researcher's ontological and epistemological positioning in the study, his/her Indigenous paradigm.

Conversational Method

In keeping alignment with an Indigenous paradigm the primary data collection method utilized for this study was the conversational method. Kovach (2010) identified many names that are utilized to describe very similar methods of inquiry and ultimately settled on the term conversational method. The abundance of names used to describe the same method implies the extensive use of the tool within studies conducted from an Indigenous paradigm. This widespread use is no surprise as Kovach (2009, 2010, 2018) explained that the conversational method is fully compatible with Indigenous ways as it is "rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing and being" (2018, p. 226) and "is relational at its core" (2010, p. 40). Although conversational methods such as semi-structured interviews and focus groups exist within Western research paradigms, Kovach (2010) contended that when utilized from an Indigenous paradigm the conversational method is fundamentally different. Kovach (2010) identified the unique features of Indigenous conversational method as being grounded in tribal knowledges, relationality, involving protocols specific to the community, purposefully aiming to emancipate from colonization, and the flexible, informal, collaborative, reflexive, and dialogic nature of the conversations (p. 43). Thomas (2005) stated that conversations needed to be unstructured to meet these unique qualities that are mandated when adhering to an Indigenous paradigm.

Chilisa (2012) made multiple recommendations on how to appropriately conduct interviews following a postcolonial Indigenous framework. These recommendations included starting with ceremony which may include the sharing of tobacco or other important cultural items. Introductions should take place at the beginning of the interview and must include the researcher situating themselves within the work and in relation with participants. Other recommendations included: ensuring to ask questions one at a time and avoid asking loaded questions, ensuring that the respondent is given time to fully answer, affirming and validating responses, and attempting to end the conversation on a positive note. Cohen and colleagues (2018) provided similar insights into conversations conducted with individuals from marginalized groups. These recommendations were adhered to in all conversations with advisory members and in all research conversations with participants.

Description of Study Environment

The study seeks to understand school-based leadership within inner-city communities impacted by complex racialized poverty. Site selection was purposive in attempting to find a community with a high population of Indigenous peoples who faced complex racialized poverty. The community demographic will be addressed in significant detail in the fourth chapter through the words and artifacts shared by participants.

Site and Participant Selection

As this study aimed to better understand leadership practices within a community impacted by complex racialized poverty within the province of Saskatchewan. Participant selection was conducted using purposive sampling (Cohen et al., 2018; Tongco, 2007). Purposeful sampling based on either tight or lose criteria is common in studies of schools serving in low-income neighbourhoods (for example see Chenoweth, 2007; Kearney et al., 2011; Parker & Flessa, 2011), in studies of leaders who center their work on equity (for example see Archambault & Garon, 2013; Shields, 2010; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011), and in studies that examine schools with high Indigenous populations (for example see Bell et al., 2004; Fulford et al., 2007; D. Smith, 1999). For this study, I originally intended to spend significant time in a single school community that could serve as a case study. In trying to identify an appropriate site, the school needed to meet four criteria. First, the school had to be located within one of Saskatchewan's largest five urban centers of Saskatoon, Regina, Prince Albert, Moose Jaw, or North Battleford. Secondly, the school had to be located within a neighbourhood that is considered to be economically disadvantaged. Third, the school was required to have a majority of its population be Indigenous students. Finally, the school had to be an elementary school. As further described below, the Covid-19 pandemic challenged my site and participant selection and the study overall.

Site Selection

After successfully defending the proposal for this project in November 2019, I submitted my behavioural ethics application to the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board in January 2020. With a few minor revisions, I was granted a certificate of approval on March 11, 2020 (see Appendix A). I was eager to begin seeking a school division and school that would participate in the study. On March 15, I submitted a request for ethics approval to the

school division which would ultimately participate in the study. On March 16, the Government of Saskatchewan announced that given the global Covid-19 pandemic that all schools were to close effective March 20 (Government of Saskatchewan, 2020). The methods of my study had to shift significantly as I could no longer be present in the school, and the number of participants to whom I had access reduced significantly. Members who did participate in the study still offered commentary about their local school experience, but the intent of the work shifted from focusing on the school as a case study, to focusing on the conceptualization of the Community School model.

Given the closure of schools I was concerned about the feasibility of the study proceeding. In late March I reached out to my cultural advisors to gain insight into whether it was possible to proceed. Cultural advisory members helped me reimagine how to fulfill cultural protocols if the study were to take place largely through virtual settings. These minor changes included making traditional offerings, such as offering tobacco, through a conversation by phone or through a virtual meeting space with the promise of delivering the offering to the person when time and restrictions allowed. With the support of advisory members, my intention to offer participants a warm drink and a snack was remade into an offer to have a warm drink and snack delivered to them via a food delivery company. Cultural advisory members suggested that these minor changes would be sufficient, especially if I had a previous relationship with the participant.

I was bolstered by the advice of advisory members who supported the study moving forward, but was concerned given the upheaval school divisions were facing as to whether I would be able to get approval from a school division or a school. I was granted approval from that school division to conduct the study on April 22. Participants for the study included teachers and leaders of the school that had both the highest percentage of self-declared Indigenous student population and was located in the neighborhood with the lowest median personal income.

Participant Selection

With the support of the principal and cultural advisors I sought out participants using a snowball method whereby supporters of the study helped connect me with individuals identified as potential contributors who had expressed an interest in participation. In the end the study had

eleven participants. Participants came from two broad categories, participants from an inner city school and community, and those from the school division and broader urban community. Participants from the school community included an Elder, a kookum, principal, vice-principal, a language and culture teacher, and a health nurse. Participants from the broader school division and community included a superintendent and four Indigenous educators each with significant leadership experience. The participants represented the diversity of Indigenous people in the community that was being studied. Participants were invited to participate in research conversations created in alignment with Indigenous methodologies and specifically the conversational method (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Thomas, 2005).

Data Collection and Analysis

The first recorded conversation occurred on May 28 with the principal. In total eleven recorded conversations occurred between May 28 and June 25, one with each participant. Conversations ranged from 40 minutes to just over an hour and a half with an average length of 66 minutes. Of note, as many of the conversations occurred when strict physical distancing procedures were in place, most of the conversations in late May and early June occurred through Zoom, a virtual meeting platform. For conversations in later June some participants asked to meet in person; these requests were granted provided that all protocols of the local health authority and the organization in which the conversation occurred were strictly adhered to. At the participant's request, one conversation occurred over the phone. Participants are introduced in the participant's section at the beginning of chapter four.

Data

Data collection adhered to all practices outlined in the behavioural ethics package for the study. Conversations, either in-person or using technology, adhered to the principles of the conversational method. Transcripts were created and coding and analysis conducted.

Conversations

Intention was placed into the planning for all research conversations. In addition to planning conversations in alignment with the principles of the conversational method (Chilisa, 2012; Kovach 2009, 2010), I also consulted with members of my cultural advisory. A female

Elder was particularly insightful in helping plan for respectful and engaging conversations. Her insights aligned well with what I already understood of the conversational method, but also enhanced my thinking. She shared with me the importance of relationship and of acknowledging generosity of the participants. She also helped me understand that it was important to be able to listen even if the conversation became negative or challenging. She supported me in thinking about how to reframe possible negativity back onto a positive path. To this end she offered suggestions including inviting participants to imagine and discuss a more positive aspirational state. Prior to engaging in research conversations, I also benefited from insights shared by committee member Dr. Debbie Pushor who met with me for coffee shortly after my proposal defense. During our conversation Dr. Pushor suggested that research conversations could look very much like the informal conversation that we were currently sharing over hot beverages. She also recommended taking notes during the conversation to capture important thoughts that I hoped to revisit or to engage in further conversation about. With these additional insights I embarked on planning for research conversations.

Given the importance of relationship in the conversational method (Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2009, 2010) I was fortunate to have had previous relationships with almost all of the participants. Additionally, in a number of cases, the participants also had relationships with members of my family and/or friends. These previous relationships with participants afforded me starting points for conversations where trust was already developed and where I already had some insights into their work and their areas of passion. With the one participant who was unknown to me prior to the study we had a phone call prior to their commitment to the study. During this pre-conversation we chatted and discussed the study. This pre-conversation allowed me to begin to build relationship and to learn a bit more about the participant prior to a recorded conversation.

Each research conversation started and concluded with some opening small talk to help start and end the conversation in a good way with the recording device not running. The opening prompt with the recording device turned on was a request for the participant to introduce themselves in the way that they would like to be introduced within the study. This opening prompt led to rich descriptions of themselves. Beyond the participant introductions there was no formal order to the conversation. Participant introductions always offered interesting insights that

launched our conversation naturally into topics which the participant had presented. For each conversation I prepared a note page with reminders that included advice from advisors as well as questions that I was hoping we would discuss within the conversation. The questions asked of each participant were similar yet differentiated based on their role within the school and community. Questions on the note page were in bulleted form as reminders only. They were designed this way to ensure that I would ask them in a manner and order that flowed within the conversation.

Given the overarching research question, each conversation included questions about leadership within inner-city schools which often included conversation on current observations, aspirational state, as well as barriers and promising practices. Questions common across each conversation included asking about inner-city communities and schools, barriers that were faced by students and families, thoughts on success, quality teaching, partnerships, parent and community engagement, as well as promising practices. These areas of questioning were also explored to ascertain participants' thoughts on a desired future state and how we might achieve it. Each conversation provided significant flexibility to flow where the conversation naturally went. Conversations concluded with an opportunity for participants to share final thoughts or to ask questions of me. My note sheets were vital to the success of the conversations as I was able to ensure that topics I hoped to cover were discussed and was able to bring the conversation back to salient points that warranted further exploration. In the end each conversation was unique to the participant, and although the themes related primarily to the elements of the conceptual model, the conversational structure allowed emergent themes to develop that helped to extend its elements.

Transcripts

Each recorded conversation was transcribed in its entirety. Transcriptions from the first data collection window were completed by either the student researcher or a confidential transcriber in June and early July. Conversations that occurred during the supplemental data collection window were all transcribed in their entirety by the student researcher. Completed transcripts were emailed to participants for verification. Once verified, transcripts were loaded to NVivo 12 software.

Coding and Analysis

Descriptive coding (Cohen et al., 2018; Saldaña, 2015) began in late July and August. Using NVivo 12, I assigned words and phrases to passages from transcription texts. Links between codes were examined and clusters of codes were identified which became themes (Saldaña , 2015). Ensuring that I was not coding in isolation, I maintained contact with members of my cultural advisory and shared with them codes that I saw emerging as well as areas I intended to pursue further with participants who were willing to engage in additional research conversations.

As confidence around the themes developed, I undertook a round of member checking (Cohen et al., 2018; Saldaña, 2015) at the beginning of second conversations where emerging themes, especially those that presented strongly in their own first conversations were discussed for accuracy and feedback. After the supplemental data collection was complete, additional rounds of coding were conducted, this additional round of coding ultimately led to the development of themes.

Supplemental Data Collection

Given the challenges presented by the Covid-19 Pandemic, it was difficult to make contact with all intended participant groups. While one caregiver from the school was interviewed during the month of June, I did hope to fulfill my initial hope to have a sharing circle to include more parent voice. To this end, in consultation with cultural advisors, the principal, and the participating school division ethics chair, I extended the research window into the fall and winter of 2020 to allow for additional data collection. My hope was that given a summer of physical distancing, Covid-19 infections would have diminished to the point where the research activities, including sharing circles with parents, could have progressed as originally intended.

My optimism for a fall climate more conducive to research was met with rapid growth in Covid-19 cases. Return to school plans for the 2020-21 school year were highly restrictive. Students and staff returned to in-person learning with strict safety guidelines including restrictions on visitors which limited my access to the school as well as access of parents and community members. These pandemic-imposed challenges led to a methodological pivot from

the original design of a case study primarily examining a particular inner-city school. The study proceeded with voice from members of a school, its community, and school division as they collectively informed my understanding of inner-city leadership. Given that the number of participants from the selected school and community remained at only six, I do not claim this to be a case study of a school. Rather, I reframed the study as an opportunity to examine leadership and to test and refine a leadership conceptualization with the support of members of one school community, school division, and broader community. Given the continuing safety parameters I continued the supplemental data collection window much the same as I had the first data collection window.

Health restrictions placed on schools demanded staff to work in ways in which they had never faced before. Given the realities facing staff, students, and families, I did not seek to resume data collection until school staff had time to acclimate to pandemic protocols. The majority of supplemental data collection occurred in late November and December, aside from one conversation with a participant who did not work in the school system which occurred in late September. Given the continued challenges of connecting with individuals, the supplemental data collection consisted of follow-up conversations with participants.

Second conversations afforded me the opportunity to member check themes from participants' first interviews and to gain significant new insights (Cohen et al., 2018; Saldaña, 2015). Each conversation in this round began with a review of my key thoughts from the conversation. This allowed me to check my understandings and biases and to prompt for additional insights. Themes that had emerged from the first round of conversations that had not been explored in their first conversation were also shared and they were invited to provide insight into that theme. I also shared with each participant an interesting non-theme that I had noticed which was a lack of conversation about School Community Councils. Participants were also provided with a condensed version of the proposed leadership conceptualization which had been revised based on the initial round of data collection. In total, nine participants engaged in second research conversations.

After transcripts had been approved by participants, another round of coding took place which included the new transcripts. As themes from the first interviews were shared with

participants, a number of these themes were further reinforced. Given that the model was discussed directly, several new codes specific to leadership and the proposed conceptualization were also formed. I engaged in another round of sorting my minor codes and themes and ultimately concluded this second round of analysis with the eight themes presented in the next chapter.

Field Notes Journal

From the beginning of the study, I kept a field notes journal which served as an important repository for tracking events and my thinking related to the study. Prior to data collection, the journal was used to track main ideas from conversations with cultural advisors and decisions that would impact the design of the study. Once research conversations began, the journal allowed me to track important aspects of the conversations including the provision of verbal consent by participants as well as to provide supplemental background on the conversations as Cohen et al (2018) noted that transcripts themselves are "decontextualized, abstracted from time and space, from the dynamics of the situation, from the live form, and from the social, interactive, dynamic and fluid dimensions of their source" (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 523). Cohen et al. (2018) made a series of recommendations for researchers keeping field notes. Key recommendations included maximizing recall of events by making notes in as timely a fashion as possible; keeping notes in secure computer files instead of in handwriting, and ensuring that notes are satisfactorily complete to ensure that the notes make sense even after some time has passed. Following these recommendations, my journal was kept in a secure computer file which were typed within hours of the completion of conversations with advisors or participants. The journal was also a tool that helped me remain aware of my own thoughts and biases and their potential impact on the analysis of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) as such notes were also added during the analysis and the writing of chapters four, five, and six.

Trustworthiness, Validity, and Reliability

When utilizing an Indigenous research paradigm "the ultimate test of the validity of knowledge is whether it enhances the capacity of people to live well" (Castellano, 2000, p. 33). I firmly believe that the research I have undertaken is in alignment with this statement. Additionally, I have honoured the voices of those generous enough to share knowledge with me.

When using the conversational method, the importance of representing peoples' voices in a good way is paramount (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Thomas, 2005). Thomas (2005) indicated that there is a lot that can be gleaned from stories but he argued that first the researcher must learn to listen. Castellano (2000) took this notion of readiness to listen and learn a different way when she wrote about the importance of the context of the stories and the storyteller's need for awareness of whether the listener would be ready to use their new knowledge responsibly. Wilson (2008) also warned about the need to understand the context of stories, including where the storyteller is at in their own journey. These cautions about the need for listening in a good way, using lessons responsibly, and understanding context are further evidence of the need for trusting relationships prior to entering into the conversational method (Kovach, 2009). Throughout the study, I was committed to being the best listener that I could be to ensure that stories were represented with as much reliability as possible.

A huge part of the need for trust is the import of ensuring that the story is accurately portrayed as it moves from oral representation to print (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009, 2018). Thomas (2005) shared that storytelling "allows storytellers to use their own voices and tell their own stories on their own terms" (p. 242). A potential complicating factor in the re-storying is that the story must go through the filter of the researcher on its way to print (Kovach, 2018). Archibald (2008) shared that many Indigenous stories have lost their meaning as well as educational and social value due to poor translation; essentially the storytellers have lost their voice, stories, and their terms. The conversational method is a method that is congruent with Indigenous ways and therefore requires significant attention to methodology and axiology to ensure that it is conducted and represented in a good way. It was imperative that I maintain fidelity to the original intention of the story and that the spirit of the oral tradition is maintained (Archibald, 2008; Kovach 2018).

To ensure that the data and findings presented in the next three chapters represent with fidelity what participants wanted me to report, the following actions were implemented. Each transcript was shared in its entirety with the participant for verification and changes were made to the transcripts to represent the wishes of participants as required. Each of the second research conversations began with the researcher sharing important learning gleaned from the first conversation as well as themes that had emerged from the collective round of conversations, with

a special emphasis on themes that were significant within the first conversation with that participant and themes that the researcher found unexpected. Prior to second research conversations, I also shared the revised leadership conceptualization and highlighted aspects that had been added or modified as a result of the first conversations. Participants were invited to critique the conceptualization and to provide insights into elements that were not strong enough or were missing. Throughout analysis of the first and second round of data collection, many conversations were held with cultural advisors, especially the community female Elder, who provided important insights and support.

Relational Axiology (Ethics)

Often Indigenous research has been of an extractive nature and harm has been inflicted on individuals and/or communities (Kovach, 2009; S. Wilson, 2008). Given the harm that has been caused by research, it is imperative that any research involving Indigenous people and/or communities be particularly purposeful in ensuring high ethical standards (Kovach, 2018; Tri-Council, 2008). Chapter 9 of the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (Tri-Council, 2008) was created as a framework for ensuring ethical conduct when researching with Indigenous peoples in Canada. One of the major premises of the chapter is that engaging with the community is fundamental to research with Indigenous peoples. The chapter outlines community engagement principles that should be adhered to; however, many of these principles are difficult to apply to the inner-city setting in which I have conducted research as there is no overarching political body, such as chief and council. I believe that Indigenous school-community members who have interest in the school in which I have conducted research meet the description from Chapter 9 of a community of interest. Pursuant to article 9.4, communities of interest are considered communities for the purpose of research and therefore community engagement efforts must be undertaken. However, these may differ from efforts in formal communities as leadership may be highly fluid and less well defined. I have consulted Chapter 9 in all aspects of the creation and conduct of this study.

Kovach (2018) referred to the ethical standards that must govern Indigenous research as “big E” ethics. Indigenous methodologies are governed by relational axiology and must strictly

adhere to principles of relational accountability (Kovach, 2009; S. Wilson, 2008); these principles can be seen in the four Rs.

The Four Rs

In 1991, Kirkness and Barnhardt argued that North American universities needed to scrutinize themselves and to move towards the creation of spaces that are more empowering for Indigenous students. In their article they presented four important notions that needed to be addressed to create a more empowered state for Indigenous learners: respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility. These terms have since been adopted by leading scholars of Indigenous research methodologies and are considered vital when conducting research with Indigenous people and communities (Kovach, 2009; Wallin & Peden, 2014; S. Wilson, 2008). Wilson (2008) utilizes three of these terms and Kovach (2009) adds the additional importance of relevancy.

Respect

Respect is paramount to Indigenous methodologies (Kovach, 2009; S. Wilson, 2008; Chilisa, 2012). Researchers must ensure that they are consistently acting in a manner which is respectful of cultural protocols, traditions, and knowledges, as well as people. As research is relational, it is incumbent upon researchers to be seeking to build stronger relationships built on respect; it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure this relational capital is developed (Kovach, 2018). Kovach (2018) stated that a researcher, even a non-Indigenous one, can utilize Indigenous methodologies if they are committed to "an ongoing mutual relationship with Indigenous peoples" (p. 224).

Throughout the study I have privileged the important notion of respect. I have respected Indigenous people and cultures through my learning, and participation in ceremony, and relationships formed prior to undertaking the study. Importantly, I have built respect through the relationships that I have formed and strengthened during the study. I have been purposeful in privileging Indigenous cultures in the study by honouring the advice provided by cultural advisors. Respect for Indigenous culture was also shown through utilizing oral consent for participation in the study and honouring protocols for asking for the sharing of knowledge. Adhering to the principles of the conversational method promoted respect by asking participants

to share on areas of importance to them, allowing each participant to help shape the direction of the study. The results of the study acknowledge the uniqueness of Indigenous peoples and uphold the importance of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing. Through member checking and sharing insights of the study with advisors, I hold that the findings of the study are respectful of participants sharing with me and represent the collective voice that I have been empowered to share. Further, I have displayed respect for the generous sharing of advisors and participants by ensuring that the lessons I have learned throughout the study have been engrained in aspects of my life outside of the study.

Reciprocity

The extractive and harmful manner in which much research of/with Indigenous people has taken place necessitates this principle. Kovach (2009) stated that "a relational research approach is built upon the collective value of giving back to the community" (p. 149). This reciprocity means that the research must be meaningful for the community, however, Kovach (2009) also stressed the importance that academic sharing of knowledge plays in reciprocity.

Pandemic restrictions have thus far hampered meaningful opportunities to give back to the school and community. Once the study has concluded and this document has been defended, I will provide opportunities to school staff as well as parents and community members to share what I have learned in a manner that makes sense to them. I will also make myself available to the staff and community as a resource and will support actions that they may choose to take as a result of the findings. Importantly I will also provide a copy of this report to the participating school division and will offer opportunities to disseminate information to division leadership. I am also committed to the academic sharing of knowledge gained through the study through scholarly activities such as presentations and publications.

Relevancy

Related to reciprocity, Kovach (2009) highlights the importance of the relevancy of research conducted within Indigenous communities to the community itself. She noted that relevancy "is integral to giving back" (p. 149) and argued that this requires researchers to base research on community needs. Kovach (2018) urged researchers to be cognizant that findings be disseminated to the community in an accessible form, what she termed the "Uncle Paul or Auntie Doris principle" (p. 230).

Given my professional experiences, considerable reading, and checking with participants and cultural advisors, I am confident that the current study will have relevance to both community members and members of the participating school and division staff. To ensure relevancy of the study I have employed the conversational method to enable participants to share what is most meaningful to them and thus have empowered participants to help shape the findings of the study. As the study concludes I will ask both participants and cultural advisors about the best way for me to disseminate research findings to ensure that results are accessible. Ideally, through the dissemination of findings there will be opportunities to add to relevancy by contributing to capacity building of staff and community members in areas of their own identification. As explored at the conclusion of chapter five I have also identified through the study a number of questions related to what I have learned in the study which I am interested in pursuing further

Responsibility

It is important that researchers ensure that they are fulfilling their responsibilities within research (Kovach, 2009, 2018; S. Wilson, 2008); this encompasses the other three Rs. The researcher must be responsible for fostering strong relationships and for ensuring appropriate protocols are respected. Responsibility also falls on the researcher to ensure that they are purposeful in forming opportunities for reciprocity and are working to ensure relevance. Kovach (2009) concluded that "Indigenous inquiry calls forth the inherent stewardship responsibilities. In both its procedure and consequences, Indigenous inquiry asks researchers to demonstrate how research has given back to individual and collective good" (p. 174).

I have acted responsibly in all aspects of the research process by remaining committed to cultural procedures and ceremonies. I have designed the study with the intent to minimize any harm to participants. I have designed the study to examine a question that I believe is vitally important and activated cultural advisors in shaping the study at all stages. I have been responsible to participants by ensuring opportunities for member-checking. I believe that I am also showing responsibility by contributing to a greater good by hopefully having an impact on changing leadership practices and improving schooling opportunities for Indigenous students in inner-city schools.

Informed Consent

The principle of informed consent has been adhered to. This principle "requires that prospective participants in research are provided with information about the project in which they are being invited to participate that is sufficiently full and accessible for their decision about whether to take part to be considered informed" (Wiles et al., 2006, p. 83). Care was placed on ensuring that participants' volunteerism was maintained and that they did not feel as though they had been coerced into participation by the researcher or the school principal (Cohen et al., 2018). Some cultural groups view written consent as problematic and have other traditionally appropriate means of granting consent, including verbal consent (Cohen et a., 2018; Wiles et al., 2006). Given that many participants in this study were Indigenous people, I offered two potential paths to granting informed consent.

The first method offered is the traditional Western method of providing informed consent in writing. This involved the provision of a document outlining the purpose and procedures of the study (See Appendix B), the option to freely withdraw from the study at any time without adverse effects, and an opportunity to ask any questions of the researcher. One participant opted for this method.

The second method aligns with ways of being of Indigenous people. It includes the gifting of tobacco, or other culturally meaningful items, and a handshake agreement (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009; Tri-Council, 2008). Cultural advisors supported my understanding of making an offering for oral consent. Upon advice of advisors, First Nations participants were offered tobacco and Métis participants were offered tea. When a participant opted for verbal consent all relevant information shared in the written form was shared verbally as the relational agreement to participate in the study was formed. In the event of multiple interviews, verbal consent was confirmed prior to each conversation. The only written documentation of the agreement was notation kept within my research log. This method was selected by ten participants.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

The participating schools' and individuals' rights to privacy have been observed. I have protected confidentiality of participants by assigning individuals, the school and community pseudonyms. I provided participants the opportunity to select their own pseudonym. No

identifying information was attached to transcripts and connecting information will be kept separately in my secure research journal. It is common to identify schools by name, especially when highlighting positive aspects such as success working within neighbourhoods of poverty or being at the cutting edge in culturally responsive pedagogy (for example see Baydala et al., 2009; Bell et al., 2004; Carter, 1999, 2000; Chenoweth, 2007, 2009; Fulford et al., 2007). However, it is noteworthy that within this study, the school's anonymity has not been waived given the sensitivity of topics that have been brought forward by participants who may be easily identified in these local spaces.

Chapter Summary

The design of the study adhered to the tenets of Indigenous methodology. In the creation of this study, I have been purposeful in addressing all of the principles of an Indigenous research paradigm as identified by Aveling (2013). As such this study has been grounded in Indigenous epistemology, privileges Indigenous voice, has a clear decolonizing aim, respects sacred knowledges, observes cultural protocols, is collaborative with Indigenous peoples, utilizes storytelling, aims to give back to the community being researched, and includes my own self-situation. I have also consulted Chapter 9 of the Tri-Council Policy Statement as well as a number of works by leading Indigenous researchers to ensure that I have adhered to a high-level of ethical standard.

Chapter Four: Findings

Presentation of Collected Data

This chapter outlines the timeline of the study as well as the context in which the study was conducted. The community, school, and participants are introduced. Data collection and analysis are briefly explored. The chapter concludes with a detailed examination of the major themes for the study.

Study Context

This section introduces the context of the study within the historical events that transpired during the study timeframe, as well as through an introduction of the participating school division and school.

Covid-19

The world changed rapidly in the winter of 2019/2020. Writing for the Canadian Health Network, Bronca (2020) recounted a timeline of the Covid-19 Pandemic. The virus first emerged in the Chinese City of Wuhan in the Hubei Province in December as a mystery pneumonia. Despite efforts to contain the virus, including quarantining the city of Wuhan, international travel allowed the virus to breach international borders. By early March the virus was spreading rapidly in countries including Italy and Iran, prompting the World Health Organization to declare Covid-19 a pandemic on March 11 (Bronca, 2020).

At the same time as international confirmed cases of Covid-19 were rapidly rising, Canada too saw an increase in cases. Early on these cases were linked to travel to China, however, they soon began to be linked to travel to other countries not known to have significant Covid-19 outbreaks such as the United Kingdom, India, and the United States. The significant number of new Canadian cases led to community transmission, including transmission at large conferences and gatherings. On March 24 Canadian officials announced that local transmission had become the primary source of new Canadian Covid-19 cases. By this time Canadian federal, provincial, and municipal governments were enacting measures in an attempt to slow transmission rates. These measures included promotion of hand hygiene, limitations on gatherings, closing non-essential business, and closure of schools (Bronca, 2020). Canadian

citizens, like citizens of many other nations, found themselves adjusting to a seemingly new world in which staying at home, maintaining physical distance, and virtual meetings became the norm. Educators felt an immediate impact, as Morris and Chapman (2020) stated "in what seemed like an instant, public schooling was fundamentally changed as educators quickly responded to the need for remote instruction" (p. 1).

Protests Against Systemic Racism

Sobo et al. (2020) likened systemic racism to the other pandemic of the day when they stated powerfully that racist police brutality was an "endemic plague" (p. 2). On May 25, 2020, while much of the world's population were under social distancing and self-isolation orders, African American man George Floyd was killed by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin while three other officers stood by. Video of Floyd's murder catalyzed renewed vigor for the *Black Lives Matter* (BLM) movement. In the following days and weeks, massive protests emerged across the United States, as well as in other countries. Sobo et al. (2020) stated "waves of solidarity have pulsed through US streets and now are surging internationally in protests, demonstrations, and vigils" (p. 1). These surging protests targeted the police violence perpetuated against African Americans and more generally systemic racism.

Prior to Floyd's murder, Covid-19 dominated news media; after his death, police brutality and systemic racism proliferated North American discourse. The prominence of the American protests prompted many organizations to make public statements against systemic racism (see for example Ottmann, 2020). It also forced Canadians to examine systemic racism at home especially that which has been constructed to oppress Indigenous people (see for example Morin, 2020; Slaughter & Singh, 2020). The murder of George Floyd caused a significant disruption in North America and forced Canadians to notice, talk about, and learn about racism. It was during this time of heightened personal and societal reflection that the conversations for this study took place.

Saskatchewan Urban School Division

The participating school division is referred to by the pseudonym Saskatchewan Urban School Division (SUSD). SUSD is a large urban school division providing prekindergarten (PreK) to grade 12 education across many elementary (PreK to grade 8) and high schools (grade

9-12). The schools within the school division are located in neighbourhoods with diverse socioeconomic profiles. SUSD has significant diversity in its student population. It is notable that most of the self-declared Indigenous students in the school division attend schools that are geographically clustered in lower socio-economic neighbourhoods, with roughly half of all Indigenous students in the school division attending a quarter of the schools. Many schools, especially those in more affluent communities, have very low (fewer than 10%) self-declared Indigenous student populations. Most of the schools with a high percentage of Indigenous students are mature buildings in need of significant repair; many of these are century old schools closely resembling pictures of residential schools.

Urban Core

The urban center has four socio-economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods that are adjacent to each other near the city's downtown. These neighbourhoods are often referred to as the urban center's core neighbourhoods. Information available on the urban center website indicated that the median personal income for these four neighbourhoods is $27,092 per year which is significantly below the urban center average. A quarter of the residents of these neighbourhood have a personal income below $15,000 per year. In recent years some of these neighbourhoods have seen significant gentrification with some original homes being replaced by new builds.

The elementary schools in the core neighbourhoods offer PreK to grade 8 programing. Across the schools, the student population has been in decline over the past few years, and they are now some of the least populous schools in SUSD. Despite the low student numbers, the schools do have some of the largest cohorts of Indigenous students in SUSD with well over half of the students in each school having self-declared their status as First Nations or Métis people.

Introduction of Participants

For the purposes of confidentiality, demographic information that would make participants identifiable has been intentionally omitted. All participants are referred to by pseudonyms. The local school referred to by some participants has been given the pseudonym Prairie Sage Community School (PSCS). Participants from PSCS include a school Elder, a

kokum, a health nurse, teacher, and administrators. Participants from SUSD and the community include significant leaders in SUSD and local Indigenous organizations.

Joe

Joe is veteran member of the PSCS staff. He was raised on a First Nation near the urban center in which he now lives. He was raised by his mother who spoke a variety of Indigenous languages, but she did not speak English. He considers himself lucky to have been raised in a linguistically diverse home and considers English "hard to use because it doesn't really explain what you're trying to say." He has vast teaching experience across a wide variety of school settings both at the high school and elementary level but shares that he has found his niche in his current position. For well over a decade, he has split his time between PSCS and another nearby inner-city school as the Cree language and culture teacher. He recognizes that his position is unique, important, and challenging. As he speaks, he frequently infuses Cree words and ideas to help emphasize his points; his pride in his culture and language are immediately evident. He stated, "I was fortunate to keep my language and to be able to share it."

Helen

Helen is a health nurse based out of a local health center. As part of her assignment, she supports a number of schools. Helen has 20 years of experience as a health nurse and has worked in a wide variety of neighbourhoods and supported schools representing a wide range of socio-economic realities. She stated that she prefers to work in Community Schools due to them usually being smaller in size allowing for her to form stronger relationships with the school community. Given the greater health needs in the inner-city neighbourhoods, she feels a great impact of her work. She works closely with school staff to support the community and regularly attends school events.

Margaret

Margaret is a Cree kokum who raises her grandchild who attends PSCS. She identifies the First Nation of which she is a member, but also noted that she was not raised there and as a result, she does not know a lot about the reservation or life there. She spent most of her life living and raising her family in another major urban center in the province. She is a mother of

six, has 26 grandchildren, and raises foster children. She was forced to step back from her work as a caregiver for youth and the elderly due to an accident that has had lasting effects. Despite recently moving out of the PS community, she continues to drive her grandchild to PSCS every day and plans to continue to do so until her grandchild completes grade 8. She is proud of the support she provides the school and children through sewing powwow regalia for the PSCS dance troop.

Matt

Matt is the vice-principal of PSCS. He has earned a master's degree in educational leadership as well as two undergraduate degrees. Matt has now lived in three of the largest urban centers in the province having been raised in one, attended university in one, and now lives and works in another. Although relatively new to the school division, Matt has a wealth of leadership experience. His teaching experiences included teaching in a Community School and serving as an administrator in a number of rural schools. Contrasting his current school with his most recent rural school placement he noted that "the issues that we deal with on a daily basis in a school like PSCS were rarely, rarely spoken about or noticed in a place like (town name)." He noted that his previous teaching experience in a Community School helped shape his perspectives on Community School education.

Peggy

Peggy supports a number of inner-city schools in the SUSD as an Elder. Peggy is Ho-Chunk and she emphasizes the pride that she has in her family names and highlights the important work that her ancestors have done in government relationships and in creation of programs to support Indigenous people. As a child she moved frequently around the United States and was introduced to many Indigenous cultures and languages. She did well in school and ultimately began working in program development. She and her spouse, a Nakoda Elder, who works as a traditional Knowledge Keeper, moved to the urban center in which they currently reside many years ago with hopes of having positive impacts on schools. She loves her role in supporting schools, including PSCS, as an Elder. Of her role she shared "I haven't regretted it for one second because I met so many wonderful people… I met so many kids. Now

after being there for a few years, I see them growing and moving on into high school and it's just amazing to me. I'm glad that I can be there for them."

Stella

Stella is in her third year as principal of PSCS. She introduces herself as "first and foremost I am a mother" and notes that part of her learning early in her principalship was to ensure that she created balance between her work and home lives. Her teenage daughters are Indigenous and have been raised to value their Indigenous culture and ways of being. Her family also includes her partner and his two children. She has benefited from "a very diverse experience" as an educator prior to becoming principal of PSCS. She began her career teaching in a small hamlet. Next, she taught in an affluent suburban school. Her experience teaching in a First Nations community was sandwiched between two different stints as a teacher in the same inner-city school in which her second opportunity at the school she became vice-principal. Her final assignment before the principalship at PSCS was as vice-principal of a large suburban school. It is clear through conversation that she has learned a great deal from her previous experiences and that these experiences have helped shape her into the leader that she is. Of her current assignment she stated, "I am principal of a Community School where I absolutely love leading, learning, and growing to understand with my staff and alongside my staff and alongside our families and students."

Barry

Barry, a Lakota man, introduces himself by sharing his spirit name and his given English name. He situates himself and his people on the land and speaks at length of the history of the Lakotas including that his people never signed treaty and see the land as unceded territory. He currently resides on a First Nation in close proximity to the urban center where he works. He is employed by the SUSD as a cultural liaison, a role that allows him to work alongside staff and students in many schools each year. He is a ceremonial man who conducts ceremony multiple times each week in support of friends, family, and his school division. Through his work he has introduced many SUSD staff members to Indigenous ceremonies. He comes from a family of educators and has a deep commitment to ensuring improved schooling success and experiences for Indigenous students.

Dale

Dale introduces himself as a Métis man who was born and raised in the urban center in which the SUSD is located. He considers himself "blessed and fortunate" to have been raised by his kokum whom he considers a guiding force in his life. He is grounded by the stories and perspectives that his kokum conveyed to him. His distinguished career as an educator has recently been recognized through a major national award. In his career in education he has worked for both SUSD and the other school division in the urban center. The majority of his career was spent as a classroom teacher; however, he had significant impact at the division level as a coordinator and program leader. Notably, early in his teaching career he had the opportunity to be the teacher for a program aimed directly at Indigenous student success, an experience he sees as being formative. In addition to his work within school divisions, he also works as the educational lead for a Métis Local that works in partnership with both school divisions in the urban center.

Greg

Greg introduced himself as a husband, father and superintendent with SUSD. As a superintendent, Greg has myriad responsibilities, notably including leadership development and leadership of education in Community Schools. In addition to his leadership portfolios, Greg also has responsibilities for several schools including PSCS. Greg introduces himself as a settler man and recognizes the immense privilege with which he has lived his life. He identifies that people are holistic beings and that we need to ensure that we have balance and look after ourselves. He describes himself as someone who is easily excited and is striving to slow down and be more thoughtful in order to better include other people's opinions.

Sherry

Sherry is a descendant of a nearby historic Michif buffalo hunting settlement. She takes great pride in her culture and the land that her family calls home. She introduces herself in her language, a language that she is trying to learn as an adult. She has a well-respected background as an educator in the province having been a classroom teacher, resource teacher, consultant, vice-principal, principal, and Métis Nation of Saskatchewan's advisor to the Ministry of

Education. At the time of the first recorded conversation she was working as an instructor in the teacher education program from which she is a proud graduate. Her motivation for her education career is "ensuring that Michif and Métis content and perspectives are brought to life to educate the non-Indigenous people of this land but also to help our Métis kids and their families to feel that pride that was lost for a long time."

Willie

Willie is an Indigenous educator who comes from a community with a mixture of Indigenous peoples including Cree, Nakota, and Dakota. Willie is a parent to three children and states that "I have devoted my whole life and my career to sustaining their life, giving them a better life, I guess… everything I do is for my kids. Education is really important for me because I think it is the gateway to change." Willie has taught in First Nations and suburban schools and believes that urban school divisions can learn from First Nations schools. Willie is employed by the SUSD.

Themes

Given a rigorous process of data analysis including insight from my cultural advisors and member checking with participants, I advanced eight major themes that emerged from the study. Many of the major and minor themes were anticipated given the literature review and intent of the study while other themes unexpectedly emerged. The eight themes are poverty, culture, family engagement, success, partnerships, racism and colonization, teaching, and leadership.

Poverty

Participants recognized the pronounced concentration of poverty in certain communities within the urban center. In order to help address the significant needs associated with poverty participants consistently reinforced the importance of the Community School model and stressed that the school be a hub for the community. Both Willie and Stella stated directly that the school is and must be "the heart of the community." The need for greater supports within Community Schools, both those supplied by school divisions and partner agencies, was frequently contended. Participants also identified that within the broader umbrella of Community Schools, some schools stand out as serving neighbourhoods with more pronounced needs. Within this study

core neighbourhood schools consistently stood out as the schools identified as having the highest level of need within SUSD. This section addresses participants' thoughts on the concentration of poverty, Community School education, including the unique challenges and barriers that these schools and the families they serve face, staffing considerations, and the need for a stronger systemic emphasis on equity.

Inner-City Schools. Greg clearly addressed stratification of neighbourhoods in the urban center that SUSD serves:

> we have a very divided city. We have schools that serve students who predominantly have more wealth and opportunity in some areas of the city and then in other areas of the city there is quite a marked difference in terms of the socio-economic status of the education levels, employment, and health of those communities.

Further, Greg stated of schools in the lower socio-economic neighbourhoods:

> look at any single indicator, pick literacy rates, pick attendance, pick whatever you want to, graduation rates. The needs are more pronounced in some of our communities and amongst some of our neighbourhoods and families in those neighbourhoods. It is a moral imperative, an economic imperative, just a professional imperative that we do the right thing.

Barry specified that the unpleasant reality of the urban center is that the vast majority of students attending these lower socio-economic neighbourhood schools are Indigenous. Barry shared his deep frustrations with the continual schooling inequities faced by Indigenous children and the need for inner-city schools to rethink current practice and improve. He stated, it is "the perfect definition of insanity, still doing the same goddamn thing. Still getting the same stupid results. Move on, get better." Greg shared similar thoughts with his comment that "it was clear that the system that we were implementing was designed for some students' success and other students' lack of success." Greg stressed the importance of looking for new ways to work that would better meet the needs for students and families.

Sherry identified the important role that schools must play in supporting families who have experienced trauma and who are living in poverty. Sherry clearly connected past injustices to the current realities:

> some of the issues, some of the challenges that our communities still face are because of what happened to our communities. It did not happen over-night, it has been a long period of challenges that our families have faced, and it is going to take a long time to get to change.

Joe also identified the deep roots of homelessness and other issues that disproportionately plague Indigenous people, noting "we need to understand how these things have happened to them."Sherry implicated schools in creating trauma and inequities and the pivotal role they must play in the solution:

> Those intergenerational effects are very real. We are still dealing with those in a way that we have to make sure that we put supports in place to help those people overcome those things. Here is my theory, if you can take these things away from people through the education system, you should be able to put them back. That is as simply as I look at it.

There was agreement with the statements made by Barry, Sherry, and Greg in terms of the need to work differently, especially in the face of significant challenges.

Unique Challenges. Participants recognized the unique challenges faced by inner-city schools. Greg shared that addressing these challenges to increase learning outcomes for students "is the challenge of our time." He went on to share the need for SUSD to address these challenges head on and to ensure that SUSD and its educators learn from past mistakes and embrace these challenges as opportunities to learn and grow. Sherry acknowledged that given the neighbourhoods that inner-city schools serve and their unique challenges, schools need to be far more than an academic learning center for students:

> this is the place where families often get their personal and their academic supports. That's what makes Community Schools different, it is not just about the academic learning, it is about the personal journey and the personal learning and the social supports that we try to ensure that we help our families to find to meet their needs. I feel like where in other schools you are a school, an academic school, and we are like the one-stop-shop. We help them find doctors and we help them see dentists and other people who can support them if they are having issues trying to access food. We help them find counsellors, we make sure that clothing is available.

Some of the barriers and challenges to education in SUSD inner-city schools raised by participants are addressed in the next section.

Barriers for Students and Families. A number of barriers facing inner-city students and families, and therefore the schools that serve their children, were raised by participants. The most frequently raised barriers included poverty, transiency, communication, health, parents' own experiences with school, and the physical school buildings. Peggy spoke to the importance of inner-city schools working differently to support students and families. She advocated for a "way that we can frame our overall approach so that we're feeding the potential to excel. And a need in feeding the potential to excel, is to address whatever roadblocks students are experiencing."

Poverty was frequently identified by participants as a critical barrier to students and families in inner-city neighborhoods. Participants shared that there are a host of associated ills that come with poverty. Barry advanced that it is because of these compounding problems that the Community School model is required. Joe stated that Community Schools and educators in these schools need a philosophy that differs from schools in more affluent schools; he contended that there is a need for a philosophy of support and that this philosophy of support must be exercised in a manner that does not shame students or families. Matt reflected on supporting students and families struggling with poverty in rural schools in which he had worked that had more heterogenous communities that spanned the spectrum of affluence. He believed that the stigma associated with students and/or families accepting support was diminished when these supports were commonly offered and utilized. Examples of support offered at PSCS include the school's nutrition program, community clothing closet, and partnership with health. The concentration of complex poverty within inner-city neighbourhoods is the root of many additional barriers. Joe was optimistic that his students could break out of the cycles of poverty in which they were raised, noting "poverty isn't something that they created. The systems created them to be in that situation, but they can change it."

Closely associated with poverty was another significant barrier addressed by many participants - housing and the resultant transiency of students. Stella and Matt both addressed concerns with families moving. They shared that many of their families have attended the school for a prolonged period of time but that it is common for students to move to and from the school as a result of housing instability. Matt shared that many of the students who arrive at PSCS have

experienced a significant number of school changes, often in a relatively brief period of time. He shared that in his experience these frequent movers were often the most difficult with whom to form connections and develop trust. Stella and Matt both shared that many of the students who move away from PSCS return later in the year or in future years. Peggy, who frequently stressed the importance of relationships with students and families, advocated for the importance of quickly embracing new students and families as well as the importance of supporting students and families who needed to move. Margaret identified the importance of having her grandchild attend the same school throughout her elementary years so that she could maintain relationships and have staff who knew her learning needs. Peggy shared that support for students who are moving could be as simple as talking with them and asking questions such as if they know anyone at their new school/community.

Another complicator in inner-city schools is communication with families. It was shared that conventional forms of communication such as email and texting cannot be taken for granted. Home visits were addressed as an important means of communication with some families, as were making a personal phone call or meeting parents in the school or on school grounds during student drop-off or pick-up times. Tied to the challenge of communication is the barrier presented by the lack of empowerment felt by many Indigenous families. Barry shared that there are still many Indigenous families that do not question educators because of an ingrained disempowered stance of "white is right." Many participants also spoke to a generations-long lack of trust of governments and public institutions.

A clear physical reminder of why distrust in educational institutions has been earned is the physical school buildings in inner-cities, many of which are century-old brick buildings that are comparable in design to residential schools. The legacy of residential schools is tangible in inner-city schools. Sherry addressed the problematic look of many inner-city schools:

> Just the look of them is enough if you are dealing with families who have intergenerational experiences with residential schools, my gosh, like these buildings are exactly like what they would imagine, so it is hard to overcome the outer perspective to even come into the schools.

Barry similarly shared that "these castle schools are historical reminders of places that are not good." Barry further argued that the older school buildings that primarily serve Indigenous

students are also clear examples of sub-par facilities and infrastructure that would not be tolerated by non-Indigenous communities.

Related to the earned lack of trust in schools is the barrier presented by family member's negative school experiences. Dale reflected on his own childhood in the inner-city:

> I know from my own personal experiences that the school could have tried to move the mountains to get my mom to come to school and my mom would never come. My mom never came for a single Christmas program, parent teacher interview, nothing. Her baggage was such that school was probably the most threatening place for her.

Matt shared that he "fear(s) that a lot of people who haven't had positive experiences in education system in the past, have that mindset that teachers aren't all that good." Matt knew that the PSCS staff needed to be purposeful in showing community members that they were in fact caring people and that the school was a safe place.

Student's health and nutrition were also addressed as common barriers. Helen articulated the connection between poverty and health and simplified that in inner-city schools "we see more health issues with students." Helen shared that much of her support for PSCS and other inner-city schools is supporting families with medical needs; often this entailed connecting with families to support health needs that could easily distract students from learning such as contending with rashes or lice. Also related to health, participants discussed sleep and nutrition needs as potential barriers. On the importance of a school nutrition program, Peggy stated "and the breakfasts, I think is a big thing too because you want students to start the day by having a breakfast, so you know that they're not thinking about how hungry they are." Stella and Matt both discussed the complexities of operating a nutrition program that feeds almost the entire student body each day. Matt shared that PSCS staff members understood that student misbehavior may be communication of unmet needs indicating a need for some form of support. Stella echoed this thinking, frequently discussing the need to support the whole child.

Deficit theorizing also appeared to be a barrier to education in inner-city schools. Sherry addressed commonly held deficit thinking such as "you know they can't because they are not even getting fed at home and all those things" she went on to challenge that thinking "yes those things are challenges, absolutely, but if we don't believe that our kids and our families can overcome those challenges then they won't." Barry saw deficit thinking as being larger than just

at the school level; he levelled systemic critiques including the old school facilities that Indigenous students attend in the inner-city and what he deemed to be sub-par staffing of inner-city schools.

Equity. Not surprisingly, given the realities and identified barriers presented, participants spoke passionately about the need for schools to do better for inner-city students and families. Barry spoke clearly about the euro-centric foundations to education and that the system of education was not created for his peoples' success. He shared that Indigenous students were always at an:

> unfair disadvantage because that was never our world view: it was always a foreign understanding. And so, it was never in our language, it was never in the curriculum to talk about us or how we see the world, it never included us.

Dale shared that "we are still living in a colonial society where everything tends to be sort of patchwork" and called for a clear focus on improving inner-city schools that included increased cultural and language learning, enhanced parent and community involvement, and increased student learning outcomes. Others also clearly identified the need to do things better and to do things differently. These contentions included Sherry's plea "I think that we need to be able to look at our Community Schools again with that idea of not what is equal but what is equitable." Greg shared the deep moral commitment at the division level that would be needed to make an impact. He shared that there was a clear need to enhance supports in inner-city schools, based on the needs of the community, above and beyond what was offered in suburban schools. He also advocated for differentiated thinking and enhanced problem solving to try to get things right. Joe clearly stated of SUSD's efforts to enhance Indigenous student success "we have great people, but we have a ways to go with that work here."

Culture

Participants were unanimous in advocating for Indigenous culture to be foundational to education in Saskatchewan's inner-city schools. Discussion focused on current examples as well as the need to continue to improve. Specific conversations included the need for Elders and Knowledge Keepers, programs that allow for deeper learning such as the PSCS Cree program, special events, protocols, the diversity of peoples, and the need for educator learning and action.

Recognized Importance of Inclusion of Perspectives and Culture. In conversations on what constitutes the nature of success, pride in oneself, culture, language, and history was continually raised. The need for these learning opportunities to be privileged within inner-city schools was acknowledged and advocated for. The inclusion of First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspectives is included in Saskatchewan curriculum.However, Dale shared that just because it is included in curriculum does not mean that these perspectives are actually included meaningfully in classrooms. Dale reflected on historic lack of inclusion, even after its provincial mandating, when he shared that "even though we knew it was in the curriculum it was more a question of will you include First Nations, Inuit and Métis content and perspectives? The majority of teachers said no." Dale shared stories of the push-back that he received while supporting school-based leaders and teachers in moving towards implementing Indigenous content. Dale also shared that the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives and culture within urban center classrooms has improved; "there is more acceptance now than when I first started." Despite this improvement, Barry shared that his children, who attend SUSD schools not located in inner-city neighbourhoods, have not and still do not feel culturally affirmed in their own schooling; indicating significant room for growth for SUSD. Peggy believed that students within inner-city schools are benefiting from the sense of pride and affirmation that comes with the inclusion of perspectives and culture at greater rates than Indigenous students at non-inner-city schools. Margaret gushed with pride when discussing the cultural and language learning opportunities presented by PSCS to her grandchild. Matt identified that in his estimation the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives and culture is more easily accepted within the school community when the school has many Indigenous students. He felt that there may be push back from non-Indigenous parents and community members in school communities with few Indigenous students; perhaps indicating why there may be more cultural inclusion in inner-city schools.

Dale referenced competing interests for professional development time for educators. He identified the significant importance of school staff's developing cultural competencies and yet, how this learning is often not addressed as meaningfully as it should be given other pressures. He shared:

> It is building those cultural competencies of your staff so that they understand what you are doing and why you are doing it and what this looks like and getting that empathy

> from another worldview. Tons of PD and yet that is often the challenge isn't it, when you say okay well we will need lots of PD on this except we have a system directive about literacy and numeracy and you have to do all of those things.

He concluded this thought by sharing that in his estimation, literacy and numeracy almost always win the competition for educators' time and attention.

Stella reflected on one of her first conversations with a parent after beginning as principal at PSCS. That parent shared that their family had no real connection to their culture and they were really hoping for the school to nurture their children's cultural and spiritual realms. Stella shared that this conversation helped catalyze her into conversations with Elders and Knowledge Keepers. Joe recognized Stella's efforts in ensuring Indigenous cultures and perspectives were infused at PSCS. Joe stated "at [PSCS]… we do quite a few cultural things there, cultural camp those types of things. Those are opportunities to learn off the land and that's the administrator over there, we're lucky to have that kind of, not guidance, but support."

Elders and Knowledge Keepers. Stella deferred much of the leadership at PSCS in terms of their cultural work to Elders, especially Peggy. When speaking of Peggy's role at PSCS Stella used the term "leadership"; Helen further spoke about Peggy's role as a mentor to staff, students, parents, and herself as a community partner. The enactment of an Elder, like Peggy as a leader of the school was seen as an important step by other participants. On diversifying the understanding of leadership of inner-city schools Sherry advanced:

> I think that shared leadership is crucial in these schools and it is not always the people who are in the formal leadership positions. I think of a school like this and how important to the leadership team some of those cultural people in this school [referring to the inner-city school in which the conversation was taking place] are. You couldn't do some of the work that you do without that. That willingness to say that I know these people are important to this work and that willingness to bring them in. Sometimes it is people who are in your school and sometimes it is not; it might be people outside of your school. I think about who is a respected Elder in the community, who do our people respect?

Sherry also reflected on a previous experience that highlighted an important role that Elders can play:

> One of the things that I was involved in when we were at [name of inner-city school] that I thought really went well were those circles that we had. We had some of those to get the input of the community and it was let's share a meal together and let's have a discussion and we broke it into smaller groups so that it wasn't so intimidating and we brought in some cultural people that understood the ways. And even seeing some of those people facilitating that was enough to get our families to engage, because they saw themselves, they saw their own people leading the work. So you don't always have to, as a non-Indigenous administrator, lead the work. What you have to do is bring in the right people that will engage your community in the work.

Multiple participants discussed the sense of safety, affirmation, and pride that Indigenous students, staff, and community members feel when they see an Elder leading work. It was also identified that the inclusion of Elders as leaders helps provide direction to programing that supports educators in moving from one-off tokenistic activities towards deeper inclusion of content and running purposeful programs that allow for deeper cultural and linguistic engagement.

Cree Program. PSCS staff are proud of their Cree language and culture program. As the Cree teacher, Joe works with all PSCS students in kindergarten through grade 8 multiple times per week. Despite challenges, including not having a curriculum or enough linguistic materials, Joe appreciates his position and its relative uniqueness. Joe identified that one limitation of his program is that it focuses on a single language and cultural teachings; "I do it in Cree which is only one culture out of how many cultures." He also shared that although many of his students are not Cree, he does not hear complaints from students or families. Through communication with families over the years, Joe has the sense that families feel "just lucky to have something." Margaret certainly felt fortunate that her grandchild was afforded the opportunity to learn Cree. Stella shared that Joe's support of student learning goes well beyond his classroom and permeates PSCS cultural events.

Cultural Events. In addition to Elder leadership and the Cree program, PSCS also offers a variety of cultural events and learning opportunities. These events are supported by Peggy and Joe as well as other PSCS and SUSD staff and community members. A significant learning event

for grade 5-8 students is a cultural camp which allows for on the land learning and learning that includes the raising of a Tipi to learn Tipi teachings. Another annual event is a school Feast for the entire school community, which is conducted following traditional protocols. More regular opportunities include the school drum group and powwow club, smudge opportunities in the school's rock garden, and Elder Peggy's twice weekly visits to the school. The school also has begun holding sharing circles with parents and community members which are led by Peggy and her partner. Margaret enthusiastically discussed the programming at PSCS, sharing that "their programs that they have for the students and parents are awesome." In addition to sharing her appreciation for cultural events Margaret also expressed her gratitude for other events including holiday events and school bingo.

Protocols. One identified area that warrants consideration for school and system leaders is learning about and honouring Indigenous protocols. Participants shared that it is important to talk with the Elder or Knowledge Keeper with whom you are working to ensure that you understand their protocols and that required steps are followed. Joe shared how as a school employee he sometimes feels caught between school needs and appropriate protocol:

> I'd go into the school and make sure it's not drying out too fast or whatever, right. So, I do that process. It's not my place to do that because that's a community thing. But whoever is taking care of the drum should be doing that and we don't have those roles in place yet, right. We don't have the person taking care of the drum and the drumsticks and the chairs, and all that stuff because there is nobody, and I'm not the guy to do it. And sometimes where I get to say no is because, I was alluding to this earlier, when I said people ask me to do things. But I say, well you know what? That's somebody's niche. Somebody makes a living off of that.

It needs to be understood that appropriate attention to protocol will require some additional financing for things such as honorariums, tobacco, and cloth. For this reason, Stella advocated for additional budget lines for inner-city schools to ensure that they are able to follow appropriate protocols.

Diversity of Inner-City Indigenous Peoples. Most of the Indigenous participants took time in their conversations to stress the importance of not pan-Indigenizing and sharing that this

happens too often. There is not a single Indigenous culture in Saskatchewan but rather a great plurality of Indigenous peoples and cultures that should not all be lumped together. Joe spoke at length about the diversity of Indigenous people in Saskatchewan and shared that the population of SUSD schools is made up of "people from all over that speak different languages." Dale shared that a common solution appears to be the privileging of one cultural group over others. Dale stated that a,

> challenge that we have here in Saskatchewan... is that we tend to be Cree-centric. We tend to focus on Cree perspectives omitting the other cultural groups that are there. We have a strong representation of Anishinaabe people, we have some Dene people, who often times feel either neglected or we are imposing Cree perspectives onto them. That is a challenge that we have to be aware of.

Joe also identified this phenomenon when he shared that a nearby Saulteaux First Nation has many students attending SUSD schools, yet their language, Nakawe, is not taught.

Willie shared his frustration that white educators often assumed that he was knowledgeable on all Indigenous peoples and cultures:

> I don't know everything about all the nations. I know just as much as you do or the next classroom teacher on… the Ojibwe for example. I would know just as much as the next teacher, but yet, I'm expected to [know] that.

A potential promising practice to support schools and school divisions on ensuring that they are representing all Indigenous peoples well is having an advisory council of Elders for the school division; something that SUSD used to have in place.

Sherry, Barry, and Dale all worked closely with SUSD's former council of Elders and were all emphatic on the importance of having a council comprised of Elders representing various nations. Sherry spoke at length about make-up and importance of this group:

> We had folks from all of the cultural linguistic backgrounds, well respected people from the community and abroad... When you have these kind of folks, well-respected in their own communities who are guiding the work both of the [First Nations Inuit and Métis Education] Unit to make sure that we are doing the right work and are not investing in things that we shouldn't be. But then to also be available to help build the learning and

the capacity of all the folks in the schools where their kids, our kids, are going. I saw a time, a point in time where I had a lot of hope for the process that was going on in terms of engaging those folks and I know that it is an investment financially, I get it, but the payoff is huge. They are worth their weight in gold. It not only built my own, because me as a Métis, a Michif girl doesn't mean that I know all there is to know about the Lakotas, and Dakotas, and Denes and the Crees. I don't have that inherent knowledge. So to build my capacity as well to be able to lead some of that work in our school division, we need to be able to invest in our people in those positions so that they can continue. It is capacity building that will spread. And the way to do that really was with the most knowledgeable people we could find in their own ways. We weren't asking them to be knowledgeable in the education system, we wanted those people that were knowledgeable in their communities, respected in their communities, knowledgeable in their ways. We can find a whole bunch of people who are knowledgeable in the education sector ways, there are a whole bunch of those… That was a time when I realized that if we do not have, you don't want to call it oversight, but if we do not have a group of people who are well respected in their own communities walking along side us then who is going to have our back? And how do we have theirs? It is reciprocal. How do we make sure that that relationship is reciprocal and that they can call on us for our expertise and the things that we can bring to their communities, but we can call on them for the things that we need help with. And they will stand beside us, we stand together. That is what I felt our advisory did. It stood with us as a division, they stood beside us, they supported us… I think it is crucial. I know personally in our division, I have missed that. I have missed their guidance, I've missed their presence, I've missed their voices, I've missed having that group of people that I could go to that would help guide me. And sometimes they were the ones who kind of helped you too, cause when you are an Indigenous person in a system that wasn't basically built for your success you end up with a lot of challenges. Those people were kind of like your counsellors because they understood what you were experiencing and so they could help you navigate some of the challenges that you were having. To me there is no better thing than having that group of people. I

> hope that at some point in my career before I end that I will see it again, it is the right thing to do. It shows that we value the voices that have been silenced.

Not only do Sherry's words highlight the importance of having guidance from a diverse group of Elders, but they also indicate the role that the group played in impacting the learning of educators.

Need for Educator Learning and Action. The need for educators to engage in learning about (and with) Indigenous cultures was evident in the study. Sherry and Dale both indicated that it would take humility for white educators to engage in this learning. Dale shared an exemplar of one educator's cultural learning that required humility on his part:

> We were at a meeting, and maybe it was a partnership meeting, and [cultural leader] had to step out. We were going to do a smudge, my assumption was that I will just lead the smudge. [Cultural leader] said no, the principal, this is his school and we have invested in this principal, the principal will lead the smudge. I remember probably my first immediate response was that I was offended, why are you letting a white guy lead the smudge when I am sitting right here. And then I thought my goodness what a witness that is that with Indigenous people sitting right there that this principal who is non-Indigenous can lead that and do it competently… I remember my mouth falling open and the pride, I was so proud. I thought oh my goodness this is what we are about, this is what we are trying to do. Our message all along was that we will build your cultural competencies and we will make you so sure that you can do this that you can do it in front of these people. He did it so well, I remember thinking afterwards gee I wonder if I could have (laughs)… That is what you want. You want people to have those competencies so that they can do those things but at the same time be able to judge when is it right and when is it not so that you are not appropriating, because we don't want to do that either but it was about providing opportunity. Providing that opportunity and let him to do what we have said along that you can do, and so he did it.

Further to this story, Dale shared that the idea of cultural responsiveness training "is not just that idea about giving you the information and letting you sit there with it, it is about what are you going to do with that." Greater cultural understanding will support educators in another area where increased knowledge and action is required; parent engagement.

Parent Engagement

A significant theme in the study was the importance of parent engagement. Participants shared both the value and challenges of this work and identified that both of these were amplified in inner-city schools. PSCS staff, community members, and partners shared their efforts in this regard as well as the continued need and desire to get better. Thoughts on SCCs roles in engaging inner-city parents were also shared.

Identified Need for Parent Engagement. Multiple participants spoke about the importance of parent engagement, but these statements were usually accompanied by thoughts that inner-city educators had yet to fully embrace the philosophy of parent engagement. Of the state of parent engagement, Greg stated:

> I think that that relationships piece is one that we sometimes gloss over and it is one that is recognized as critically important but I don't know that we are always as purposeful and intentional and that we don't always understand that all of that is supposed to translate into positive learning outcomes.

Similarly, Dale stated that educators:

> speak highly of the importance of parental engagement, but we don't have a clear idea of what that is. Often times when we as administrators, as teachers, we have one idea of what that looks like and then parents have their own idea of what that engagement is going to look like. The problem is that both of them tend to do this (makes motion with his hands in which the hands pass by each other inches away from touching), they miss, they miss each other… We have teachers who see their classrooms as their stronghold, so if you are going to come into my classroom it is on my terms. If I want you in my classroom then it is going to be that you are doing this particular role, you are going to help with the hotdog lunch, you know? You are going to help with the newsletter, those kinds of things.

Greg and Dale's comments indicate the identified value of engaged parents and also clearly state that there is room for growth in the intentionality of educators to build relationships and ensure that parents are empowered in student learning.

Strength and Diversity of Families. While participants shared about the complex issues that many families living in inner-city communities faced, they also stressed the strengths of these families. From her own childhood experiences and career as an educator, Sherry imparted:

> I have spent most of my career in Community Schools. I grew up in [core neighbourhood]. I think that the strengths of our kids and our families in these schools are really the sense of family, they are the generosity that often times our families are challenged financially and although people might see that as a whole piece of poverty as a weakness, it sometimes becomes a strength in that we learn to do a whole lot with very little. And even with how little you might have you are always willing to give, that is what I saw with our families in every Community School that I have been in. No matter how little they have they were always willing to give, that sense of generosity. That always brings me back to my own family and sort of the foundation of my grandma. They never owned a thing, ever in their whole life, and yet any time you would come to her house she always gave you the best of what they had. And I feel like that is the piece that others don't see who are looking at our communities from the outside. When you are in that community you see it and you know it, but it is not always the part that is highlighted in the media or other ways of telling who these people are in these communities. I think definitely the strengths are that sense of family, that generosity, the resilience that our families have to have gone through intergenerational traumas and experiences that have deeply affected not just their current situation but for multiple generations and so how resilient do you have to be to overcome this and still, the fact that they are still coming to school to me is a miracle, really. I think that the strength is that they will, our families will fight hard for their kids and I love that about them.

Peggy shared an analogy of a bag of rocks and that no two rocks in the bag were the same to impart that schools must get to know families well and work with families in a manner that works for the family. Peggy also stressed the importance of the school supporting families and suggested that inner-city educators should be asking families questions like "tell me how things are going?" and "did you get that taken care of?" She also envisioned school leaders not just as leaders for the school staff and students but also as potential mentors to parents.

Home Visits. The importance of home visits was frequently contended. When speaking of positive actions taken by schools to build relationships with parents Sherry stated that:

> I think about the good work that people have done in many of the Community Schools that I have been in. I think about the visits, like we don't wait for people to come to us, when we are in these schools, we go out and we see them and we meet them for coffee at Tim Hortons if we have to or we do what we need to do to engage with those families in a place where they are comfortable.

Peggy spoke about the value of home visits for both teachers and administrators in building relationships and trust with students and families. Peggy also shared how she has witnessed administrators newly placed in inner-city schools quickly develop relationships and trust with students and parents through home visits. Stella and Willie, who both have worked in schools on First Nations shared that home visits are vital and a common element of teaching in Indigenous communities. Participants also highlighted the importance of engaging in cultural and community events as important means to developing relationships and trust with community members.

Important Characteristics for Educators. Participants identified characteristics that they have observed in inner-city educators who have successfully created strong relationships with parents and community members. Willie shared that educators having a warm and caring demeanor is essential and that first impressions can have a great impact in either a positive or negative way. Peggy shared a story to illustrate that inner-city educators need to be welcoming and flexible. She concluded the story by sharing how turned off she had been by an encounter with an educator, and summarized that "this is one of those people who's just being a stickler for the rules and exercising his power." Educators who are vulnerable and share about themselves, their families, and their experiences were thought to create better relationships and trust. Other critical attributes for developing relationships with parents and community members included consistency, patience, and excellent listening and communication skills.

Participants also identified positive impacts of engaged parents. While reflecting on the influence of parent classes she offered in a school, Peggy shared the clear impact on student attendance:

> Now, how does that benefit the students? It benefitted the students in that when their family members were at the school, those student's attendance went way up, because if your mom's coming to the school, then you're going to be coming [laugh] to the school, too. And a few of the moms were also aunts and if your auntie is at the school, you better be at the school, too.

Further Peggy stated the positive impact of having parents and community members from diverse cultural backgrounds present in the school "and then to have people from another culture present in the school, it just opened the doors for the students to ask questions and they did." Sherry indicated that there appears to be a cumulative effect when relationships and trust are built:

> That kind of stuff builds trust and it builds faith in the community. Word gets around. I think that is part of the other piece is that our families talk and often they are related to each other, like that whole actual family relations not just that feeling of family. Actual kinship ties are there and so then you start to do some good work with a family, other families start to hear that and that is how the trust and the faith and all those things get built is through that kind of work.

Given the importance placed on building relationships and the identified value of engaged parents, it is no surprise that PSCS staff shared their commitment to working with families. Margaret, Peggy, and Helen all shared about the warm welcome received daily by students and families as multiple staff members including the administrative team greet them at or outside the door each day, and similarly provide a positive send-off at dismissal.

PSCS Parent and Community Engagement Efforts. PSCS staff also identified the importance of parent engagement. They shared at length the efforts they have taken to build relationships with families. Both Stella and Matt addressed the importance of home visits for PSCS. Prior to the pandemic, PSCS staff have been provided with time during professional development days and during staff meeting time to conduct home visits; during the pandemic time was allotted for regular phone calls. Stella shared the allocation of time for family connection is part of an overall attempt to center the importance of parents and families in PSCS; to this end she was also purposeful in the language she used which included renaming 'meet the teacher night' to 'meet the family night.' Another purposeful effort to engage parents at PSCS

was having a community room that was always open for parents which included having snacks and coffee available. On the importance of the community room, Matt stated, “I think, opening the door and making sure that they know that the stuff is available to them. And that this school is just as much theirs as it is ours is important for them to know.”

PSCS staff also attempt to seize opportunities when parents are in the school to learn more from them and to make the events fun and rewarding. During twice per year parent teacher interviews the staff devised passports which encourage families to visit multiple locations in the school. Two of these passport destination locations are a chance to share hopes and dreams with vice principal Matt and to share family cultural information with Cree teacher Joe. Health Nurse Donna is frequently involved in school events and shared that the school makes every effort to be not just inviting to the students, but to families as well. School events almost always include serving food. Stella shared that a primary goal of these events is to make sure that families feel welcome, affirmed, and safe.

Many of the school events are cultural activities. Elder Peggy is heavily involved in school events as are members of the school division’s First Nations, Inuit, and Métis unit. PSCS has made a commitment to holding an annual traditional Feast which has been a wonderful way to bring the community together. Elders also preside over talking circles which help build relationships with parents and community while also creating a process for the staff to hear the voices of key stakeholders and to showcase that they care about following appropriate cultural protocols. Matt recalled the power of hearing an Elder introduce protocols for a community sharing circle and how he helped level power when “[he] started the circle with the protocol and the purpose and that everyone is equal. We’re sitting around in a circle and so, everyone has a chance to be heard and listened to.” Peggy also supports students and parents with cultural activities including a beading group and creation of ribbon skirts. Other popular community events include art nights and bingos. Both Peggy and Margaret shared that they have witnessed at other schools during community events white educators gravitating to each other and not really engaging with Indigenous parents and community members; Margaret happily declared “but not at [PSCS].” Stella shared that community events in addition to their other efforts to build relationship with parents have led them to a place where she feels that parents feel comfortable with herself and the staff and are willing to openly share information with them.

Two staff members were repeatedly mentioned for the positive impact they had on relationships with families. The administrative assistant was celebrated for her warm demeanor and her personal connections with families. The Community School Coordinator was seen as a great communicator who made sure that community members always were invited and felt welcome. Margaret summed up her relationships with members of the PSCS staff in one word "beautiful."

Throughout the study, stories were shared that showcased PSCS staff's knowledge of and connection with families. Margaret excitedly told the story of how she had been approached by Stella to use her talents to create regalia for the school's dance troop. Margaret enthusiastically shared "oh my gosh, I just felt so overwhelmed and happy that I was going to do something at least for the community you know. And I felt honoured at being able to help these little children." A second story was shared by Stella about a family that had been impacted by Covid-19. Many children from the home attend PSCS and the staff became aware that one of the adults in the home had tested positive and had to enter isolation. Given what PSCS staff knew about the family, they were able to reach out to a partner agency and secure a significant gift card to support the family. Stella shared about the emotional response of the non-isolating parent and the gratitude that the family expressed to the staff. Peggy shared the importance and potential benefit of the school supporting families in this manner:

> that was a big priority for them to make sure that the parents have access to resources that can help them in those ways… I think that's when you really see how effective the school-to-home direction is within the Community Schools and that helps that other direction, home-to-school. That draws the parents closer to their Community School when the school is responsive to the parents' needs. And the parents use reciprocity to come and help the school and the things that school needs, either to know, or to do, or how do they partner. That they become more of effective partners when they see that the partnerships goes both ways.

Further, Peggy shared, ensuring that families know that the school values them will help break cycles of Indigenous parents feeling unwanted at the school. Peggy stated that some actions or inactions by schools can effectively put up signs "no parents allowed. Or even worse, no Native

parents allowed." Peggy saw the actions taken by the staff of PSCS as taking these figurative signs down.

Despite the clear effort made by PSCS staff to create a warm and welcoming environment for parents, participants were clear that there is more work to do. When speaking specifically about PSCS culture camps which present a possible opportunity to have parent involvement in planning and teaching, Joe shared that parent involvement is quite limited. Joe saw real opportunity for activating "parents and utilizing what they have, what they can do, what they can share". Joe and Barry spoke about two potential barriers that likely impacted parent involvement in school events as the requirement to have criminal record checks to volunteer and limited parking. Barry wondered about creating relationships that went beyond parents attending events to a deeper engagement and school leadership asking, "how do you build that co-governance and that co-relationship with parents, and community, and family? That's so important. It's a lot of time, if you were a person that just wanted to check in and check out you certainly could do that." Barry went on to share that moving a school towards authentic parent and community voice would take time and courage. Stella and Matt both shared that there was a need to find better ways to engage parents in sharing their voices and advising the school.

School Community Councils. While participants overwhelmingly spoke about the importance of parent engagement, during the first round of conversations only Stella made any mention of SCCs, and her reference was made not to her current school's SCC but rather an individual with whom she had previously worked at another inner-city school who worked closely with the SCC. Margaret, a member of the PSCS SCC, did not make mention of the SCC when discussing her relationship with the school and staff. As a result of SCCs not emerging from initial conversations, in subsequent conversations participants were asked their thoughts on why SCCs would have been initially absent within the study: this time strong opinions were presented.

A number of concerns were raised with the current SCC model. Seemingly the most contentious point, and the concern from which the other identified issues appear rooted, is the imposition of western formalities such as elections, positions, agendas, and minutes on largely Indigenous communities. Of SCC structures, Greg specified:

> the SCC with its formality has tended to have a feel about it that was very conservative, very status quo. I think that the reaction of many parents is that some other means or mechanism would feel more comfortable, more authentic.

Two participants, Matt and Sherry, shared how SCC structures had worked better for them in schools with different demographics, but they struggled to get community interest for SCCs in inner-city schools. Sherry, Dale, and Willie all shared that in their experience, Indigenous and new Canadian families are significantly underrepresented on SCCs across the neighbourhood socio-economic spectrum.

In discussing who is and who is not typically in attendance at SCC meetings in inner-city schools, Dale spoke passionately about the need for schools to hear the voices of the families who were struggling:

> often times the people who are on those councils are people who have kind of dealt with their demons and are moving forward. They have a certain perspective that they see that needs to happen, and yet who are you trying to get in the door? There are those other people whose voice needs to be heard. How do you, I don't want to use the word attract, how is it that you gain their confidence, that is the huge challenge. It is their voice that you need to hear in terms of why. That is a huge challenge. When I was going through this I thought about community councils and I just dismissed them.

Willie shared similar concerns over Indigenous families' confidence in schools, especially for families that are struggling. He shared "within our schools too there is so much mistrust that I wouldn't want to give any information because it has been used against our Indigenous families." There appears to be concerns with both cultural malalignment in SCC structures and systemic mistrust that are preventing greater involvement in inner-city SCCs.

Issues of purpose and voice were also raised. Matt also wondered about community understanding of the role of the SCC and if the purpose might be better understood if membership would increase. Willie reflected on his own children's school SCC and why he had not become involved, despite having an interest. Willie shared two salient points: the first was his concern about the authenticity of the SCC advisory role when he shared "whatever agenda is set out there the decision is already made." Willie also feared not being validated if his was the

lone Indigenous voice in the room; a sentiment also shared by Sherry "nobody wants to be that lone voice in the room." Sherry summarized her thoughts:

> If what we are looking for is to engage the voices of our newcomer families and our Indigenous families, until we find a way to make that a non-threatening situation for them, and make it something that they do not feel disadvantaged by, we are never going to see them there.

Clearly there are barriers to successful SCCs in inner-city schools. PSCS staff were purposeful in trying to address these barriers.

Stella shared some of the efforts that she and the staff of PSCS have made to encourage greater participation on their SCC. To support families' schedules they have tried scheduling meetings during the school day and in evenings; additionally, they have offered baby-siting services. Snacks or meals are always offered. Staff members support the preparation of agendas and taking of minutes. They have removed the formality of elections and elected positions and continually seek new members; this includes having a process in which the community coordinator reaches out to families that have not previously attended meetings to see if they have interest in attending. PSCS has also opened the first SCC meeting of the year with an invitation for members to share an artifact to learn about each other and to help build relationships. PSCS has also invited an Elder to sit on the SCC as a community member. Despite these efforts, it remains a challenge to have parents attend meetings. Participants were unanimous in calling for a revamping of SCC processes or for creating parallel processes that better aligned with Indigenous ways of knowing and being which would be more inviting to Indigenous families.

Success

Success, specifically what it is and who defines it, was another significant theme. Insights into what a more holistic view of success may look like emerged. The need for improved outcomes in inner-city schools was raised. PSCS staff shared how they are trying to learn more about the aspirations that families have for their students. Achieving this holistic success was seen as being larger than just the school staff could offer, it required significant involvement of other key stakeholders.

What is Success? Participants shared diverse opinions of what success is; however, views of success that were shared can be categorized as either notions of school success based primarily on academic success, especially in areas of literacy and mathematics, or more holistic views of success. Unsurprisingly holistic versions of success were articulated by all Indigenous participants; even non-Indigenous participants all identified the importance of a holistic view of success in inner-city schools. Notions of success focused on academic achievement were identified as being based on Western ideals. Holistic and Western views of success were identified as potentially competing for the time and attention of educators. On the conflicting views of success, Dale articulated the differing and competing views succinctly and urged educators to unpack these understandings:

> you have people coming with a very western view of what student success is and that tends to be very academic. Whereas you have Indigenous people who are coming and see it more as holistic and so you kind of have that to navigate. Those different worldviews that are out there and what success really means… you have to unpack all of that, and that has to happen at the very beginning so that you have those conversations about those values and those goals. What does success mean? You need to have that out on the table, because, generally speaking, you can say that to teachers and administrators that it should be holistic, oh yeah for sure I get that. But do they? When the chips fall what comes out, literacy and numeracy… So before we can even talk about literacy and numeracy we got to talk about this.

Dale made his idea of unpacking success even broader when he shared that even terms that on the surface are universal, such as respect, may mean different things and be practiced differently by different cultural groups.

Holistic. Participants each identified factors beyond traditional academic indicators that were important factors for determining success. These factors included happiness, respect, relationships, empowerment, confidence, and pride in self and culture. Peggy shared that feeling successful itself can bring an immense sense of joy. When speaking of her grandchild and her wishes for her, Margaret was quick to share the importance of happiness now and into the future. Respect, especially that for their elders, was shared by both Dale and Margaret. Margaret argued that respect was most important: “be very respectful, that is number one. Be respectful of your

elderly people." Relationships and a sense of belonging were shared as both a measure of success and an important support for working towards success. Stella shared that she hoped that all students could engage in relationships with staff and students that would lead towards happiness and a love of learning. Willie shared that "that sense of belonging is the key to anybody being successful." Peggy spoke about the importance of empowerment and self-advocacy especially when faced by challenging tasks or circumstances; she shared that she hopes to see students trying hard and asking for help and to never to hear a student say, "I can't do that." Similarly, Willie argued that confidence in themselves and their ability to learn and to embrace challenges was vital to success now and into the future. Willie's assertion included having a confidence in who they are and not having to pretend that you are something that you are not.

Statements were made about the importance of students knowing, and having pride in, who they are. All Indigenous participants made statements of cultural pride and wanting that pride for Indigenous children. Those who spoke their language shared pride in their language either directly or by speaking a number of words in their language during research conversations. Sherry clearly stated her view of success:

> for me success, in particular for Indigenous kids, is not just the can you read and can you write. Success is really about having a good strong foundation in knowing who you are, being proud of who you are, knowing your own cultural ways, having experienced those cultural ways in the education system so that it is not just something that you are learning at home, that it is something that as I am growing as a student in the preK-12 system that I am experiencing those things in my classrooms and in my schools. To me success is not just about those marks that happen, success is about how I feel, what is my self-concept of who I am as a student, as a child, as a young person. What value do I see people placing on my ways of knowing, not just the ways of knowing of the system which is largely non-Indigenous led. And so to me as a successful graduate of the K-12 system I would see a successful graduate as an Indigenous person, I wouldn't just be a successful graduate. I would be both successful in my cultural ways and my cultural knowing and my language.

Noting the challenges of being distant from their home communities either geographically and/or for significant durations of time (possibly even generations), Stella reflected on her time on

reserve and in the inner-city and shared that "we need our urban children who are Indigenous to know who they are as Indigenous people." Joe implied the importance of strong language and cultural background by discussing the success that many newcomer students experience in schools: "people that come in from different countries, have their language, they speak it at home. They know who they are, and they come here, and they excel. Wow." Joe addressed the importance of a position like his that allowed for him to support students' development with culture and language. Margaret was exhilarated that her granddaughter was able to learn from Joe "it makes me so proud. Like she is getting into her ways, our cultural ways and the language. I always tell her that you know when [Joe] speaks, you listen. Learn something from him." Margaret also shared that her grandchild frequently shares the Cree words that she learns at school at home. Many Indigenous participants called for the participation of Elders, or councils of Elders in conversations on success as well as the creation of plans to achieve student success.

Western Views. Academic achievement was identified by most participants as key to student success. Greg summarized the importance of academic learning in all communities stating:

> that no matter what community we are in, we know that part of the currency of success is being able to read and write and being able to engage academically and have academic success.

Greg also addressed the need for all students to learn to be good citizens and to engage in learning about treaties as well as the need to view students holistically. Notably, Sherry stated that from her experience it is the holistic supports, especially fostering a sense of belonging, that work to support struggling learners to achieve academic success.

Equity and Increased Supports. Barry was blunt in his assessment of the current state of success for Indigenous students when he said, "yourself and others have seen the data. We haven't changed much in 40 years of public record in terms of creating success and achievement for Indigenous students." This lack of progress perturbed Barry who shared that

> in the old camp days, you were only as strong as your weakest member of your community. So, if your Elders or your young people are struggling, we never left them behind. We created a solution… they were the highest priority.

Other participants also identified the realities of much lower levels of achievement for Indigenous students. Given these realities, multiple participants including Sherry argued for additional supports in inner-city schools. In advocating for additional supports for inner-city schools, Sherry noted that families and students are "dealing with many compounded issues…[and] what has happened historically. Those intergenerational effects are very real." Barry identified the significant needs present within inner-city schools as an "unsettling reality"; he too wondered if there were sufficient supports in place within these schools to help create change. Greg and Sherry both made similar hopeful comments about knowing that all students can be successful and that there were solutions to achievement gaps, but that they just had not figured them out yet. Both participants shared a determination to keep working towards improved outcomes.

PSCS Student Success. PSCS staff spoke about the importance of both academic learning and more holistic views of success. Joe, Matt, and Stella all made references to the four quadrants of the medicine wheel and focusing on the whole child. Stella touched briefly on school goals addressing literacy and mathematics but spoke at length about supports in place and professional learning for staff on holistically supporting children and families. Matt spoke about learner profiles which staff keep for each student. The profiles ask educators to consider many aspects of the child including their interests and how they learn best. Matt and Stella both stated that if student needs are not met, academic learning will be very difficult. Stella shared positive feedback she had received from families about the support that school staff provided to students. She also shared a recent phone call that she received from a parent whose family had left the school after moving out of the neighbourhood:

> she said, "I see a difference between schools." She said, "[PSCS] does so much for families in other ways." I said, "yeah, we look at families and children holistically," and so we support the academic but we also support the socio-emotional, and the physical, and the spiritual… When I explained it that way, she really understood… She was crying on the phone. She said thank you so much.

Joe identified that significant work was taking place in the school to support students in the quadrants of the medicine wheel but felt as though the school had room to grow in supporting students in the spiritual quadrant.

PSCS staff have also been reaching out to families to learn from them about their hopes and dreams for their children. During parent teacher interview times prior to the pandemic, Joe and Matt set up stations in the school to meet with families and ask about their hopes and dreams. The information gathered by Matt and Joe was shared with staff. During the 2020-21 school year, the staff plans to continue asking families about their hopes and dreams, but will do so with classroom teachers making phone calls to families. In conversations with Stella and Matt their desire to have meaningful relationships with each student and family is clear.

Partnerships

The importance of partnerships emerged as a strong theme in the study. While inner-city schools have partnerships with a variety of agencies including health, local business and non-profits, this section will focus specifically on partnerships with Indigenous people, agencies, and governments. These sections will refer to the term authentic partnerships which were defined for this study by Dale as "if it is going to be authentic then it has to be done with and it has to be that you develop the goals together." Dale noted that this is a shift from traditional relationships between schools and school divisions and Indigenous partners. The next section will examine the importance of ethical space, relationship building, shared ownership, and humour in the creation and strengthening of authentic partnerships.

Ethical Space. Dale was the only participant to directly discuss the term ethical space; however, the elements of ethical space were frequently shared by other participants. Of ethical space Dale shared:

> when we talk about ethical space it is like a park bench and so that when you and I are sitting on the bench our humanity resides between us. It is unseen, unfelt, but it is there. If you can honour my worldview and how I see things through my lens and I can honour yours. then we can move forward in a good way. But we hurt each other when I don't make the time to learn your ways, so the example I always use is a rock. When I taught grade 8 science and had to talk about biotic and abiotic. What is the rock? Is the rock biotic or abiotic. From the Western perspective you would tell me that it is not alive, and yet from a traditional perspective I would tell you that that is the grandfather spirit and that that spirit resides within that rock that that rock watches for the creator, it watches, it

> can see. If I take that rock into a sweat, it will breathe on me. If I open my heart and mind to the teachings, it will speak to me. So that rock has a spirit and it can see and it can breathe, and it can speak, is it biotic or abiotic? That is what Willie [Ermine] is saying, I don't need to believe that that rock has all those characteristics, I just have to accept that fact that somebody else understands it that way. The bottom line becomes as a teacher my job is for kids to be able to differentiate between biotic and abiotic not tell them what is biotic and abiotic. My job is, can you tell me? If you are going to tell me that rock is biotic, what are the characteristics of being biotic? It has a spirit, it breathes, it speaks, it sees; good enough for me, you understand the term. That is what Willie [Ermine] is talking about with that ethical space and that humanity that resides between us. I just need to honour that, I don't need to think that I am threatened and I have to tell you, you are wrong, I just have to accept that fact that someone else sees the world differently and that is okay. It is not right or wrong, good or bad, better or worse, it simply is. If we can get past that and just get to the is, we will be fine. We are threatened and so that whole idea of ethical space is about putting down our defenses and try and actually listen to what the other person is saying and to get to that point of acceptance.

Willie shared similar thinking about the need for non-Indigenous people to acknowledge and appreciate Indigenous epistemology. "I think that we just need to believe that it is valid. Our belief system is really what it comes down to. Acknowledging that there is other ways to see. What you believe in there is validity in it here in this space." Greg identified the importance of non-Indigenous educators being humble and open to learning new ways.

Barry referenced the many oppressive policies imposed on Indigenous peoples and the clear lack of Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of being and that the formation of those policies as being foundational to the creation of a long history of broken relationships. Sherry reflected on a time where she was witness to an authentic partnership between a school division and a group of Elders who acted as the school divisions cultural advisory board:

> that was a time when I realized that if we do not have, you don't want to call it oversight, but if we do not have a group of people who are well respected in their own communities walking along side us then who is going to have our back? And how do we have theirs? It is reciprocal. How do we make sure that that relationship is reciprocal and that they can

> call on us for our expertise and the things that we can bring to their communities, but we can call on them for the things that we need help with. And they will stand beside us, we stand together. That is what I felt our advisory did. It stood with us as a division, they stood beside us, they supported us.

Peggy introduced a beautiful term to reference the formation of authentic partnerships when she discussed educators and community members working together friend-to-friend.

Relationship Building. Peggy stressed the importance of kinship in Indigenous cultures. Her teaching bridges the previously shared notion of appreciating the belief system of someone from another culture; Peggy shared:

> as Indigenous people we have a different perspective on that because our relationships are primarily driven by kinship. So, we have our relatives that we are obligated to, in certain different kinds of ways in our behaviours obligated by our traditional relationship, your kinship… And then we have our belief system that says how you deal with older and how you deal with younger people and so, we're governed by that. So, we see each other as more as relatives than we do as business associates or co-workers, or all those kind of things… It feels foreign to us as Indigenous people to have this business kind of a friendship. It lacks a lot of things that we feel are essential. Having a kinship relationship says that you understand the way I do things and I understand the way culturally we do things. We both understand the same rules and so we will treat each other, we agree to follow those rules and so, I know that I'll be treated, respectfully. And I know that will always treat that person, respectfully…Of course, that doesn't always work 100%.; there are failures. But in kinship there's that quicker, easier road towards forgiveness, reconciliation.

Peggy's teaching highlights the value placed on relationship in Indigenous cultures. Joe also discussed the notion of kinship and identified that it is about more than just the person that you are in relationship with but also includes where you are from and who you know. Joe shared that his relationship with me was an indicator of this, based on his previous connection with my father it meant that we had a starting point for our relationship.

Of the immense importance of relationships in developing authentic partnerships with Indigenous people and organizations Dale stated:

> All the time, 100% of the time, I would say it is about relationship. It is about spending time together and never mind what the goal is if you are going to have a partnership with the tribal council then spend time with the tribal council… It is about building the relationships and the trust, that is the foundation of all Indigenous organizations and our cultures. It is about relationships. If I trust you and I know who you are, I know your family, and I know your story, that changes everything. People are way more willing to be vulnerable and they are also more willing to trust you that you are going to do the right thing. If you can't spend time with me, then it is clearly not a priority, and people see that right away.

Similar to Peggy's sharing, Dale discussed the mediating impacts of establishing relationship:

> I can come and I can tell you what I am thinking and I am not worried about offending you because we have already talked about the importance of being authentic and being able to share and have those courageous conversations. Sometimes we need to have a courageous conversation because something is not working. That doesn't mean that our relationship goes down the toilet because I am going to offend you, it is that we are bigger than that. It is because of that strong relationship.

Given the sharing of participants it appears that authentic partnerships must have authentic relationships as their foundation.

Shared Ownership. The need for partnerships with Indigenous people and organizations to extend well beyond superficial partnerships towards authentic partnerships with shared ownership was frequently raised by participants. Power dynamics were seen as detrimental to fostering partnerships. Dale, Barry, and Willie all identified that schools and especially school divisions hold significant power and need to consider how this power will be purposefully shared with partners. Sherry and Joe both identified the hierarchical structure of educational systems as being very colonial and saw these structures as impairing relationships and limiting the flow of important viewpoints. Sherry discussed the importance of leadership for shared ownership coming from the very top of educational systems:

> You have to have the support and the belief of the people who are in those positions of power. Until you have that it is hard to do that in a systematic way. Until we have that kind of support right from the very top… Until we have people believing that this is

> important and not just the Indigenous people believing that this is important, it is going to be very difficult to do.

Dale shared experiences from his career where he was involved as a school division lead in partnerships with Indigenous partner agencies that had co-governance mandates. Of developing these partnerships, he shared:

> make sure that we are on the same page talking about the same thing and develop those goals together. And you can talk about the values too that go along with that and the vision. All of that stuff you develop it together and that is what makes them authentic partnerships, because everybody is then invested. You a have a common goal, common vision, and you are in a position where you can come to the table and have conversation and it can be authentic and it can be, I was going to say truthful, but it isn't about being truthful, sincere, that is what it is.

Dale shared that within these authentic partnerships that there is a clear need to be responsive to partners' needs. He shared that school divisions need to switch from looking for barriers and start looking for possibilities and to stop being dismissive and to take action. Greg also identified the potential to partnerships like those described by Dale. Greg shared that it will be power sharing with Indigenous partners where partners are invited to have "actual decision-making responsibility…that is where trust will be built, it is not built in words it is built in deeds and actions." Greg spoke of the humility required from educational leaders to identify and rectify current power imbalances which will allow them to adopt a stance and appreciation of partnerships grounded in mutual ownership.

Engaging Indigenous Families and Community Members in Partnership. While a previous section has addressed insights from the study on engagement of parents, participants clearly shared an aspirational view of parent engagement founded on relationship and shared ownership. Peggy observed the power of partnership with parents and community members:

> I have found that the most effective answers to our difficult questions come from within the community. So, if you can get input from the community and ask them, "What do they see as their problems," and ask them, "What do you think would help with that?" Then when it comes time implement the programs that result from that assessment, you'll

> get a lot more engagement because it's their solution and they own that solution. And so, they are more likely to come forward and to help to implement that solution.

Multiple participants shared similar views to those expressed by Peggy.

Engaging Indigenous Employees in Partnership. Participants also spoke of the need for better partnership within educational organizations. Barry spoke from his own experiences, and those of his Indigenous colleagues, of struggling to be validated within educational systems when he shared "we try to contribute but then we're always underestimated or there's always this idea of underlining that somehow, we don't meet the standards." Sherry advocated for deconstructing traditional hierarchical educational systems to allow for Indigenous employees to be involved in decision making processes. Of her observations of Saskatchewan school divisions Sherry stated:

> they weren't involving any of the Indigenous people in their school divisions because they didn't have the right title or didn't have the right role to be in the room. And so for me that piece is super important. As I think about how do we get this work done, we need to think about who needs to be in the room, not what title do they hold. And so that piece for me is an important part of all of this, ensuring that the right voices are around the table regardless of what title they might hold in the organization because your position is the job that you have it doesn't show all the knowledge that you have and so for me that is the piece, how do we get the right voices in the room to be able to do this work with each other rather than having a group of people do it for us.

Dale spoke about a time when he witnessed school division senior leaders create a space for greater involvement of Indigenous employees:

> We had [names a series of former system leaders], people who were open, willing, and would listen. I came along with this perspective and they gave me a voice. I think for a long time for us as Indigenous people we didn't have a voice. No one was listening… I was surrounded by people who wanted to hear what I had to say, who respected what I had to say.

Common terms from Dale's transcripts included equip, empower, and build. These were terms that he used in reference to the support he received from senior leaders in his own leadership development, but he also echoed these terms when speaking about the work that he and his team

did in supporting school administrators and teachers. Dale's three oft-used terms appear to be important throughout educational systems seeking to gain greater insight and leadership from Indigenous employees.

Humour. A significant theme throughout the study, especially in conversations with Indigenous participants was the importance of humour. In particular, humour was raised as being an important aspect of Indigenous ways of being and especially important in the creation and maintenance of relationships as well as a means to deal with difficult circumstances.
The importance of humour in developing and maintaining relationships in Indigenous cultures was clearly stated when Willie shared "humour I think for me is a big part of that relationship building with Indigenous people, you need to have a little bit of humor: you need to kind of understand where that humor comes from and why it is important. Dale shared that humour "is a huge part of building relationships" and stressed the cultural importance of building a foundation for partnerships and relationships by making time for less formal conversations which should include sharing some laughs together. Willie also shared that humour can be used as a gauge for the health of relationships by sharing that if Indigenous people stop joking with you it can be a sign that something has occurred that has damaged the relationship. Joe shared that humour can also be a powerful tool for supporting individual's humility stating, "we humble each other with humour."

Willie shared that humour is required within Indigenous cultures as a mechanism for coping and healing during hard times. Willie acknowledged that "we have that humour to lighten the load. Let's laugh it off, let's heal ourselves through laughing and make a joke of it instead of being hurt and destroyed by it." Similarly on the importance of humour Joe shared that "life is serious, but you don't need to get caught up in the negativity." Greg shared how he had often witnessed an Indigenous person he worked with ease tension in challenging conversations through the use of humour, something Greg marveled at given that in his estimation the recent roles that he had served in, including the superintendency, had caused him to have a "humourectomy… because I just felt so afraid of offending."

Humour was also shared by a number of participants as a powerful strategy to use in teaching. Joe summarized his approach to teaching by saying "I use kindness, humour, and storytelling." Matt was the lone non-Indigenous participant to discuss humour during his first

conversation. Matt shared that he has been able to use humour to quickly build relationships with PSCS students, including those who initially seem hesitant to get to know him.

Given the importance of humour to Indigenous peoples, it appears vitally important that non-Indigenous people develop a greater appreciation of the value of humour. Willie shared about the disconnect between cultural understanding and humour:

> I know that mainstream society doesn't value [humour], I know that those are really valuable in Indigenous culture… We use a lot of humor to get through our day. But if a superintendent comes in or somebody else… it is really annoying to them because they don't see the value in that, they think we need to get on with the meeting and that we don't have time for that, we need to do this this, and this, right. The value I guess is just different.

Dale shared a story based on a similar lack of understanding where a seemingly well-intentioned directive was given to a team of Indigenous educators, Dale reflected:

> We would laugh, we would just laugh. What was interesting from outside of our room, people would hear us laughing and automatically assume that that was unproductive. Wasting time, unproductive, off-task, when that is so far from the reality of what is going on. You are creating a synergy that moves everybody in the same direction, on the same page, it is so powerful. I remember [name omitted] saying to me, that after I left one of the directives that came down the pipe was no more goofing around. I remember [name omitted] saying how that hurt them. You know, again, just a completely different perspective on what productivity looks like. Two different worldviews happening and yet we were shaking things up, we were doing so many good things and yet we are judged on our humour on our laughter on that joy, because it is different than what is happening everywhere else so what has to change? Well it is us who have to change to fit the system.

Dale's story is ripe with a sense of colonial superiority and a clear lack of understanding. Willie and Dale's statements provide clear examples of the importance of humour to Indigenous peoples, and how humour has been suppressed within Westernized systems.

Racism and Colonization

This section addresses thoughts shared by participants in relation to racism, history of oppression, experiences of being Indigenous within a provincial school system, as well as the need for anti-oppressive education and allies.

Racism. Most conversations for the study included recognition of the existence of racism in society and some addressed racism in school systems. This identification of racism included a number of stories told by Indigenous participants about their own recent personal experiences. Peggy shared stories of mistreatment and being judged based on her skin colour. Her stories included being accused of something at a local hospital and being denied entry to a school where she was supposed to be supporting students and staff. She used the term "dehumanizing" to reflect on how these experiences made her feel. Peggy stated that she has the capacity to advocate for herself in these challenging situations but fears similar experiences for Indigenous parents in schools may devastate relationships. Barry also spoke about persistent racism in the community and in schools. He shared that Indigenous parents are often dealt with in patronizing or condescending fashion by school staff; he highlighted specifics from his own experiences as a parent. Dale shared an experience from early in his career where he was accused by a white parent during a parent teacher conference of racism against white students. Dale was disheartened that despite the completely unfounded claims of the parent and the presence of the vice-principal in the conference that he received no support from his administration. On feeling the effects of racism, Peggy stated "I know what it feels like. So, for people to have to feel it as a result of somebody else's hurtful words, it's so hard to get over."

Some white participants also acknowledged the existence of racism. Stella told a story about her recognition of privilege that had to do with acknowledging that her children, who are First Nations, did not share the benefits of her white skin. She shared a specific story about a shopping trip where she was in a different aisle than her kids who were approached by a white woman who began berating them. Other white participants recognized and shared stories of racism in society or more specifically comments which they had heard stated by their friends and family. White participants did not identify specific incidents or problematic policies related to school or school division operation.

History of Oppression and Colonization. Systematic oppression faced by Indigenous peoples of Canada was also addressed by participants. Barry spoke at length about the Indigenous peoples' relationships with government and institutions stating that "everything is broken relationships, broken promises, broken policies, everything… Public policy is basically is so oppressive in nature to Indigenous people." Barry went on to argue that main-stream society does not understand "the trauma and the systemic abuse that was endured to our people." Joe ardently contended that the root of the many social ills facing Indigenous people can be traced to purposeful processes of colonization that stripped Indigenous peoples of their culture, language, and land and have led to significant and still prevalent intergenerational trauma.

Participants also singled out schools as powerful sites of oppression. Dale highlighted the perpetuation of cultural domination still at play in schools:

> I think that that is the challenge that we have had historically with public education is that for Indigenous people in this province we have had to leave our culture at the door. Everybody else can bring their perspectives in but not us.

Barry shared similar thoughts when he shared that in schools Indigenous students are at an "unfair disadvantage because that was never our world view; it was always a foreign understanding. And so, it was never in our language… the curriculum was never to talk about us or how we see the world, it never included us, right." Barry identified the power of education to help address past and current injustices, for these reasons he advocated for schools where many Indigenous students attend to get nothing but the best (facilities, programs, educators, responsive curriculum…) which he argues has never been and is still not the case.

Greg spoke at length in recognition that government, society, and schools have been purposeful in the oppression of Indigenous peoples. Interestingly, Greg shared the learning path that he had been set on through learning afforded to him by SUSD over the past few years targeted at developing critically aware and culturally competent leaders. Of the many learning experiences he discussed, he detailed one that he found embarrassingly impactful:

> What we did with the leadership group was we brought in [name omitted] who had been involved in land claims negotiations as a government lawyer for years and years and years. We brought him in because we thought, and I am kind of embarrassed to say this because I thought this was for others but apparently I needed it as well. I needed to hear it

> from a real western source. Like sometimes you can't get far enough hearing from people who are not just sort of like you. He came in and gave us a message about how we, and we all kind of looked the same in the room, he was a white privileged male from an academic background. He said we are guilty of injustice. He just laid it out and he provided all kinds of examples. He took us back through Canadian history that we had heard from Indigenous leaders in our unit, but there was something about also hearing that from someone in that position. It was kind of embarrassing because you should be able to hear it from anyone but, sometimes you are embedded in your culture and you can not get out without that kind of unlocking. That was really pivotal for me and I think for the division, but I will just speak about me. He just named it. It was, here is the history of injustice, we are all complicit. Look around this room we are all the custodians of or the owners of a public institution. Public institutions have failed our Indigenous people repeatedly over and over and over again, and we have not lived up to our treaty commitments. Here is the reality of what our governments have done, and we are public servants, what are we going to do?

Barry was happy to acknowledge work taking place in SUSD like that described by Greg; however, he did not see much real change happening for Indigenous staff or students:

> when you come to the actual structure and operation and there's not a lot that conducive to an Indigenous paradigm. It's a different kind of environment when you come into these structures. And I honestly believe people don't set out to be discriminatory or to mean to even be racist but when it comes down to the standard of doing things, it's always like this is way we've always done it. This is what been established so this is the way we'll continue to do it.

Many other participants shared similar thoughts to Barry's on the difficulty of Indigenous staff members fitting into school systems that are misaligned with their worldview.

Challenge of Being an Indigenous Employee in School Systems. A common theme among Indigenous participants who were employed in the education sector was the challenges they faced. These challenges included the sense of isolation, navigating euro-centric norms, being relied upon to be an expert, and the sense of working harder to be recognized. As a result

of these challenges, participants felt marginalized, identified the need to pick their battles and to have support systems. Indigenous educators in the study identified with a sense of isolation felt from the dearth of Indigenous employees in school systems. Sherry, Willie, Barry, Dale, and Joe all spoke about the challenge of being the only Indigenous person, or one of only a few, Indigenous people in their buildings; Stella also shared about the adversity that a close friend had faced in a similar circumstance. There was an overwhelming sense that school divisions need to increase the number of Indigenous people within all employee groups. Multiple participants discussed SUSD's strategy to increase the number of Indigenous employees. Along with the need to increase the number of Indigenous employees, participants also identified that there was a need for school divisions to counter harmful discourses that exist about the hiring of Indigenous people. Dale shared his experience:

> I heard that tons of times. I know that when I first started teaching that it was that idea that you graduated from [a preparation program for Indigenous teachers] so obviously your degree doesn't mean anything and you are only here because you are brown. I got that so many times, people saying to me, you only got your job because you are Métis. You never would have got the job. There is your uphill battle right from the moment you are hired; you have to prove yourself as competent and capable when you have the same qualifications as everyone else, you still have to prove yourself because you only got your job because you are Métis. I heard that so many times.

Dale further shared that non-Indigenous educators have felt enabled to make such statements. Joe, whose career began around the same time as Dale's shared very similar thoughts "school systems are not set up for our success. I had to continually prove that I could do my job." Dale and Joe's view that Indigenous educators need to work harder based on the judgements of others was common to other Indigenous participants. Willie articulated this reality:

> you have to work ten times harder just to be recognized as being skilled or educated or any of that kind of stuff. Just to get people to see you as an equal person or somebody that knows something. You are constantly working on trying to know more or build those skills even though you might already have them, but you almost have to become an expert in every single piece just so that you can be recognized as valid.

Indigenous educators agreed that there was only one area where they were seen to be experts, whether they were or not. Sherry stated that a common experience for Indigenous educators is expectation "to be the be all to end all of anything Indigenous." This was seen to be highly problematic as participants readily acknowledged the pan-Indigenization in this belief. Participants shared that they held specific knowledge about their people but did not hold detailed information about all Indigenous peoples and were often called upon to address information which was not theirs to share. Also problematic was non-Indigenous educators abdicating responsibility to learn thus making more work for Indigenous educators and limiting the growth of non-Indigenous educators. Joe shared that one of the bigger struggles he had faced in his career was when fellow teachers would say to him "this is some Native thing, you do it" to which he had developed a standard reply "don't you want to learn?" Sherry stated that being consistently called upon to address all things Indigenous has a disempowering effect, especially after repeatedly informing others that you might not be the right person to share: "it makes you feel like you really do not have a voice that matters."

Participants also shared the challenge of working in a system based on a worldview that was at odds with their own. Willie shared that as a student and now as an educator that he had to be observant to learn about expectations and actions of others. Willie identified individuality and competitiveness as two features of working within provincial school systems that were at odds with his cultural norms. Hierarchical structures were identified by multiple participants as problematic to the Indigenous value of relationships. The primacy of Euro-centric norms left Indigenous employees feeling like outsiders within their school divisions, a sense that was exacerbated by how few other Indigenous people there were to commiserate with. Willie stated:

> I think that that is what it really comes down to with Indigenous educators in our system is that we don't fit that norm and there are not enough of us in the system to build that family relationship, that understanding.

Similarly, Dale shared that Indigenous employees often lack a sense of belonging within systems as their paradigms are at odds with norms and because they are often isolated. Sherry identified a need for leaders in school systems to create safety for Indigenous employees to be able to share their experiences and thoughts without fear, something she did not believe currently existed:

> we have to find ways to ensure that we can hear those voices that can inform without fear. Right, that there are repercussions for speaking your mind; that it is a career limiting move if you are actually saying something that is contradictory to what is the current practice.

Based on his experiences Willie identified both the need for change but also the need to be calculated in his advocacy, he used the term "picking your battles."

The need for support from school systems and each other was identified. Dale shared that the short-sightedness of school divisions having recruitment policies for Indigenous employees without having clear policies and practices to support retention. He argued that it was paramount to ensure that all Indigenous employees felt safe and affirmed within the system. He contended that one way to support this was to provide safe spaces for Indigenous employees to decompress with each other. Joe also shared the need for support networks for Indigenous employees, but identified that given his very unique role as a cultural and language teacher that he was forced to look outside of his school division to the local university and to other Cree speaking educators for community. Sherry reflected on her career and contended that various policies and practices can make school divisions more or less safe for Indigenous people. When purposeful actions are absent from school divisions Sherry has witnessed "Indigenous people are surviving in this despite it not being a good place." Joe shared a conversation that he had early in his career with a colleague who told him that "you can't change the system, the system changes you." Joe did identify that SUSD has changed over the course of his career and that he acknowledged that he had "been involved in the shift in awareness" towards better environments for Indigenous students and staff. He identified that through his career he has been a support for this change, although he used a Cree term to describe the rate of progress, ēsis, which he translated to mean at the pace of a snail. Barry shared a similar view on underwhelming progress "has much changed? I don't know, you know what I mean. I just don't know." There appears to be significant room for expediated growth to ensure safe and welcoming spaces for Indigenous employees.

Anti-Oppressive Education. One possible path to improve the sense of safety for Indigenous students and staff is through purposeful enactment of principles of anti-oppressive education, a topic that resonated with many participants. Purposeful action by both SUSD and PSCS were evident in this regard. Two significant initiatives recently undertaken by SUSD were

identified. The first were learning modules about anti-oppressive education created by SUSD staff members which were provided to office staff and educational assistants during the school closures in the Spring of 2020. Reflecting on the anti-oppressive modules, Willie shared both the positive manner in which the learning was sought by most participants but also the desire of some participants to not be involved. Willie shared of the initiative that there was:

> lots and lots of pushback, which is expected to a certain point. You know like whenever you have to work on yourself or admit that you have biases or any kind of wrongdoing, it is hard and people push back… I guess the thing that hurt me the most out of all of it was that this was mandatory for the administrative assistants and the educational assistants, but low and behold there was still that pushback from our admin staff where they said no my staff don't have to participate.

Ultimately Willie shared that where school administrators attempted to excuse their staff members from the learning that leaders at the system level did ensure their participation. The second major initiative in SUSD that participants discussed were learning opportunities for school-based leaders targeted specifically to developing in the important areas of equity and social justice. Stella and Matt both shared about their learning in their respective leadership groups and how they brought their learning back to the staff at PSCS. Ultimately PSCS created a staff leadership committee to help lead professional learning on anti-oppressive pedagogy. Stella and Matt spoke proudly of the leadership of two of their teachers and of the way their staff engaged in this learning.

Greg identified the need for SUSD educators to continue to improve in the area of social justice and in particular in improving outcomes for Indigenous peoples. Greg stated:

> this is the challenge of our time. If we can figure this out what an amazing learning opportunity to grow as people, to grow as an organization, to be better than people who have made these mistakes over time. It takes a ton of work and creativity and we are far from there yet, but at least we are on the path.

Greg acknowledged that the system has ample room to grow but is committed to structuring the organization in a "way that works for everyone." Greg also shared details of his learning over the last few years and his personal commitment to continuing to learn.

Allyship. The personal commitment to learning and action stated by Greg are important aspects of allyship. The importance of non-Indigenous people acting as allies was repeatedly identified as important. Barry spoke about the need for allies to support Indigenous people:

> And that's what I'm saying, that's the truest indicator [of allyship] is that when Indigenous people or people of colour, however, don't always have to be the elephant in the room; others will stick up. Others will speak up, others will say hey, this is what's happening.

While speaking up and supporting is important in allyship, Sherry shared that allies:

> need to listen more than they talk, and they need to be able to go and say I am here with you I am not speaking for you, I'm here with you, what do you need from me? What is it that you need from me to support you in having your voice heard? I think that privileging those voices is really important.

Dale, Sherry, and Willie shared another aspect of allyship that they saw as being vital; the willingness to create opportunities for the right person to be in the room for conversations and decisions. They held that this meant privileging Indigenous voices even if they do not have the position or title to traditionally be involved in decision making. They argued that if an Indigenous person has knowledge, experience, and required perspective then allies must help break down barriers to their participation in decision making. They identified that this may require an ally giving up some of their power or to ensure Indigenous voice and decision-making capital. Sherry spoke passionately that it was:

> never about that only Indigenous people can do this work. Until we can ensure that we are doing this work together side by side and doing it with each other... I think that that is a piece that I have seen in some of my experiences in different parts of my career. I thought that there was a belief or a feeling that yes this work needed to be done but that it needed to be done for us as Indigenous people and not with us and to me that is a big theme that runs throughout whatever it is that I am thinking about taking on. I think that I will invest in it if it is a with and if it becomes a for then I don't want a part of it, because we need to find a way to ensure that these voices of Indigenous people are heard in all parts of the sector.

Participants shared that stepping into a leadership role or sharing their perspective was much easier if they knew that they had a leader who supported them fully. Barry shared that he believes that there is some danger to being an ally as there may be a perception that they are breaking from the norm or are pushing too hard; he feared that some potential allies may never fully develop into allies as they are trying to protect their career aspirations. The need for allies was pronounced in the study as multiple participants indicated that Indigenous people were underrepresented in all employment categories in SUSD.

Teaching

Participants placed great emphasis on the importance of quality teaching in inner-city schools. In particular, participants discussed dispositional traits which they believed were required for inner-city teachers, promising pedagogy, and the need for purposeful staffing.

Disposition for Working in Inner-City Schools. Despite the recognized challenges, multiple participants clearly expressed their desire to work in inner-city schools. Words such as passion and love were frequently shared. Stella was unequivocal in sharing her continued desire to work at PSCS or a similar school "I don't ever want to leave a Community School." The desire to work in inner-city schools was shared by a number of participants as the most important dispositional attribute for educators who are successful in improving student learning in these schools. Participants also identified the importance of relationships, supporting children holistically, and holding unwaveringly high expectations as key dispositional traits.

The importance of relationships was shared by all participants. The significant effort made by the staff at PSCS was noted. Sherry argued that inner-city educators need to privilege relationships stating,

> they spend all day with those kids and so my belief is that we can teach somebody good instructional strategies and we can help build their classroom management work, but if these people in our schools don't come with a core belief in the importance of relationships and a core belief that all kids can be successful if I find the right way to help them then nothing is going to happen. It is those two things, that strong belief in relationships and that you actually believe that all kids are capable.

Stella and Matt shared the purposeful work that their staff had done in prioritizing relationships with students and families. Stella shared that "I feel like everyone is on board, out walking around in the school, getting to know the kids." Peggy shared her observations:

> when I'm there at the beginning of the school day, what I see is I see the community coordinator, sometimes the principal, sometimes the vice-principal. I see them greet the students at the door and also the secretary, she's essential. She greets the students at the door. So, they greet them at the door, they send them in the direction they need to and the main thing I see is they're happy to see them, they're happy to see them… They engage in conversation that says, "I'm with you on your journey in this school."

Matt shared that taking time to build relationships "is the most important part of our day" and noted that everyone on staff is invested including the caretaker (something that Margaret also made mention of). Margaret also recognized the effort of staff to build relationships with her grandchild and shared that the staff really knew her grandchild and made her feel so welcome; of the effort that PSCS staff placed on forming relationships she stated, "that is a pretty special thing for sure."

Sherry and Stella both contended that, in addition to being purposeful in getting to know the students, it was imperative for teachers to be thoughtful in the creation of their classroom learning community. Sherry advocated for teachers to:

> spend your first part of your year with kids building that sense of community and family within your own classroom because you are spending so much time together. To me that is part of the pedagogy is being able to explicitly create things that are going to build that sense of community and relationship in your classroom.

Given the importance of maintaining relationships, Willie and Matt both discussed how teachers must be more relational than punitive when correcting or supporting a child. Willie shared the importance of a child feeling relationality within their school:

> I always say that it is that relationship that is most important in our schools, because when you have relationship then you can build on yourself. You can see the great things in yourself and someone else can see them as well. Then it just builds and builds and builds.

Margaret shared that she and other parents certainly notice when staff work with students and families in a good way, Margaret shared this of her observations of Stella:

> she is down to earth, and she will sit with you. I watched her one time and a student came in crying. She talked to him and she knelt down and she took him into her arms and they chatted. And when that little boy came out he was happy. I don't know what she said to him but she touches people like that.

Matt and Stella identified how building strong relationships with students and families is required to be able to support students holistically.

PSCS staff also placed significant care and attention into supporting students holistically. This includes providing supports that extend beyond what a traditional school may offer. PSCS staff focus on student academic success but also are purposeful in supporting students' development physically, emotionally, and spiritually. These four areas of focus represent the four quadrants of a medicine wheel. One of the primary tools utilized by PSCS staff to support student holistic development is the maintenance of a student profile for each student. These student profiles focus on areas of strength and interest in addition to areas for growth and target all four holistic quadrants. PSCS has dedicated staff learning time in staff meetings and professional development days to creating shared beliefs on holistic supports and the creation and maintenance of student learning profiles. Tied closely to PSCS's focus on relationships and holistic support is their growing understanding of trauma informed practice. Staff highlighted that they know their students well enough to easily identify when something appears to not be quite right and are quickly able to offer a variety of supports to the child to help them regain their readiness to learn.

Participants discussed the balance between holistic supports and maintaining high expectations for learning. On the role of SUSD Community Schools in providing both supports and quality learning Greg shared:

> where we were able to move up the hierarchy of needs we would make sure that there was support for nutrition and for various needs so that we could get to high expectations. They were always married. There was an acknowledgement that maybe early on Community Schools focused to the detriment of academic learning on taking care of students to feel comfortable in the school and to be well fed and having those needs taken

> care of. The [name of plan] work has really been about how do we make sure that we are focused on high expectations for all and then doing the hard work that we need to do in order to adapt what is offered in schools in order to realize those high expectations.

Sherry also discussed the need for both supports and high expectations:

> to me it is that belief and those high expectations with the right kinds of supports to help them and not equal supports, equitable supports. That whole idea that not everyone needs the same thing and not everyone gets the same thing but everyone gets what they need to be successful.

Differentiated supports were also identified as a promising teaching practice.

Promising Pedagogy. While participants identified that learning in inner-city schools was not yet occurring at the levels required to rectify historic educational gaps, they also held out hope that teaching practices would continue to improve and that all students would experience success. It is notable that PSCS was not involved in the *Following their Voices* initiative at the time of the study. The fact that PSCS was not involved in the initiative was predictable as the initial urban sites selected for involvement were secondary schools. A number of promising teaching practices for inner-city schools were addressed by participants and both *Following their Voices* and the book *Teaching Each Other* (Goulet & Goulet, 2014) were referenced by multiple participants as providing promising teaching models. Sherry discussed the need to examine surrounding schools and divisions serving similar populations and to "mine the good" teaching practices. Some promising practices already highlighted in this section include steadfastly maintaining high expectations, pursuing strong relationships with students and families, and providing holistic supports. Another significant topic of conversation was the importance of differentiating instruction to target students directly where they are at. Differentiation was seen by participants to be more important in inner-city schools given the more pronounced diversity of needs, learning gaps, and transiency of students. In addition to attempting to meet student needs through their learning profiles, PSCS staff discussed two promising models of differentiation. They offered an embedded model of support where a resource teacher co-taught in the classroom alongside the classroom teacher during literacy blocks which allowed for responsive groupings and more targeted learning. PSCS staff also shared the power of having a literacy tutor attached to their school who provided one on one support for students learning to

read. Greg also stressed the importance of teachers understanding curriculum and how to shift their thinking of curriculum to a place of understanding that "we are not enslaved by curriculum curriculum is in service of our kids and so we are not just going to go through the way we always have." As discussed earlier in this chapter, participants also placed significant value on anti-oppressive teaching and the importance of cultural infusion in the school and classroom. As a summary of teaching in inner-city schools Sherry specified that teaching:

> looks different, I truly believe that [teaching] looks different in terms of what we say we value. If you are someone who wants to work in our inner-city schools what you need to bring to the table is different than what is needed in some of our more affluent neighbourhoods.

Sherry's logic was shared by many other participants and speaks to the need to be purposeful when staffing inner-city schools. Participants shared that they do not belief that staffing these schools has been purposeful.

Purposeful Staffing. Staffing inner-city schools was a mutual interest of all participants who were educators. Of the challenges faced by inner-city educators Barry assessed "I don't suspect anybody desirably wants to be put at some of these schools." Two major issues of staffing were presented by participants. Greg shared the cultural misalignment in inner-city staffing; despite serving populations of mostly Indigenous students, staff in these schools come from "a fairly homogeneous set of backgrounds… Our staff are doing their very best to serve communities that are not like the ones that they grew up in." Willie and Barry were both clear that perceptions remained that inner-city schools were often staffed with new staff or with staff that were seen as non-desirable in other schools and may be placed in these schools for punitive reasons. Willie wondered:

> how are our kids so invalid that you send the worst or bad apple teachers to them? And then you wonder why our statistics are not growing? Or why are our levels still the way they are? Because you are sending the bad teachers to educate our students. That is the biggest problem I see with our staffing.

Barry discussed the need for teachers in inner-city schools to have additional training and a better understanding of poverty and its associated ills noting that he sees hard working teachers who are frustrated. Sherry, Matt, and Stella all shared that the experience of working in an inner-

city school is so divergent from experiences of working in most other schools that educators who have not worked in a similar school really do not understand the work. Given how different and important the work is, Willie argued that educators should not be forced to work in inner-city schools if they do not want to be there as negative attitudes and deficit thinking of educators will potentially cause students and families additional harm.

Given the identified dispositional and instructional traits presented at the beginning of this section, participants contended that staffing of inner-city schools required differentiation and commitment. Sherry wondered about instituting an application process for inner-city staffing believing that:

> putting the right people in these schools to support our kids and our families… I think lots about the whole idea about applying to go to those new schools and how it is seen as wow you get to go there, you know it is seen as a promotion. I personally think we should be putting that kind of process in place for our Community Schools. Our kids, we need the best of the best. If we are ever going to make a dent in what is going on here, we have to be able to have all the best pedagogy that exists out there.

Barry acknowledged the challenges faced by inner-city teachers and identified that it may take a "superhuman staff to be able to do that." Barry argued that school divisions must make significant commitments and investments in inner-city schools. Another area that requires commitment and investment is school leadership.

Leadership

Not surprisingly provided the intent of the study, leadership emerged as a significant theme. Major leadership themes for the study included the difference in leading inner-city schools, attributes and actions of successful leaders in inner-city schools, the importance of leaders being learners, and the need for relationships. It is notable that the *Leading to Learn* initiative which began in Saskatchewan in 2018 with the intended goal of enhancing learning of Indigenous students was only raised by one participant and none of leaders involved in the current study were involved in the initiative at the time of the study. This indicates that the *Leading to Learn* initiative was not widespread in Saskatchewan at the time of this study.

Leading Inner-City Schools. It was clearly articulated in the study that leading in an inner-city school presents significantly different challenges and requires a different set of leaderships attributes and actions. Matt clearly identified the need for inner-city schools and their leaders to work differently: "we are different kinds of schools, there is no two ways about it. We do things differently; we have to do things differently." Sherry contended "you can't talk to just anybody about the things that go on in our schools because if you have not ever been there and done that you don't understand it." Stella, who before coming to PSCS had been an administrator in a suburban school shared that during her first year as principal at PSCS she was "kind of like a deer-in the-headlights. I didn't know what was going on, what was happening." All participants who had been an administrator of an inner-city school identified that their work was different enough from leading in other schools that they often found meetings and learning opportunities where they were grouped in with all other school-based leaders in the system as out-of-touch with their realities. They were unanimous in calling for supports specific to the development and needs of inner-city leaders. As Sherry stated:

> one of the things that needs to continue to happen is that bringing together of administrators in those schools. One because often, as we said, you are putting some new administrators in those schools and for me I had lots of experiences in lots of ways in lots of things but it was really that group of core school principals that helped me to survive. Just some of the logistical things even. Just knowing that I could call up one of my friends who understood my context, who didn't judge me, who would give me that support, it is crucial. If the people in those positions don't have that support then none of the rest of it is going to work. You have to know that you have a group of people that you can count on when you don't know what to do, you know who to call at least.

Sherry's statement about leaders beginning their administrative careers in inner-city schools is important to note. In this study all school-based leaders, including the student researcher, began their principalship with a placement in an inner-city school; multiple conversations in the study reinforced that within SUSD the placement of new leaders in inner-city schools appears to be a norm.

Attributes. A number of important leadership attributes were identified in the study. Of the importance of having leaders who are a good fit for inner-city schools Sherry stressed that:

> If we know that we are putting people into a leadership position into a school like this, we have to look at what are those most important qualities and what are the rest that we can teach them. It might not be that this person is really good with technology and is a good data collection person and all of those things, maybe it is the fact that this person is connected to their community. I think that it is valuing some of the other things that leaders bring to the table that are not part of the formal way we look at leadership, the qualities that they bring.

The set of dispositional traits shared for leaders closely mirrored those traits previously identified as being vital for inner-city teachers. Amongst other attributes that were highlighted by participants in the study as being required to be successful during a placement as an inner-city school administrator were openness, listening, patience, consistency, trustworthiness, vulnerability, and hopefulness. Significantly, it was also identified that school leaders must do self-work to understand who they are so they can recognize biases. Willie Stated:

> As an administrator it is so important for you to understand how you view the world, how you view your career, how you view your family, how you view society knowing all of your biases, your stereotypes and where those came from and how do you change them when you recognize that it is not a good bias or stereotype to have. So how do you work on yourself?

Willie's point is salient given that the majority of administrators are white and come from middle-class backgrounds which may be quite unlike the backgrounds of many of the families attending inner-city schools.

Actions. Of the actions that leaders could take that were seen as powerful by participants, actions associated with instructional, distributed, and culturally responsive leadership were all highlighted. Also identified as important within this study was the prominent role that the leadership team at PSCS played in setting a positive climate in the school through their purposeful interactions with students.

Given the importance of elevating student learning in inner-city schools it is no surprise that the need for strong instructional leaders was often identified. Greg spoke about the importance of leaders working closely with teachers to identify and hone promising practices. Greg shared that leaders must be "shoulder to shoulder with teachers" and to be "present in what

people do with their time instructionally." Greg also stressed the importance of ensuring that all educators continue to grow and improve; he considered leadership of staff development processes within their schools as the "pinnacle of what we do." The importance of having clear goals and processes for striving to reach the goals was also shared as was the importance of using assessment data to monitor student progress, to provide interventions when things are not going well, and to celebrate successes.

Distributed leadership was discussed by a number of participants as foundationally important to successful inner-city schools. All participants who had taught in inner-city schools shared examples of how they were activated by their leaders to lead different initiatives within their schools or divisions. Those who had moved into leadership roles all discussed the importance of sharing leadership and the power that comes from having many leaders and being able to tap into the collective strengths of their team. Stella stated that she has a "shared leadership philosophy" which was evident throughout the study. Stella shared that she frequently uses the line "can I access your expertise as a teacher?" with staff members. On the importance of distributed leadership in inner-city schools, Sherry argued: I think that shared leadership is crucial in these schools and it is not always the people who are in the formal leadership positions.

Actions associated with culturally responsive leadership were also highlighted within the study. Dale spoke passionately about the need for leaders to champion cultural responsiveness within their schools. Dale noted that if cultural responsiveness efforts are to be realized they must be embraced by leadership. He shared that if teachers are passionate about cultural responsiveness work:

> you don't see a big change within the building. It is when the administration says this is going to happen, that you suddenly see the shift happen, because now there is that accountability piece.

Similarly, speaking of treaty education and teaching about residential schools, Joe shared that he has seen a change in the stance of leaders that has led to greater action by his colleagues:

> the last recent while, from the top down, I've been lucky to have some administrators who encourage that… those shifts have been happening, and people are a little more aware and they not feeling bad about what happened they just know it has to be taught.

The importance of Indigenous cultural infusion with schools and classrooms was a significant theme of the study and leadership actions to ensure that culture can thrive within schools appears to be paramount. Actions highlighted by participants included: staff professional learning about Indigenous cultures and ways of being and knowing, seeking partnerships with Indigenous people and agencies, infusing learning daily as well as hosting larger school events, ensuring cultural extra-curricular activities for students and families, activating Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and speakers of Indigenous languages, embedding cultural practices authentically in the school, and ensuring voice and leadership from Indigenous people.

Many participants discussed the purposeful work of the PSCS administrative team on building relationships with students. Helen shared her observations of Stella and Matt:

> Quite often I don't see them in their office lots, when I go to the school they are out walking around a lot, at recess they are outside, like [Stella] is outside on the playground. Really just engaging and interacting with the students.

Margaret shared a similar view on the Stella's interactions with students "that is why I love [Stella] so much, because she is so good with the kids." Peggy also shared about the personal welcome that students receive every morning at the door by PSCS staff which often includes Matt and/or Stella. Relationships with staff, parents, and community members also featured prominently in the study. The importance of leaders developing and maintaining trust and cohesion with all stakeholders was identified as being pivotal to inner-city school leadership.

Leadership Learning. Closely related to leadership attributes and actions is the need for leaders to model continuous learning. Barry shared the importance of leaders embracing work in the inner-city with "an open mind and heart" noting that leaders often came to inner-city schools with strong understanding of education but may be lacking in other areas. As previously identified, it is common for new leaders to be placed in inner-city schools, which may indicate greater needs for learning and development of day-to-day tasks of the principalship. Similar to Barry's comment about openness to learning, Sherry stated that one of the most vital characteristics of an inner-city leader had to be humility:

> I think that having humility and being humble, that piece is a really important piece as well as knowing that I know what I know but there are some things that I don't know and

> who are the people who do know and how can I get them in the room and how can I help use those gifts and those strengths that those people have to bring in my community.

Sherry clearly identified that learning for inner-city leaders is learning from community members. The terms humbly and humble were also used by participants in the study to describe the stance required to authentically engage in collaboration in a good way. Having humility also seems vital for leaders to engage in the self-work that Willie described in the previous section.

The next chapter addresses findings from the study specific to the conceptualization of leadership. Conclusions and implications based on findings from the study will be discussed in significantly more detail in the final chapter.

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the data from the study. It began with a chronology of the study. The research site and participants were introduced. The majority of the chapter focused on the presentation of the eight major themes that emerged from the study. The major themes are inner-city schools, culture, family and community engagement, success, partnerships, racism and colonization, teaching, and leadership.

Chapter Five: Presentation of the Conceptualization of Leadership

Findings and Conclusions Specific to the Conceptualization of Leadership

The findings of the study have informed the research question. The primary finding of the study is that the proposed contextually specific conceptualization for leadership in Saskatchewan inner-city schools offered an appropriate starting point for the study of inner-city leadership, but needed revision based on the findings of the study. With the support of participants' insights, the conceptualization has been enhanced to provide greater direction to leaders on how they can support decolonizing schools and school systems in communities effected by complex racialized poverty. A key extension of the conceptualization is offered. The conceptualization is examined through the lens of Saskatchewan's Community School model. Finally, remaining questions are posed.

Research Question

The study set out to address the research question: How can school leaders in inner-city schools in Saskatchewan decolonize their leadership practices to support the improvement of educational outcomes of Indigenous children living in communities affected by complex racialized poverty? To answer the research question, the conceptualization presented at the conclusion of chapter two is readdressed given significant insights from the study. Remaining questions about the conceptualization are also presented.

Conceptualization Revised

After the first round of interviews was completed and the first round of data coding and analysis had taken place, the conceptualization was revised to address emergent themes. The conceptualization was not discussed with participants during their first research conversations; however, during second research conversations, participants were provided with a brief description of the revised conceptualization including a few questions from the researcher about unanticipated themes that had emerged (see Appendix C). As a result of discussions from second set of research conversations, the conceptualization was revised further into the version that is now presented. Of note, numbers which were included in previous versions, have now been

removed from the conceptualization as they implied a linear Western understanding. (for a version that includes bulleted statements for each element of the conceptualization, see Appendix D). The revised conceptualization is presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Conceptualization for Leadership for Saskatchewan Inner-City Schools

Participant responses to the conceptualization were positive and insightful. Responses to the conceptualization included Stella's statement that:

> this is the model that I have longed for… When I read it I really thought this is important. I think that sometimes we forget all the different areas and we just look at the intellectual

> piece and we see it through our own lens and we forget to see multiple lenses. You have gained knowledge from multiple perspectives.

Sherry reflected on the conceptualization for the current study and made comparisons to the decontextualized leadership standards to which she has been held accountable:

> I think that you are onto something here that I think could inform the way that school divisions operate with their school-based leaders and in particular how they are able to nurture the leadership in folks who are either Indigenous or who want to work with Indigenous populations… I do think that we need to have a different model by which we operate as leaders, but also for how we are assessed as leaders… This whole idea of a different model for leadership is so needed because I don't necessarily fit into the current model. I don't feel a sense of connection to it the way that when I look at just the beginning pieces of this, I see myself in this. I am far more apt to engage in the self-reflection and the assessment pieces of a leadership model that looks like this than possibly the one that we currently have.

Similarly, positive statements were made by participants for each of the major areas of the conceptualization. The specific elements of the conceptualization including how they have been adjusted over the course of the study and participant feedback are presented next. This section is followed by exploring some unresolved questions about the conceptualization.

Engagement of Parents, Community, and Culture in Ethical Spaces

This element of the conceptualization remains the foundation. It was initially proposed based on an abundant literature base calling for the activation of cultural (Agbo, 2007; Aylward, 2007; Bell et al., 2004; Buckmiller, 2015; Ermine, 2007; Paris, 2012), community and parent knowledge (Ishimaru et al., 2019; Mapp & Bergeman, 2019; Tenorio, 2011) in schooling. Participants overwhelmingly supported its prominence as the foundation of the conceptualization, including Dale who shared "this is exactly what has to happen!" Peggy compared this element with the duty to consult with Indigenous peoples and saw purposeful engagement as being powerful "to create a shared responsibility guided in a good way through respect, responsibility, and recognition which will help people feel valued." Of the potential impact of such a conceptualization on parent engagement, Willie shared:

> If they are valued there is no telling what can be done… I have seen so many parents go above and beyond when they are valued… When we see each other as equals and share knowledge, that reciprocity, we get further.

Multiple participants acknowledged the importance of leaders understanding that they do not have ownership over the school. Stella shared that "this isn't my school, this is the community's school and their voice should be expressed, heard, listened too, and understood. I want to do more of that with this community."

As a result of the study, this element has been slightly modified in two ways. First, based on the prominence of themes of Indigenous ways of being, notably kinship and humour, within the study as well as clear indication that these ways of being do not hold equal value by non-Indigenous educators, they have been explicitly named within the conceptualization due to their significance for building and maintaining relationships. Peggy stated that educators "need to understand both (kinship and humour and their importance to Indigenous people)...for trying to create connection and for allowing people to feel comfortable to share". The second addition to this portion of the conceptualization is the need to extend the notion of shared ownership beyond its creation to the purposeful fostering and maintenance of shared responsibility. This addition was made in recognition of participants who discussed powerful partnerships from the past that were allowed to wane and disappear. Participants agreed that the creation and maintenance of harmonious relationships will require ongoing purposeful effort.

Local Definition of Student Success

This element of the conceptualization was first included based on literature challenging the primacy of Western views of success and their ill-fit with Indigenous notions of success (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007, 2009; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Khalifa et al., 2018) as well as prompts from multiple members of the cultural advisory committee for this study. Participants inextricably linked this element to the foundation of engagement in ethical spaces and as such the comments by participants in the previous section illuminate the importance of authentic ongoing partnership present in this element. The findings of this study, specifically the emergence of the theme of the importance of defining success, have reinforced the inclusion of this central element of the conceptualization. Participants continually stated the necessity for

meaningful community engagement in matters of importance to the school, especially in determining success and supporting program development. In the initial construction of the conceptualization, terms such as “may” were included in the descriptors for this section. This study has resulted in a much stronger conviction of the “must” of this element. Community members must be deeply engaged in determining a local vision of success. Dale saw this as an important element required for true transformational change in inner-city education that has thus far eluded the education sector. Given the extent to which colonization has impacted Indigenous people, this vision must embrace Indigenous ways of knowing and being in a purposeful way. Further, the study has reinforced the need for accepted notions of success to be extended beyond academic measures and must be framed around holistic concepts.

While creating a shared local vision of success was identified as very important, it was also identified by participants as highly complex. Peggy noted that previous experiences and lack of consultation in the past present a “significant hurdle to clear with families given the fact that they already feel ineffectual.” Peggy shared that it will take work for school and community leaders to support families and community members in switching their own mindsets so that they will understand that they have “permission to ask for excellence” and that collectively we “can achieve anything that we want to.” Dale shared similar sentiments to Peggy and wondered how to include the most disengaged families into this process; he helped answer his question by sharing that you must start the work “in a robust way, and then we make sure that everybody else is invited into the circle”. Greg identified the time and tension that leaders and community members will face in doing this work. He identified that to develop and pursue a community vision of success will require a significant commitment of time on an ongoing basis; he wondered if this work should truly be done at the individual school level, or whether it might be possible to do in clusters of schools, perhaps with support of elected board members representing those schools. Greg also identified the tensions that will be present in determining appropriate visions of success; notably the obvious tensions between prerequisite skills needed to achieve in the colonial world and traditional knowledge, language, and culture. Greg identified that both are important but cautioned that leaders will require training and support on navigating these potentially polarizing community conversations.

Committing to a Compelling Community Vision

This element of the conceptualization also resonated with participants. Themes that emerged in the study related to the commitment to a compelling community vision included the importance of shared ownership, common beliefs, clarity of vision, and models of success. Multiple participants spoke to the importance of having community members and staff members committed to a common vision. Greg shared the potential power of having families activated in the school plan in a way that they can convey messaging to both the school and their child about the importance of education and the school plan. Stella spoke about the importance of staff and families sharing beliefs, commitments, and high expectations. Stella saw opportunity for community involvement in monitoring and communicating progress. Peggy shared that in order to succeed, we will need to be able to show students, families, and staff what success looks like highlighting the need for clarity of purpose and potential models of success that schools will seek to achieve. Participants reinforced the importance of creating the shared vision but also the need for community members to be actively involved in the shaping and sharing the narrative of their work with the school.

The importance of inner-city leaders acting as allies emerged as a key finding of the study. It is notable that this need is pronounced given that the preponderance of educational leaders in Saskatchewan are non-Indigenous. A significant aspect of the leader as ally notion stems from the ability to foster trust of the community in themselves, their staff, and the school in general. This seems to highlight the need for the leader as an ally to be actively supporting staff in developing their stance as an ally. The importance of trust surfaced throughout the study but was especially pronounced when participants discussed supporting hesitant parents to engage deeply with school staff. Greg saw the immense importance of trusting relationships between teacher and parent and shared that the "student-family-teacher connection level is really where trust (in the school) is built." The notion of leader as ally is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Participants questioned the best forum for the joint pursuit of a community vision to be realized. There was general agreement that SCCs as currently enacted offered limited access to community voice. Participants wondered about the creation of parallel or overlapping processes to SCCs that might involve greater voice such as community sharing circles. Greg wondered if

the relationship between parent and teacher was in the initial point for dialogue for forming and communicating the compelling community vision. Participants discussed the involvement of Elders in all stages of the process of committing to a compelling vision; in particular, the importance of extending initial invitations to community members to attend vision setting events, in sharing insights into a desired vision, and in working with staff and community to pursue and communicate progress of the vision.

Fostering Learning Community Growth

Elements of this portion of the conceptualization received significant support throughout the study. Few challenges were presented that required changes to this portion of the conceptualization. There was general agreement in the power of distributed leadership especially in relation to leveraging the strengths of staff and community and to create collective ownership of initiatives to allow for their longevity if key leaders depart the school or community. There was also significant recognition of the need to activate leaders outside of the school administrative team including Elders, community members, and parents. The element of this portion of the conceptualization that received the most attention from participants was the purposeful leveling of hierarchies which was seen as aligned with Indigenous ways of being. The participant holding the highest position in the study, Superintendent Greg, admittedly at first struggled with the concept of rejecting strict supervisory processes but reasoned:

> We reject the strict supervisory processes when they are out of sync with what teachers, students, and families are telling us they need in the classroom. Those three coming together to do the good work that is described here needs to be our goal, not compliance with system directives. System directives need to be in support of what works in classrooms. So it is a flipping of the power structure… I thought of it as a flipping of the model of leadership which means that we are purposefully embracing responsive support processes…creating a support structure that allows people to share power…I liked that one, I just had to reflect on it a little bit.

Ultimately participants in the study agreed that school leaders should enact their leadership in service of the community and be flexible in how they operated to be able to activate the learning of their staff and community in unison to support improved student learning and experience; this appears similar to leadership as practice as articulated by Raelin (2011, 2016).

The reoccurring theme of staffing again emerged in conversations on learning community growth as participants wondered whether staff members lacking important dispositional traits would be able to learn alongside community members in a school-community collaborative culture. Another important consideration was presented by both Matt and Stella who stressed the importance of stable funding sources for inner-city schools to allow for appropriate compensation of Elders and community members for their leadership and support. PSCS can be noted as a positive example of a school with a clear distributive leadership conceptualization that has extended beyond the school staff. Stella noted of PSCS that "we are all leaders in different ways and that we have strengths and that we share that… we have a great community of learners and leaders here." Importantly this great community of leaders and learners includes the purposeful ways that Elder Peggy has been invited to work with students, parents, and staff on an ongoing basis. It was obvious from conversations with Stella that she clearly recognized Peggy as a key leader in their school-community.

Creating Community Within Community

This portion of the conceptualization received significant additions from the study including the recognition of the importance of kinship and humour in forming a sense of community with Indigenous peoples and the importance of leaders creating safe and affirming spaces for Indigenous staff members to flourish. Other aspects of the conceptualization were well-received by participants. Participants made clear connections between this element of the conceptualization and the critical imperatives element. Participants shared that in order for educators to operate in a manner conducive to the formation of community based on relationships, there was a need for humility and personal reflection to be evident in the critical imperatives portion of the conceptualization.

One notion of the conceptualization that was particularly well received was leaders and staff taking the stance of guest-hosts (Pushor, 2007). Multiple participants noted the importance of this stance and that without the ability to recognize themselves as the guests in the school, they would not likely be able to create the conditions required to invite the community into shaping the culture of the school. The need for relationships permeated every aspect of the study and especially resonated with the staff of PSCS. Of the importance of Indigenous families being actively invited into shaping the culture of the school, Peggy powerfully stated that given the

destructive impacts of residential schools, it was very important for parents to play a role in shaping the school culture and policies and to be present in school programing. Participants saw this element of the conceptualization as being particularly important for creating a shift from traditional notions of managing student misbehaviour towards the promotion of positive student action.

This study identified the importance of kinship bonds and humour to Indigenous people. The emphasis on these elements emerged as unexpected findings of the study and were passionately spoken about by participants. Both were also identified as being either lacking or purposefully impaired in educational systems. If leaders are to create a sense of community within the school based on enacting community norms within the school, they will need to be able to embed relationships built on kinship and promote and participate in a culture that privileges humour. In discussing this portion of the leadership conceptualization, Stella was critical of the work of the PSCS staff;however, the purposeful work which Stella and the PSCS staff has undertaken to develop close bonds with students and families and the manner in which they sought to activate people like Peggy and Joe to infuse Indigenous culture throughout the school was evident.

Given the many statements shared by Indigenous participants about the difficulty in navigating a Euro-centric system based on norms not their own, this element of the conceptualization appears to offer a solution. If a school were to be deeply infused with Indigenous culture and ways of being, many of the concerns shared by participants would be addressed. An Indigenized school culture seems to present an environment that would be attractive for Indigenous staff members to thrive.

Being A Principal Ally (Formerly the Critical Imperatives)

Overall, the dimension of the conceptualization referred to as the critical imperatives was very well received by participants. Of the importance of this portion of the conceptualization Greg shared:

> I loved the critical imperatives section, for those of us who grew up without thinking about the power structures or the racism or the oppression that exists, you know it takes a lot of work for us to feel comfortable and secure in that work.

The study bolstered the need for inner-city leaders in Saskatchewan to be able to lead in a manner conducive to the dimension previously referred to as the critical imperatives and to be engaged in the critical self-reflection about which Greg spoke. While revisions are made to the contents of this dimension of leadership, the most significant change to this section is in the name and overall framing. The contents of this dimension remain critical in importance and require a high level of critical thought on the part of the leader. At its core this dimension really is about the school leader serving as an ally by locating ideas of leadership beyond their administrative role and within the practices of the individuals who are part of the school and community. In renaming this section the term principal is used more broadly than its usage elsewhere in this study: it is meant here to refer to the stance of any school leader who acts in an influential manner as an ally to members of the school and community. As such the term ally is also broadly applied to non-Indigenous and Indigenous school leaders who are purposeful in their leadership efforts.

In addressing the need for the school leaders to be allies there is a clear distinction that must be made between allyship and exerting oneself as a saviour (Michie, 2007; St. Denis, 2010, Swiftwolfe, 2019). In her 2010 study of the experiences of Indigenous teachers in Canadian schools, St. Denis found that it was irritating and unhelpful when non-Indigenous educators adopted a saviour stance by acting as experts or professing to know the proper course of action for Indigenous peoples or on Indigenous matters. Instead, St. Denis advocated for non-Indigenous educators to be allies of Indigenous staff and students through admitting their personal limitations and fostering shared decision making. The narrative of white saviourship remains prominent in society and media and must be combated in education (Higgins et al., 2015; Korteweg & Fiddler, 2016; Swiftwolfe, 2019). The notion of allyship should be extended beyond the students in the school to also encompass other members of the school community. Peggy ardently contended that the school does also need to play a role in allyship with families.

Provided the opportunity to learn from participants in the study, the reframing of this dimension also became quite clear. This dimension is about more than leaders paying attention to a collection of important concepts that permeate educational literature. There appears to be a common set of principles that will allow leaders to be allies across multiple groups of people whose voices have been marginalized in educational settings. To ensure that leaders are acting as

allies and not as saviours, it is important that they adopt a stance grounded in four key principles. First, it is imperative that they are reflective and that this reflection stems from a deep and honest understanding of oneself and their positionality (Cranston, 2020; Peters, 2015). Second, they must be excellent listeners who seek to hear and learn from people with diverse experiences, viewpoints, and worldviews (Anuik et al., 2010; Ermine, 2007; Frawley & Fasoli, 2012; Priest et al., 2008). Third, they must act as a partner who empowers others, especially those who have not traditionally had influence (Khalifa et al., 2019). Finally, they must act as an ally and be supportive of (although maybe not directly leading) the implementation of helpful action to foster improved outcomes, particularly for stakeholders who have been marginalized and/or underserved (Peters, 2015; Swiftwolfe, 2019). Through reflection, listening, partnership, and action, inner-city school leaders can be supportive allies able to lead the other areas of this leadership dimension in a good way.

Many of the elements of this dimension of leadership that were presented in the conceptualization in chapter two emerged as major themes of the study. The prevalence of these themes is not surprising given the extensive literature bases that support these areas and my own first-hand experiences of working in inner-city schools. Among these vital areas for leaders to reflect, listen, partner, and act on are complex poverty, trauma, cultural responsiveness, anti-racism, and parent engagement. I contend that leaders adopting a stance of ally grounded on the principles of reflection, listening, partnership, and action will be better able to serve their community through enacting anti-racist pedagogy, trauma informed practice, cultural responsiveness, and parent engagement. Collective leadership in each of these areas is vital to the flourishing of Saskatchewan inner-city schools.

A major addition to this dimension of leadership that emerged as a significant theme of the study is the inclusion of leaders creating conditions conducive to Indigenous educators flourishing. A strong theme from the study were the difficulties faced by Indigenous educators working in Euro-centric education systems. In addition to making statements about the frustrations of frequently having to prove themselves and having to be the lead on all Indigenous matters, participants shared how working in provincial school systems forced them to distance themselves from their communities and their customs. In essence, schools and school systems appeared to continue to be strong sources of colonization for Indigenous educators who were

forced to conform to systems and ways of being that were dissimilar to their own. As Sherry stated, “you should not have to check your cultural self at the door in order to be successful in an organization.” Through the stance of an ally, leaders must co-create with their Indigenous staff members, safe spaces for their Indigeneity to flourish and for their way of being to be honoured and celebrated. Ideally the creation of comfortable and culturally affirming spaces in schools will support recruitment and retention of Indigenous employees. Ideally this will create a compounding effect as participants’ strong beliefs were that having more Indigenous employees will provide greater community and safety.

Fostering Caring and Culturally Appropriate Teaching

Participants in the study overwhelming agreed with existing literature that excellent teaching is required within inner-city schools and that without great teaching that the historic and prominent achievement gaps will not be closed (Carter, 1999; Chenoweth, 2007, 2009; Haberman, 1991, 1995; Wiliam, 2011). This dimension of leadership, which sees leaders supporting the implementation of culturally appropriate and high yield instructional practice, was heavily reinforced throughout the study and received no significant revisions. Elements of good teaching that received significant attention from participants included the centrality of relationships; high expectations; differentiated instruction; engagement of parents, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers; providing choice and empowerment; supporting students holistically; and hands-on-learning. Two Saskatchewan specific teaching frameworks exist that speak directly to the view of good teaching shared in the study. Multiple participants spoke directly of the *Following their Voices* initiative (Following their Voices, n.d.) and Goulet and Goulet’s (2014) work and the pedagogy for which they advocate. Of note in this study, an interesting additional consideration in conversations of good teaching when working with Indigenous populations appears to be including humour within the classroom.

Participants clearly conveyed the importance of school leaders in supporting teaching practice if there is to be deep coherence of practice across the school. Literature is clear that school leaders do play pivotal roles in supporting the creation of school cultures permeated with culturally responsive practice (Khalifa et al., 2016, 2019; J. Martin et al., 2020), anti-racist practices (Burleigh & Burm, 2014; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Cranston, 2020; Higgins et al., 2015; Michie, 2007), and parent engagement (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Ishimaru et al., 2016;

2019; Pushor & Amendt, 2018). With so many important areas on which to focus to help staff strengthen their practice, a significant aspect of leadership in inner-city schools will be working with the staff and community members to plan for effective professional learning to allow for teachers to enhance their teaching practice in the areas which the community identifies as important. With so many areas of teaching practice being identified as important and educational attainment gaps to close, it is no wonder that many participants were steadfast in advocating for inner-city schools to be staffed with strong veteran teachers and administrators.

Conceptualization Extended to Encompass Senior Educational Leaders and Officials

Throughout the study, participants continued to impart the importance of leadership from the very top of educational systems if any real changes in inner-city education are to be realized. The initial purpose of the study and the creation of the leadership conceptualization was to focus on the role of school-based leaders; however, given the insights of participants, the conceptualization has been extended to be orientated towards leaders at all levels of school systems that have schools located in communities with spatially concentrated racialized poverty. Specifically, this conceptualization is important for Members of the Legislative Assembly, school board trustees, leaders of the Ministry of Education, directors, and superintendents to be able to understand, support, and enact. The extension of this conceptualization to encompass additional educational leaders is testament to the need for concerted effort from all decision makers to truly make a difference in improving learning outcomes and experiences for Saskatchewan inner-city students. All aspects of this conceptualization appear to be directly applicable to leaders at all levels of educational systems. School-based leaders are more likely to adopt the form of leadership described if they are supported and held accountable by provincial and system leaders; such support and accountability can be realized only if provincial and senior level system leaders understand important aspects of inner-city leadership.

Elected officials, the Ministry of Education, and school division leaders are well situated to set priorities for provincial schools at the provincial and school district levels. Saskatchewan has an urgent need to improve outcomes for Indigenous students (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2017; Steeves et al., 2010;) and some initiatives have been undertaken that show promise such as *Following Their Voices* and *Leading to Learn*. To rectify the prevalent

inequities the response cannot be fragmentary; improving the current situation will take concerted effort over time and working with Indigenous peoples. This must stem from the very top of the hierarchical authority within current educational systems. Importantly, words are not enough; it is essential that clear tangible actions and resource allocation be in alignment with espoused beliefs. This has not been the case. The Government of Saskatchewan and the Ministry of Education have set lofty goals for improving success rates of Indigenous students (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2017), yet there have been a significant run of austerity budgets that have resulted in Saskatchewan school divisions being forced to make cuts to their staffing and programing (see for example: A. Martin, 2017; Warrick, 2019; White-Crummey, 2021). Not surprisingly, the consequence of these actions often ensures that equity work (including programs, and staffing) is lost at the expense of traditional notions of success focused on academic targets alone. There appears to be a significant disconnect between rhetoric and reality in what government/district systems prioritize in regard to supporting Indigenous student success.

This study made clear the need for senior leaders to appropriately consult with Indigenous people and multiple participants called for enhanced partnership and the (re)formation of a council of Elders. The study also clearly illuminated the need for leadership at all levels of educational systems to provide adequate resources to inner-city schools to ensure that students attending these schools have equitable opportunities for success. This resourcing must include purposeful staffing of teachers and school leaders as well as funding to ensure that students' needs are met both in terms of basic needs such as nutrition as well as their cultural needs. Participants also spoke about the importance of relationships with senior leaders. Multiple Indigenous participants referenced the same small group of former senior leaders in SUSD for the work that they empowered through the relationships and trust that they had formed with Indigenous leaders both locally and those within SUSD. Trusting relationships with senior leaders was seen as a foundational state for Indigenous leaders flourishing within educational systems.

The need to foster flourishing conditions for Indigenous staff members was seen as important at both the school and district level. Participants shared the importance of leadership

from the top of the system both in what is espoused and actual actions. Other clear recommendations from participants for leadership from the system level included having an advisory council of Elders to guide the system and that could be available to support Indigenous employees, having networking opportunities, and creating opportunities for employees to share their experiences in the system which should include the option for an exit interview if the employee decides to leave the system.

Senior level leaders were also seen as critical leaders given their ability to enforce system accountability. It is clear in leadership literature that school level leadership is required to ensure educator adherence to initiatives, especially those that require dispositional shifts (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Khalifa et al., 2016, 2019; Pushor & Amendt, 2018). Multiple participants spoke about the similar need for leadership from senior leaders if there was to be adherence and longevity at a division or provincial level. Without system accountability, it appears unlikely that there will be sustainable improvement across Saskatchewan's inner-city schools. If the proposed leadership conceptualization is to be realized, inner-city school leaders activating this form of leadership with their community will need to be supported by provincial and school division leaders. Much like school-based leaders of Saskatchewan are predominantly white, Martell (2016) said of the superintendency that "the dearth of Indigenous educational leaders in Saskatchewan educational leadership may be attributed to the gatekeepers. A lack of recruitment, hiring, and retention is tantamount to deliberate exclusion" (p. 216). There appears a need to address the representation of senior level leaders in the province and to support non-Indigenous senior-level leaders in becoming allies.

Actions taken by senior leaders that were identified as being positive by Indigenous participants appeared to be those that reduced hierarchical structures. While participants spoke about the need for leadership from the top of systems, they also spoke about the need to level power across the system and to actively work to reduce hierarchical structures and to share influence. Hierarchies are entrenched in school systems. Evidence from this study challenges hierarchies and invites relational and distributive leadership across schools and systems.

Conceptualization and Community School Leadership

The conceptualization of leadership appears to be well aligned with the leadership described by Saskatchewan's now obsolete Community School model. Notably the conceptualization privileges and enhances aspects that were central to the Community School model. In clearly focusing on increasing student and staff learning, it extends the Community School leadership construct. I contend that the Community School model and the proposed leadership conceptualization will work best if enacted together with adequate resourcing.

Tymchak (2001) noted the importance of school-based leadership for the realization of the Community School model. He identified elements that were essential for school leaders. Among these important aspects of Community School leadership Tymchak called for leaders to be collaborative, to value parents as partners, and to value the community as resources. He also called for school leaders to work purposefully to build capacity in the community through sharing leadership. To achieve the leadership needed for Community Schools "in-school administrators will need to be builders of a school culture that is characterized by shared power through collaborative decision-making" (Tymchak, 2001, p.140).

This description of school-based leadership is a clear example of the transformational leadership paradigm that was prevalent in the 1990s and 2000s. Transformational leadership approaches permeated education with the aim to restructure organizations leading to greater effectiveness (Leithwood & Poplin, 1992; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Stewart, 2006). This approach called for collaborative leadership and power sharing. The transformational leadership paradigm was critiqued for being deficient of any instructional or student learning focus (Marks & Printy, 2006; Stewart, 2006). The critique of transformational leadership for the lack of focus on learning can also be levied on the Community School leadership model for the underemphasis on learning. For example, Appendix 3 of the task force's final report is a two-page document which describes in-school leadership. On these two pages the words *learn, instruction, and assessment* were not used; the term *student needs* was used once. The words *change* and *develop* were used five and 14 times respectively.

Given the transformational approach espoused by the Community School leadership model it is not surprising, that participants of the current study identified a criticism of the

Community School model had been a lack of focus on enhancing student learning. The Community School model appears to have been viewed as an add-on to the instructional program. The plea made by the Saskatchewan Rivers School Division (2007) in examining their implementation of SchoolPLUS to not allow themselves to be overly consumed in their learning program at the expense of other important elements shows that the Community School model was not just an add-on but was perceived to be a competing interest.

The proposed conceptualization rectifies this omission by making clear that the work of school leaders is multi-faceted, but importantly learning focused. The conceptualization includes many important elements that were identified as critical to the Community School model such as sharing power and valuing parents. It also makes clear that leading learning and improving teaching is the work of leaders. Leadership in inner-city schools must not focus on any element of the leadership conceptualization at the expense of others.

In identifying the myriad areas of expertise that each school leadership team must possess, the conceptualization calls for purposeful construction of leadership teams who can share important work. Similarly, to the leadership described in the Community School model, leadership needs to be enacted not by lone leaders but by a strong team of leaders that is comprised of school administrators and other staff leaders as well as key leaders from the community. The conceptualization aligns with the Community School model in embracing the need to level hierarchies. The conceptualization goes further than the call from the Community School model to create shared ownership by instead embracing the notion that ownership of the school should reside primarily in the community with staff members acting as guest hosts (Pushor, 2007) during their tenure. The model also aligns with the vision of Community Schools in that the school should be a hub for the community and open for community use.

Tymchak (2001) called for Community School leaders to have a “willingness and ease” (p. 141) in working with both Indigenous people and parents. The proposed leadership conceptualization extends the notion of willingness to an understanding that interacting with parents and community is a primary role of leaders. Leaders in inner-city schools should enthusiastically work with Indigenous peoples and parents. The conceptualization also privileges the disposition to enter partnership work with Indigenous people and parents in a good way. The

conceptualization seeks to extend this work by advocating for the staffing of Indigenous people and for leaders to create conditions where Indigenous staff members can thrive.

The Community School model lacked the acknowledgement of white privilege inherent within schooling and the recognition of the gifts, resources, and possibilities inherent within the Indigenous community that could be brought to bear for improved school experiences. It did not deliberately focus on the need to understand and embrace Indigenous knowledges, culture and language in teaching and learning environments. To that end, the model held promise for working collaboratively, but did not make explicit, nor deliberately intend to shift, the relational status and privilege existing between Indigeneous and non-Indigenous peoples. To that end, it lacks the advocation for the creation of an authentic ethical space in which to engage with Indigenous peoples. It fails to suggest that schools (and leaders) need to be grounded in, and work to establish, anti-racist, anti-oppressive structures, practices, and pedagogies. Essentially, the model may have been a positive reflection of its time, but times have changed.

Both the Community School model and the conceptualization advocate for purposeful leadership. Both also identify the need to resolutely support leaders and leadership development. Further to supporting leadership development, I agree with Tymchak's (2001) contention that Community Schools require additional administrative time to ensure that all important aspects of the work can be engaged in. Perhaps with additional time for leaders the myriad duties that they have will not be seen to be in competition. Arguably time could be reduced if the intent of the model were realized, and not as much effort put into reactive programs and strategies if time to engage in proactive collaborative leadership and programming was privileged from the start.

In part, the Community School model was not successful given the lack of a focus on instructional leadership. The leadership conceptualization clearly requires the shared power and active community envisioned by the Community School model. The Community School model kept the teaching and learning environment beyond the purview of the community, thereby continuing to reify teachers as "experts" and community members on the periphery of what constitutes academic "success".

While the Community School model itself is no longer sufficient for today's realities, the promise of the model should be given renewed interest. The forces on inner-city schools that led

to the creation of the first Community Schools in 1980 have not gone away and have become further entrenched over time. The will to support these schools and the resources needed quietly disappeared as the attempts to support everyone led to the targeted support of none. Echoing Tymchak (2001), I call for the "vision, will, and resources" (p. 39) of the Community School model to be reified, but reflected in this extended conceptualization that shifts the understanding of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and focuses more deliberately on the creation of an ethical space of engagement focused on anti-racist, anti-oppressive and culturally sustaining practice.

Unresolved Questions

The opportunity to engage in conversations with a generous and insightful group of participants helped hone my understanding of effective leadership for inner-city schools. Despite coming to a place of greater understanding, many questions still remain about the conceptualization and its application. Many of these questions could be answered by a leader who elected to utilize the conceptualization, although different leaders and their communities may come up with different answers given the deeply embedded contextual nature of leadership. These questions may serve as the foundation for further study. These questions are addressed in this chapter as they are specific to the conceptualization of leadership; chapter six also addresses additional implications for practice, research, and theory.

Given that the conceptualization has as its foundation the engagement of community, culture, and parents in ethical spaces, it is imperative that engagement processes are inclusive and ongoing. Both inclusivity and the ongoing nature present questions. How can school leaders foster a sense of authentic invitation for community members who have been hesitant to engage with schools? I believe that at least part of the answer is to make multiple invitations to ongoing engagement events; however, this presents another question about the time required to engage with community. How will administrators, school staff, parents, and community members manage the time required to engage deeply given myriad other responsibilities? Can the use of established tools, such as the Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Bergman, 2019) help ensure that the mutual commitment of time is reciprocated with increased capacity, partnership, and school improvement? Can such a tool be used during early engagement opportunities (as well as in an ongoing manner) to help school

staff and community members create indicators for their own success as they engage in conversations about identifying and supporting student success?

Provided that the conceptualization calls for staff and community to collaboratively define student success, how can school leaders facilitate processes that will allow for diverse views to be shared and still bring the community together to pursue a clear vision? What challenges will a leader face if the view of student success defined by the community is significantly different than views of success elsewhere in the school division? Participants identified the need for support networks for inner-city school leaders given the differences between their roles and those of other leaders in their systems. There may well be a need for inner-city leaders to support each other if their school communities' views of success differ from division norms. This support could include the advocacy for required resources. Could small support networks of inner-city administrators pursuing similar notions of student success be significant scaffolds for mutual growth?

Importantly, once the community has helped shape the vision of success it will be important to ensure that this vision remains at the forefront of the school and community's work. To this end maintaining a focus, measuring progress, and celebrating successes will all be integral parts of the school and community's joint work. Revisiting the notions of success periodically to ensure that the view still aligns with the desires of community members will also be important. How often should the revisioning process take place? Given the frequency of family moves in inner-city communities, how might school and community leaders help introduce the vision to new families and provide these new families with an opportunity for voice and contribution? How well will notions of success be received if they fall outside of established vision of the province or division? Will school community visions that are highly unique be met by support or opposition from school divisions?

What might it look like to have parents and community members truly activated as leaders of the school? How can the staff and community be brought together in a manner that will build mutual trust and relationships especially for those staff and community members where this will be a significant departure from their previous experiences? Are there specific roles, both for staff and community members, that will need to be reconsidered or created to support the flourishing of community leadership? How can staff balance their professional

learning obligations from the school division with their obligations to the school and community?

How might school leaders begin their journey towards becoming principal allies? Does this indicate prerequisite skills and understandings that should be displayed prior to a placement in an inner-city school, or can these dispositions and skills be learned and strengthened on the job? The same wonders also apply to teachers and other staff members who also appear to have a similar set of dispositions and skills required to have a positive impact in inner-city education.

Finally, there are questions about forces functioning outside of leaders' control that will impact the climate and conditions in schools and communities. These outside forces are addressed elsewhere and include ongoing colonial domination, systemic racism, complex poverty, trauma, previous experiences, negative narratives, curricula, provincial budgets, physical school buildings, and provincial and school division expectations. What important actions can be undertaken by all levels of government, the Ministry of Education, other government agencies, school divisions, and society in general to give students and families living in inner-city neighbourhoods the greatest possible opportunities to achieve success?

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the revised conceptualization for leadership of Saskatchewan inner-city schools that was derived through the study. Participants helped shape and extend the conceptualization. The conceptualization identifies ways in which school leadership can be decolonized to better serve students, families, and community. Support for the conceptualization of leadership is provided by the conclusions of the study addressed in the final chapter.

Chapter Six: Conclusions and Implications

This final chapter begins with a discussion of the major findings of the study and how the study is situated within a broader research context. The major conclusion of the study affirms the pronounced racialized poverty and associated challenges in inner-city communities which necessitate thoughtful and unique enactments of leadership aligned with the conceptualization utilized in this research.

Conclusions and Implications

The following section examines the major findings of the current study relative to previous research literature. There appears to be significant congruence between the major findings of this study and the literature, however, some findings appear to be unique to the Saskatchewan inner-city context. The discussion identifies the role of colonization in creating the current state as well as a number of promising actions that leaders can take to begin the process of decolonizing schools and school systems.

Major Findings

The major findings of the study are presented in the same order that they were addressed in the chapter four. Implications for leadership are examined for each of the major findings.

Poverty

Findings from the study align with the conclusion from research that there are significant challenges faced by families (Rank, 2004; Silver, 2014; W. Wilson, 1987) and students (Gaskell & Levin, 2012; Jensen, 2009; Nogeura, 2011; Silver, 2016) living in poverty. Findings also align with research findings that school staff face significant challenges working within neighborhoods with a concentration of poverty (Anyon, 2005; Carter, 2000; Chenoweth, 2007; Gaskel & Levin, 2012; Hattie, 2008; Jensen, 2009; Levin, 1995). Findings indicate that there is compelling reason to recommit and to strengthen the community education model to better meet the needs of students living in communities impacted by complex poverty.

Literature on poverty in Canadian prairie cities clearly identified the concentration of Indigenous people living in poverty in urban inner-cities (Gingrich, et al., 2016; MacDonald & Wilson, 2016; Silver, 2009, 2014, 2016; Walks & Bourne, 2006). Participants in the study readily recognized both the racialization and the concentration of poverty in the urban center that SUSD serves. Greg's statement about SUSD serving a "very divided city" with a "marked

difference" in socio-economic stratification of various neighbourhoods paired with multiple participants' articulation of the concentration of Indigenous students within SUSD schools in economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods, confirm Western-Canadian poverty research as being valid in describing the context of the current study (Gingrich, et al., 2016; MacDonald & Wilson, 2016; Silver, 2009, 2014, 2016; Walks & Bourne, 2006). Just as research on the impacts of poverty on student learning emphasize complicating factors that make learning more challenging (Gaskell & Levin, 2012; Jensen, 2009; Nogeura, 2011; Silver, 2016), participants identified myriad complicating factors associated with poverty. Participants also readily identified pronounced and continual inequities in student learning results between Indigenous students and their non-Indigenous peers (Cottrell & Orlowski, 2013; Howe, 2017; Orlowski & Cottrell, 2019) especially for Indigenous students attending inner-city schools.

The core neighbourhoods were continually identified by participants as the most socio-economically disadvantaged neighborhoods in the city. This finding is verified by median personal income data provided by the urban center by neighbourhood. This data also indicate the immense depth of poverty faced by many core neighbourhood residents as 25% of residents of these neighbourhoods have a personal income of less than $15,000 per year. This aligns with research that identified the significant depth of poverty in Western Canadian cities (Gingrich, et al., 2016). When school staff shared stories of supporting students and families, it was readily apparent that many of their families lived well below established poverty lines.

The gentrification identified in the Prairie Sage community warrants discussion. Multiple participants noted that the Prairie Sage community was in transition with a number of older residences, often affordable rentals, being torn down and replaced with new builds. This pattern of development has been gradually replacing low-income residents of the neighbourhood who are often Indigenous, with middle-class, often white, residents. Gentrification is associated with declining school enrollment (Jordan & Gallagher, 2015; Pearman, 2020). Jordan and Gallagher (2015) identified two forces that drive decline in schools where gentrification is taking place. First, gentrifiers are often childless. Secondly, those with children often exercise discretion in selecting schools. Pearman (2020) identified that enrollment decline is especially pronounced if the gentrifiers are white. Participants' thoughts on gentrification and the decline in the school enrollment align with research. Stella and Matt both identified that children from newly

constructed homes in the neighbourhood are not attending PSCS beyond the fully funded prekindergarten program. Stella noted that these families often opt for programs such as French Immersion or Montessori which are offered outside of the Prairie Sage community. Matt offered another possible reason for gentrifiers not attending PSCS in that "we do know that a lot of families have decided to not send their kids to our school. Perhaps because of its reputation as a, you know, an Indigenous centered school." Gentrification of the Prairie Sage neighbourhood appears a logical root cause for the declining enrollment of PSCS.

Clear across the various findings of the study was the awareness of Stella, Matt and the PSCS team of the context in which their school was located, and which neighbourhood residents were sending their children to the school. The contextual actions taken by PSCS staff specific to working in a neighbourhood with a prevalence of complex poverty included a holistic approach to education, focus on creating relationships with students and families, and a trauma informed school environment. A major finding of the study was the need for a revitalization of a community education model which provides additional supports to inner-city schools and their students.

The initial success of the Saskatchewan Community School model led to a rapid growth of Community Schools from 11 to 98 schools between 1980 and 2004 (Saskatchewan Association for Community Education, n.d.). Elliot (2012) contended that the movement of all Saskatchewan schools to the Community School model under the banner of SchoolPLUS led to the significant weakening of the model within the original target schools. Sherry's statement that inner-city schools need to be provided with equitable not equal treatment appeared to be a rejection of the dilution of Saskatchewan's Community School model that occurred with the adoption of SchoolPLUS.

Participants' comments appear to provide significant validation of the concepts of Saskatchewan's Community School model (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004), though it no longer reflects current understandings of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Multiple participants identified the need for the school to be the heart of the community and for there to be significant efforts made to deeply engage parents. Participants also identified clear discrepancies between schooling outcomes in inner-city schools and schools in more affluent areas as well as the need for schools and community to work to reduce barriers to

success. Culturally responsive instruction was also a hallmark of the Community School model that participants believed to have immense power.

Participants clearly articulated a vision for education in inner-city schools that was aligned with the principles of Saskatchewan's previous Community School model including enhanced community supports (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004). However, the conceptualization articulated in this study better reflects understandings of colonialism and white privilege than the original model. This extended conceptualization recognizes the inherently privileged colonial relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and focuses more deliberately on the creation of an ethical space of engagement focused on anti-racist, anti-oppressive and culturally sustaining practice.

Participants of the current study steadfastly advocated for the strengthening and diversification of supports for inner-city schools. It was advocated that these additional supports come from both the SUSD as well as other government and partner agencies. The pervasive and complex poverty in which many inner-city school students live and the discrepancy in student achievement between inner-city schools and non-inner-city schools provided rationale for participants' advocacy for the allocation of additional supports. Participants advocated that Indigenous staff and community members be vitally involved in decisions about resourcing schools.

Given the socio-economic realities of many inner-city neighbourhood residents, it is not surprising that study participants identified many themes which are commonly associated with research on the impacts of poverty on schooling (Gaskell & Levin, 2012; Jensen, 2009; Nogeura, 2011; Silver, 2014, 2016). The interconnected themes of poverty, transiency, communication, experiences with school, health and nutrition, and deficit thinking highlight the immense challenges overcoming complex poverty (Silver, 2014). These themes are discussed next.

Participants of the study all recognized negative impacts of poverty and the preponderance of poverty within the urban core. There was no evidence throughout the study of any participant adhering to theories of poverty that aligned with personal responsibility or deficiency (Bradshaw, 2007; Turner & Lehning, 2007). Participants all seemed to understand poverty through more complex theorizations that included systemic barriers as well as intergenerational and interrelated challenges that made poverty difficult to escape (Bradshaw,

2007; Raphael, 2011; Sharma, 2012; Silver, 2014; Wacquant, 2008). Participants identified the important role of schools in lifting the learning of students yet identified that schools alone cannot lift student and families out of poverty (Cottrell & Orlowski, 2014).

One of the major barriers associated with poverty that was identified frequently in the study as a major factor in impeding educational attainment was housing instability and associated mobility of families. As identified in previous research (Gruman, et al., 2008; Lezubski, et al., 2000; Temple & Reynolds, 2000) housing instability and the resulting frequency of transfer of students appears to be a powerful force in the maintenance of achievement gaps and intergenerational poverty. Participants shared about the high degree of mobility of many of the students in core schools. Students such as Margaret's granddaughter, who had been a student at PSCS for many years, appeared to be a minority. Stella and Matt both shared that many of their students had endured a significant number of school moves. Stella recalled a student from the previous year who had attended 17 schools before grade 8. The frequency of school movement for students is a concern given findings of the detrimental impact of accruing school moves on student learning outcomes (Gruman, et al., 2008; Temple & Reynolds, 2000). Among other participants, Peggy passionately spoke about the need for greater housing supports for families to allow students to remain in schools of choice; however, she also realized that these supports were not yet a reality. Peggy shared that she sees teachers working hard to mitigate the damaging effects of school movement. Perhaps schools with higher levels of student transiency require purposeful plans and dedicated resources to increase supports to help support student transitions. Importantly the finding that prior school achievement can be a mitigating factor in repeated school movements (Temple & Reynolds, 2000) highlights the need for schools with pronounced student mobility to offer high-quality learning experiences for all students beginning with prekindergarten programing.

Another barrier for students and families identified by participants that is associated with poverty was the challenge of conventional forms of school-home communication. The study identified that for many families, especially those experiencing the greatest depth of poverty, that email, phone, and text were not reliable forms of communication. Also troubling was the identification that many Indigenous families remain engrained in a disempowered stance where they acquiesce to white educators. This finding aligns with Ishimaru and colleagues' (2016)

identification of non-dominant families feeling disempowered based on a lack of knowledge and currency in educational systems. It appears that leaders need to be purposeful in creating plans to purposefully foster communication that will lead to the establishment of two-way communication and family empowerment. Both study participants and previous research suggest that the practice of home visits appears to be positioned well to address the inadequacies of traditional school-home communication from both access and parent empowerment stances (Henderson et al., 2007; Pushor, 2010; Pushor & Amendt, 2018).

Participants identified both the experiences of family members during their own schooling as well as the legacy of residential schools as being significant impediments for family and community engagement with the school. Participants' statements about the façade of the school being a trigger to families suffering the intergenerational effects of residential school provide clear evidence of the legacy of residential schools that continues to harm Indigenous peoples and must be addressed (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, n.d.; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Clear statements made by participants, such as the one made by Dale about his mother's refusal to attend school events, highlight the palpable effects of previous experiences. This finding aligns with previous research that identified parents' negative experiences as being significant obstructions to engagement with schools (Graue & Hawkins, 2010; Jaime & Russell, 2010; Mapp & Bergman, 2019; Stelmach, 2005). Multiple participants shared that parents' level of comfort with subject material may impede their involvement with their child's school. Margaret expressed a lack of comfort in supporting her children with homework by sharing her experiences with her own schooling and as a parent "after grade 7/8 algebra we didn't have that. So that was a big thing for me and for my kids coming home from school and my kids asking me about algebra and I had no clue." Given these findings, inner-city educators must develop an understanding and appreciation of intergeneration trauma and previous negative experiences so that they do not misinterpret parent's hesitancy to become involved in their child's schooling as lack of caring about their child (Jaime & Russell, 2010; Mapp, 2003).

Consideration should also be given to the physical presence of schools. A good example of purposeful action to soften the look of a school was a project undertaken by Joe where he created artwork in a central point of the interior of the school with the Seven Sacred Teachings

featuring Cree terms. Joe shared that this project was prompted by a conversation with a school leader who inquired about how they could make the school appear more cultural and inviting. Notably to this end, Joe has also created spaces for smudge in his schools.

Student health and nutritional needs were frequently addressed by participants. PSCS offered students health interventions that notably included having a public health nurse, Helen, working at their school and a robust nutrition program that fed most students each day. Given research from the Prairie provinces on the significant disparity in health outcomes based on neighbourhood socio-economics (Lemstra & Neudorf, 2008; Martens et al., 2010), as well as participants' impressions of the needs of the community, these programs appear to be important to help overcome health barriers that can otherwise have significant negative impact on student's ability to learn (Jensen, 2009).

Although the participants did not adhere to, and most outright rejected deficit narratives, participants in the study did identify that narratives of deficits and placing blame on factors outside of the school's control remain in communities impacted by complex racialized poverty. Research has clearly identified the damaging impacts of deficit narratives on student learning and that educators must reject deficit narratives (Barone, 2006; Dweck, 2006; Jensen, 2009; Leithwood, 2008; Levin, 1995; Noguera, 2003; Ramahlo et al., 2010; Sharratt & Fullan, 2009, 2012). When adhered to, deficit narratives provide permission for educators to expect less from students (Noguera, 2003; Reeves, 2011; Riley & Ungerleider, 2012) and provide poor instruction (Friere, 1970; Haberman, 1991; Jensen, 2009; Klecker & Pollock, 2005). Research has identified the impact of educators holding high expectations (Fisher et al., 2016; Reeves, 2011) and that purposeful actions of leaders can foster staff holding higher expectations for student learning (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Given the many barriers faced by students and families in inner city schools, there appears to be clear rationale for inner-city schools to have supports well beyond those provided in more affluent communities. It appears from this study that additional supports at PSCS are focused largely on mitigating the impacts of poverty and related health issues. There was little mention of additional supports provided by SUSD or other agencies aimed at provision of quality pedagogy, family engagement, or cultural supports as were desired by participants. Calls for educational systems to be reformed with a focus on improving outcomes in disadvantaged

communities abound (Gaskell and Levin, 2012; Hopson, 2014; Ishimaru et al., 2019; MacKinnon, 2000; Levin, 1995). Newton and Jutras (2022) advocated for equity in Canadian schools that centered on ensuring that all students had opportunities for access to high quality education, to feel affirmed within their school, and ultimately achieve success. Additional supports in the area of instruction, culture, and family engagement would benefit students, families, and staff.

Implications for Leaders. Provision of the enhanced supports required to create greater equity called for by participants will require the deep moral commitment and enhanced problem solving from SUSD for which Greg advocated. To impact change in inner-city schools, a deep commitment to the principles of equity-oriented leadership (Capper & Young, 2014; Marshall, 2004; Shields, 2004, 2010; Theoharis, 2007, 2010) appear to be a requirement for school and senior level leaders. The study's findings suggest that school leaders of inner-city schools must make themselves aware of the complex poverty which has engulfed their school's neighbourhood and the myriad barriers associated with this complex poverty. Specifically, leaders must work with families, community members, staff, and community agencies to put plans in place to mitigate the damaging impacts of poverty on schooling outcomes.

PSCS provides positive examples of leadership to mitigate the harms of poverty, specifically through their nutrition program and communication with families. By all accounts the school's nutrition program was a great support for students and families. The partnership with health that allowed for Helen to be closely connected to inner-city schools also appears warranted given the significant literature indicating health disparities based on income (Lemstra & Neudorf, 2008; Martens et al., 2010; Rank, 2004; Silver, 2014). It is notable that participants indicated the significant administrative time that goes into the proper management of the nutrition program and clearly maintaining and maximizing the partnership with Helen also requires attention. PSCS also provides a clear example of a leadership that fosters staff commitment to enhancing communication between the school and families through non-traditional communication. Notably, prior to the pandemic, the PSCS communication plan purposefully featured home-visits as a means to build relationships and communicate with families.

While many participants peripheral to the school highlighted the need to reject deficit narratives within inner-city schools, this did not emerge as a strong theme from PSCS staff. However, no staff member of PSCS utilized deficit narratives in the study. It is possible that school leaders and staff have previously challenged deficit narratives to the point that they were not significantly present in the school and therefore did not merit attention. Literature and peripheral participants indicated the significant need for leaders to create school cultures based on rejecting deficit narratives associated with poverty.

There appears also to be a need for inner-city school leaders to create purposeful supports to mitigate the damage of multiple school moves. This requires that the school create plans for current students who are preparing to move to a new school and conversely to quickly wrap around students who move to the school. This appears to be an area where leaders and staff could use additional supports. There also appears to be significant room for advocacy from school leaders on the housing stability front to allow for families to remain in one school long-term.

A clear implication for leadership from the theme of inner-city schools is that leaders working in these schools have responsibilities that do not exist, or do not exist to the same extent in schools that serve more affluent populations. This theme also indicates the need to work differently with families and other agencies to put supports in place at the school level.

Culture

The need to privilege Indigenous cultures and ways of knowing and being in Saskatchewan inner-city schools was a clear finding of the study. The need to imbue Indigenous perspectives and content in education is well supported by Saskatchewan specific research (Battiste, 2010, 2013; Berryman et al., 2014; Goulet & Goulet, 2014; Pete et al., 2013; St. Denis, 2010; 2011), and Canadian and international literature bases (Bell et al., 2004; Castagno & Brayboy, 2009; Deer, 2013; Khalifa et al., 2016; Ma Rhae,, 2015; Manning et al., 2019; J. Martin et al., 2017, 2020; Ledoux, 2006; Peden, 2011). Additionally, inclusion of Indigenous perspectives and content is a requirement of Saskatchewan curriculum in all subjects and grade levels. Dale's statement that inclusion of Indigenous content and perspectives being mandated in curriculum was perceived by many educators as a question of "will you include"? This is supported by Canadian literature indicating that it is unfortunately not uncommon to have educators resist inclusion, or merely scratch the surface of meaningful inclusion of Indigenous

content and perspectives (Deer, 2013; Peden, 2011; St. Denis, 2010). PSCS provides an example of purposeful inclusion of Indigenous perspectives and content within a Saskatchewan inner-city context.

The study identified the importance placed on infusing Indigenous perspectives and culture by members of the PSCS school community (PSCS students benefited from Elder Peggy's twice weekly visits to the school, their regularly scheduled Cree classes, Indigenous culture-based clubs, and cultural events). An important aspect of culturally responsive schooling is the development of cultural competence of the staff (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). Castagno and Brayboy (2008) contend that given most teachers are not Indigenous that they must engage in a purposeful and ongoing learning process to develop their cultural competence. Joe's comment about non-Indigenous educators defaulting to him on Indigenous matters identifies the continued need for educators to develop cultural competence. Willie's statement about being Indigenous but not knowing everything about every tribe indicates that in a location such as Saskatchewan with great diversity of Indigenous peoples, that even Indigenous educators will likely benefit from opportunities to enrich their understanding of other Indigenous people. Dale's contention that there are many important areas for staff learning that are in competition for educators' time such as literacy and numeracy initiatives which usually win out over cultural responsiveness learning is a salient point which is also supported by literature (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; St. Denis 2011). Participants did not indicate cultural learning as a staff during professional development times, yet they did indicate significant recent efforts focused on developing PSCS staff's anti-racist pedagogy, which Castagno and Brayboy (2008) argued had been a missing element of culturally responsive schooling.

Ideally educators will take full advantage of the cultural learning opportunities provided to them; however, many of these learning opportunities occur outside of school hours when they are elective for staff to attend. In the PSCS example, despite many of the events being voluntary they were well attended by staff. Another clear learning opportunity for staff appears to be learning from a knowledgeable colleague, Joe. Unfortunately, neither teachers nor educational assistants join Joe when he is teaching his Cree classes. Joe's teaching provides preparation time for teachers. Perhaps a promising model for educators developing cultural competence would be

for educators to join their students in Cree class and receive their preparation time in another way.

Elders hold great revere within Indigenous cultures and are the recognized transmitters of knowledge (Battiste, 2010; Government of Saskatchewan, 2018; Pete et al., 2013; Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009; Vowel, 2016). Participants were clear on the need for Elders to be actively engaged in inner-city schooling both through advisory roles at the school and division level and through work directly with staff, students, and families. PSCS provides a good example of a school that was purposeful in the activation of an Elder, Peggy, to work directly with members of the school community. As noted in the previous section, there appears to be a strong desire of a number of participants to return to a formal structure of an Elder advisory for SUSD. With the significant number of Indigenous students at PSCS and the surrounding schools, perhaps there is room for an Elder advisory specific to inner-city schools.

Previous research has identified the significance and interrelatedness of land, language and culture (Battiste, 2010; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Furita et al., 2015; Ignas, 2004; Ledoux, 2006; Paris, 2012). Of the relationship between Indigenous languages and knowledge systems Battiste (2010) stated "Aboriginal languages are the most significant factor in the restoration, regeneration, and survival of Indigenous knowledge" (p. 17). The PSCS example highlights one inner-city school's efforts to ensure that language and cultural learning are privileged within the instructional day. It is also important to note the efforts made by PSCS leaders to ensure that on-the-land learning opportunities exist, such as their culture camp. In addition to the inclusion of regular language and cultural learning embedded within the school day, PSCS also provides a rich example of purposeful cultural offerings including their powwow, beading, and drumming extracurricular activities as well as larger community cultural events such as the annual Feast. It is clear that at PSCS Indigenous cultures and perspectives are infused throughout the school.

An area for continued attention appears to be adhering to cultural protocols. As Joe stated, he is often put into difficult circumstances where he is asked to do things that go against protocols, such as tending to the school's drum. Appropriate financing of cultural programming appears to be the root of the problem more so than a lack of understanding. To ensure that cultural programming can proceed in a manner that is supported by appropriate protocols and support people with the right teachings, additional funding to inner-city schools are essential.

Adhering to appropriate protocols is even more difficult given the diversity of Indigenous people and the considerable differences in their cultural practices and protocols.

A theme raised by most Indigenous participants was the need to recognize the plurality of Indigenous groups in Saskatchewan and to be purposeful to not pan-Indigenize. Literature supports the need for educators to avoid making blanket statements about Indigenous people, cultures, and worldviews (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Korteweg & Fiddler, 2016; Swiftwolfe, 2019). Swiftwolfe (2019) provided advice to educators on how to avoid pan-Indigenizing which included speaking plurally about Indigenous peoples and cultures and specifying the nation that you are speaking about. One response to pan-Indigenizing shared in the study was purposeful privileging one cultural and linguistic group over others and being specific about the teachings that were being presented. In the Saskatchewan example, Dale described the Saskatchewan default position as a tendency to be Cree-centric. The Cree culture program at PSCS is a good example of Cree-centricity; however, this appears to be thoughtfully off-set at PSCS by having an Elder and Knowledge Keepers from other nations supporting school learning opportunities. Frustrations shared by Indigenous participants about white educators' assumptions that they were knowledgeable about all Indigenous cultures illuminates a need for professional learning on local Indigenous peoples (Anuik et al., 2010; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Hammond, 2015; Manning et al., 2020; St. Denis 2010; Wallin & Peden, 2014).

A proactive way to promote diversity of Indigenous cultures and ways of being appears to be having a council of Elders or cultural liaisons representing the rich diversity of Indigenous people (McGregor & McGregor, 2020; Preston et al., 2015; Richards, 2014; Stelmach et al., 2017). Positive recollections by a number of participants of the profound impact of the former SUSD cultural advisory committee were followed by impassioned pleas to reinstitute a similar group of tribally diverse Elders. Research has identified the those with strong traditional values need to be consulted to help diffuse Euro-centric educational practices (Battiste, 2013; Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Fallon & Paquette, 2014; Ottman, 2009). A cultural advisory committee, such as the one that previously existed in SUSD appears important to revisit given research from British Columbia, a province where Indigenous students are faring better academically than their Indigenous peers in other provinces (Richards, 2014). Richards' research compares British Columbia school divisions' Indigenous student

success rates and examines policies and practices that are common in high performing districts (Richards, 2014; Richards et al., 2008, 2009). One of the key findings from this research is "from these district comparisons, we concluded that collaboration between school-district personnel and local Aboriginal communities is a prerequisite to improved academic outcomes" (Richards et al., 2008, p. 277). Richards (2014) contended that "other provinces should look closely at the initiatives pursued in BC over the last two decades" (p. 407). McGregor & McGregor (2020) examined a promising example of Elder leadership in system and curriculum reform at the territorial level in Nunavut. McGregor and McGregor (2020) contended that having Elders deeply involved in reform efforts was both highly beneficial and a form of decolonizing.

Implications for Leaders. Implications from this theme are significant for inner-city leadership. Leaders of inner-city schools must be prepared to learn and grow greater cultural understandings and to support their staff in also engaging in developing greater cultural responsiveness. Developing greater cultural understanding will also support leaders in understanding the diversity of Indigenous peoples and develop a greater appreciation for ensuring that unique cultures are celebrated, and that attention is paid to not make sweeping pan-Indigenous generalizations. Greater cultural understanding will also support leaders in advocating for the resources required to ensure that protocols are followed and that the right resource people are activated for the benefit of the school community. Leaders of inner-city schools must work to foster within all staff members the importance of infusing Indigenous culture and perspectives (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018). Leaders must be prepared to form relationships with Elders and Knowledge Keepers and to invite their authentic participation in the planning and provision of school programming. Leaders will need to support staff in providing cultural learning opportunities which may require helping teachers find suitable physical resources; or in the case of a culture and language program such as Joe's, supporting educators through the ambiguity of not having a curriculum or premade resources to utilize. Leaders may need to advocate for greater resources to allow for greater cultural infusion; this may require advocating for embedded culture and language programing. A logical implication for school divisions is to privilege the hiring of Indigenous leaders who are well situated to promote cultural responsiveness and partnerships with Indigenous community members; this

aligns with participants calls for increasing the number of Indigenous employees in all roles in SUSD.

Parent Engagement

Participants in the study acknowledged the immense importance of parent engagement that has been clearly identified by parent engagement research (Auerbach, 2009; Evans, 2013; Goodall, 2017; Hands & Hubbard, 2011; Hattie, 2008; Henderson et al., 2007; Ishimaru, 2013; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Pushor, 2010, 2015) and high-performing high-poverty school research (Carter, 1999, 2000; Chenoweth, 2007; Connolly et al., 2005; Flessa at al., 2010; Kearney & Herrington, 2010; Kearney et al., 2012; Parker & Flessa, 2011). While participants noted the importance of parent engagement, some also identified that educators appear to lack a clear understanding of research identified quality parent engagement practices intended to support learning. This finding is supported by research that has identified that traditional parent involvement practices remain prevalent and unquestioned (FitzGerald & Militello, 2016; Graue & Hawkins, 2010; Henderson et al., 2007; Ishimaru et al., 2019; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Pushor, 2010; Pushor & Amendt, 2018; Pushor & Murphy, 2010; Stelmach & Preston, 2008). This has similarities to a finding from Parker and Flessa (2011) who found that the staff of high-performing high-poverty schools acknowledged the need for parent engagement while also identifying the significant challenge of engaging parents. Multiple barriers to parent engagement were identified in the current study including the impacts of poverty, traditional modes of communication, parents' previous school experiences, and intergenerational impacts of residential schools. The purposeful work of PSCS leaders and staff were strategic in attempting to bridge these barriers.

The staff of PSCS, and Stella in particular, were certainly aware of parent engagement research and were striving to create a welcoming climate with clear two-way communication and collaboration more in line with the family-centric paradigm (Ishimaru et al., 2016; Pushor, 2013a; Pushor, 2015). A clear sign of attempted movement to a family-centric model was Stella's renaming of meet the teacher night to meet the family night. Staff of PSCS placed great emphasis on relationship building and creating trust as the foundation to their work with families (Henderson et al., 2007; Mapp & Bergman, 2019; Pushor, 2010). The PSCS administrative team valued two-way communication with families (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Goodall, 2017; Mapp &

Bergman, 2019; Pushor, 2015) and provided support and periodically time for staff to engage in home visits and make phone calls. There is also clear evidence that the staff of PSCS had adopted a stance of looking inward (Auerbach, 2009; Pushor & Amendt, 2018) at their own practice to explore how they could better work with parents. This was evidenced by both Stella and Matt identifying that they have done good work with building trust and relationships with families but would like to do a better job of having parents more deeply involved in advising the school.

The specific need to engage Indigenous families was also identified by participants. Commonly in studies of parent involvement/engagement with Indigenous families, educators complain about the lack of involvement or the seeming lack of caring of Indigenous parents (Agbo, 2007; Jaime & Russell, 2010), and Indigenous parents complain about a lack of being authentically engaged (Jaime & Russell, 2010; Pusher & Murphy, 2010). A large body of literature speaks to the need for educators to engage with parents in culturally appropriate ways that are meaningful and focus on growth and solutions (Agbo, 2007; Bell et al., 2004; Deer, 2014; Faircloth, 2011; Jaime & Russell, 2010; Ledoux, 2006; Pushor & Murphy, 2010; Steeves et al., 2010). As addressed in the previous section, PSCS staff have made considerable effort to ensure that interactions are culturally appropriate. Parents and community hold the potential to become key resources in the school's efforts to infuse Indigenous content and ways of knowing (Anuik et al., 2010; Deer, 2014; Jaime & Russell, 2010); however, as Joe stated, PSCS parents have not yet been empowered as cultural resources for the school.

Scholars of parent engagement promote home visits as a means for educators and families to build relationships and trust (Evans, 2013; Henderson et al., 2007; Pushor, 2013b; Pushor & Amendt, 2018; S. Smith, 2013). Participants in the study placed significant value on home visits for relationships building and trust as identified in literature but also based on the difficulty in communicating with many PSCS families through traditional means such as newsletters and email. The protection of time for communication with families during professional learning time indicates the disposition of leaders of PSCS towards creating relationships with families. Margaret's professed adoration of Stella and the PSCS staff for how well they interact with kids and community underscores the effort placed on creating a warm and caring climate for students and families at PSCS. The need to interrupt dispositions and practices

that impeded engagement of parents has been repeatedly advanced (Evans, 2013; Faircloth, 2011; Fitgerald & Militello, 2016; Goodall, 2017; Graue & Hawkins, 2010; Henderson et al., 2007; Ishimaru et al., 2019; Mapp & Bergman, 2019; Pushor & Amendt, 2018; Stelmach, 2016). Scholars call for educators to critically reflect on their biases and position to disrupt damaging thoughts and actions (Evans, 2013; Faircloth, 2011; Fitgerald & Militello, 2016; Pushor, 2013b). PSCS staff has undertaken anti-oppressive professional learning which may further enhance their purposeful dispositional work.

Mapp and Bergman's (2019) framework provides a clear lens to examine PSCS's growth towards effective home-school partnerships. The challenges identified by Mapp and Bergman both for educators and families resonate in the PSCS example. Stella and Matt have been working with their staff to overcome the educator challenges. They are doing this by looking inward at the important role the school plays in developing partnerships with families, ensuring that family partnerships are held as valuable by all staff, and have provided support and time to converse with families; these factors taken together indicate PSCS's leaders' commitments to exposing their staff to non-traditional models of parent involvement. Participants also provided clear statements of the challenges faced by families including their possible negative previous experiences with schools and lack of empowerment in interactions with educators. The PSCS parent engagement efforts also address process conditions notably the foundation of trust and relationships, focusing on family assets, and ensuring cultural responsiveness. The process conditions that may require greater focus are creating a clear link to student learning and enhancing collaboration and interaction between staff and families. PSCS appears well situated to leverage the trust and relationships they have established with families to place added emphasis on the process conditions allowing them to grow towards enhancing staff and family capacity aimed at inviting families into roles as partners in leading learning. The study did not elicit findings on the SUSD organizational conditions associated with effective family-school partnerships beyond PSCS, although the researcher got the sense PSCS placed greater thought, time, and effort into parent engagement than the majority of SUSD schools.

A robust literature base calls for educators to engage the community in educational decision making (Ball, 2004; Baydala et al., 2009; Bell et al., 2004; Deer, 2014; Ignas, 2004; Ledoux, 2006; Mapp & Bergman, 2019; Ottmann, 2009). Further, the Truth and Reconciliation

Commission of Canada's *Calls to Action* (2015) requests new legislation be made that enables parental and community engagement of Indigenous people. Participants of the current study vehemently advocated for greater engagement of Indigenous parents and community members in educational decision making yet were not enthusiastic about Saskatchewan SCCs' ability to enable this to happen. Findings from this study align with previous research that concluded that the SCC mandate to create shared responsibility and parent and community engagement in educational decisions had not yet been realized (Amendt, 2018; Preston, 2011; Stelmach, 2016) and did not go far enough to increase participation of Indigenous community members (Martell, 2008). Participants highlighted the imposition of the formality of Western meeting structures, mistrust in systems, and lack of authenticity as barriers to current enactments of SCCs. Despite the efforts of PSCS staff including making frequent invitations to attend, sharing food with each meeting, offering meetings at different times of day, providing child care, having an Elder on the council, and removing some of the formality of the meetings, participation in SCC meetings at PSCS remained low to the point where the meetings appeared to be little more than tokenistic. Participants, including Peggy, Stella and Matt, shared the promise of sharing circles as a more authentic, culturally relevant, and impactful way to engage parent and community members in educational decision making (Bell et al., 2004; Fulford, et al., 2007; Pushor et al., 2005).

Implications for Leaders. This theme has significant implications for leaders of inner-city schools. Research has identified the critical importance of school leaders in moving their school staffs beyond traditional parent involvement models (Fitzgerald & Militello, 2016; Ishimaru, 2013, Ishimaru et al., 2016; Pushor & Amendt, 2018). PSCS leaders have modeled a disposition of relationship and trust building with parents and have provided time and support for their staff to engage with families. PSCS staff have taken significant action to purposefully break down barriers to parent engagement including changing communication, promotion of home visits, creating parent spaces within the school, and ensuring culturally proficient practice; these actions align with other examples from research (Baydala et al., 2009; Bell et al., 2004; Fulford et al., 2007; Pushor et al., 2005; S. Smith, 2013). These actions have created a climate favorable to more deeply engaging parents in the learning agenda.

Leaders must be able to articulate to their staff and community a clear vision for family-school partnerships (Hands, 2014; Ishimaru et al., 2019; Mapp & Bergman, 2019; Pushor &

Amendt, 2018). To this end leaders should consider selecting a research-based model to guide their practice (such as Mapp & Bergman, 2019). To attain true partnership with families will require significant focus, time, and effort of school leaders, staff, and families. Given the importance of this work and the significant time and expertise that will be required to help alter dispositions and practices of both school staff and families, there may be a need for developing a point person for this work. This may require the creation of a dedicated staff and/or parent position to facilitate the work. Importantly, parent engagement should become central to the work of all staff, as this will ideally thwart setbacks in family-school partnerships associated with the departure of key staff or community members (Pushor et al., 2005).

Leaders are advised to consider their current SCC structures and their effectiveness for engaging a diverse parent and community membership in a manner in which they are actualized to facilitate improvement to school programing. This study and previous research have identified that there may be a need to restructure SCC's to create an inviting and affirming atmosphere that will allow for meaningful engagement in developing and supporting the school's learning agenda. Sharing circles appear to be a promising avenue to explore. Through purposeful action with families, staff, and examination of formal structures including SCCs, inner-city leaders can actualize family-school partnerships which will act as the "best levers" (Goodall, 2017) for improving student learning.

Success

The problematic practice of white policy makers and educators prescribing Western notions of success to diverse communities that has been recognized in literature (Canadian Council on Learning 2007, 2009; Ishimaru et al., 2016) emerged as a significant theme within the study. Participants readily identified the primacy of Western notions of success that focused primarily on academic outcomes in literacy and numeracy. This unsurprising finding aligns with Deer's (2013) assessment of areas of emphasis within Canadian schools: "education in Canada operates with curricular imperatives that give privilege to what is regarded by many as essential curriculum" (p. 177). The Saskatchewan Education Sector Strategic Plan (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2017) that was active at the period of data collection for this study emphasized educational outcomes aligned with Western views of success, such as readiness for kindergarten and at grade level reading by grade 3. Goals within the Saskatchewan education

sector require school leaders to understand and interact with large-scale student assessment data (Hellsten et al., 2013; Newton et al., 2010). In particular, Greg placed great emphasis on the instructional leadership roles of school leaders in focusing on student achievement data and working with teachers to create plans to improve results. The Canadian Council on Learning (2007) acknowledged the importance of academic success by stating in addition to learning that affirms their cultural values, Indigenous peoples "also desire Western education that can equip them with the knowledge and skills they need to participate in Canadian society" (p. 2). Clearly notions of academic success have value and cannot be deemphasized.

The Canadian Council on Learning's (2007, 2009) examinations of success for Indigenous students provide clear frameworks to view success through a decolonized lens that promotes success in both Indigenous and Western ways. Decolonized notions of success require an increased emphasis on holistic views of success and cultural and self-pride (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007, 2009; Goulet & Goulet, 2014). Participants in the current study advocated for exactly that, expanded notions of success that included holistic views and cultural supports while also recognizing the importance of students achieving academic success. PSCS staff repeatedly emphasize the importance they placed on holistic views of education and how they emphasized the four quadrants of the medicine wheel within the school and classrooms. Clear emphasis was also placed on developing knowledge and pride in Indigenous cultures, especially Cree, at PSCS.

One of the strongest themes when exploring the notion of success for this study was the clearly identified need to develop cultural understanding and pride. The importance of Indigenous students feeling and developing a sense of pride at school has been repeatedly contended (Berryman et al. 2014; Deer, 2013; Goulet & Goulet, 2014; Government of Saskatchewan, 2018; Newton & Jutras, 2022; Stelmach et al., 2017). Participants shared the importance of learning Indigenous cultural practices, languages, and developing important teachings such as respect for Elders. This theme relates directly to the theme of culture addressed earlier in this chapter. Also, of note and related to the culture theme is the importance placed by participants on engaging Elders, parents, and community members in defining success. Elders, Indigenous community leaders, and academics interviewed by Berryman et al., (2014) identified a need to broaden the understanding of success within Saskatchewan schools to be more holistic and include the importance of students learning about their culture. Martell (2016) contended

that for leaders working in Indigenous contexts to better understand the effectiveness of their actions that "they need to be measured against aspirations and ideals of Indigenous communities" (p. 226).

PSCS staff placed emphasis on cultural learning and holistic supports, but they also had school goals on improving literacy and numeracy. Both Stella and Matt acknowledged that many of their students struggled in language arts and mathematics. While conversations with Stella and Matt included discussions of standardized assessments and intervention plans for struggling students, both spoke in significantly greater detail of their work with staff on holistic learning supports, family engagement, and anti-oppressive pedagogy. Despite a student population with significant academic learning needs, no real sense of urgency was felt by the researcher in the areas of literacy and numeracy at PSCS. The significant and persistent learning gaps that exist within inner-city schools will take long-term commitment to improve. Sherry's statement that holistic and cultural supports as were in fact academic supports is supported by literature (Bell et al., 2004; Berryman et al., 2014; Fulford et al., 2007; Manning et al., 2019; J. Martin et al., 2017). Participants identified, as has research (Cottrell & Orlowski, 2013; Howe, 2006, 2017; Orlowski & Cottrell, 2019; Richards, 2014; Steeves et al., 2010, 2012), that the burden of lifting learning for Indigenous students appears to be too large for schools to handle in isolation. Significant additional resources to close gaps were advocated for by participants from SUSD as well as government and external agencies. The resources that participants advocated for spanned the spectrum from academic supports through medical, mental health, and cultural supports.

Implications for Leaders. The implications of these findings are significant for school leaders as Reeves (2011) argued that "leadership focus is a prerequisite to every other element of leadership" (p. 2) and the focus of leaders ought to be based on achieving student success. This study does highlight an element of leadership that may be a prerequisite for determining one's leadership focus, that being engaging community in determining what success is in that community. Leaders need to be prepared to enter contested conversations about success with their staff and community and to negotiate an agreed upon a definition of success that can be pursued. This study and previous research (Anuik et al., 2010; Canadian Council on Learning, 2007, 2009; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Steeves et al., 2012) indicate that when working within Indigenous communities, the definition of success will be broader than academic success and

will likely entail holistic views of success as well as heavily featured Indigenous cultures and languages beyond just one First Nation language and culture (i.e., Cree-centric). As previously stated, community sharing circles appear to have promise in engaging many community members in important conversations and may be a good way to consult community on visions of success.

Leaders will require a significant set of leadership competencies to ensure that a small number of goals stemming from the vision of success are agreed upon, and that goals are vigorously pursued. Importantly, leaders must ensure that success criteria representing diverse visions of success are pursued. It does not appear a stretch to view holistic views and Western views as reciprocal. Holistic and cultural supports and success were seen to support academic growth and having improved academic abilities will likely lead to improved holistic outcomes. It seems inappropriate to view success as either academic or holistic; an academic emphasis is an important part of a holistic view of success. To this end, leaders must understand large-scale assessment data required by school divisions and the ministry of education. However, they must also be able to interact with teachers on classroom level academic and holistic assessments focused on other areas of development which should include cultural teachings and learnings. Leaders may also need to advocate for their school community, requesting additional supports towards attainment of school goals and advocating for expert staff members with essential skills and dispositions aligned with academic and holistic goals.

Richards' (et al., 2008) research on British Columbia school districts that have achieved greater Indigenous student success, as measured by Western views, provides a promising path towards defining and enhancing Indigenous student success. The high-performing B.C. school districts did three things: they committed to Indigenous student success as a long-term priority, they involved Indigenous leaders and community members in meaningful ways, and they used data to implement policies, adjust implementation, and measure progress. The three points raised from the B.C. research warrant consideration in any vision of leadership for Saskatchewan inner-city schools and appear well-aligned with findings from the current study.

Partnerships

As stated in chapter four, the theme of partnerships specifically addresses partnerships between schools and/or school divisions and Indigenous people, agencies, and governments. This

study uses a definition of the term authentic partnership offered by Dale: one that is done with the full participation of partners including developing goals together. Significant literature indicates the profound importance of schools and education systems authentically engaging Indigenous partners (Dempster et al., 2016; G. Johnson et al., 2018; Richards et al., 2008; St. Denis, 2010; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

The partnership model of ethical space (Ermine, 2007) was directly spoken to in the study. The partnership model of ethical space is one model of cross-cultural partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people founded on the principles of cooperative spirit and honouring diverse worldviews (see also Frawley & Fasoli, 2012). Engaging in partnerships with a partnership model as the foundation will allow for potential partners from diverse backgrounds to come together and appreciate each other's knowledge system, culture, and ways of being. Partnership principles will set the stage for robust partnership where no knowledge system or partner dominates. Participants contended that such partnerships can only be reached through purposeful commitment to getting to know one another first.

Participants held relationships as being vital for any strong relationship between schools/school divisions and Indigenous peoples, agencies, and governments. Participants' statements that relationships are the very heart of Indigenous organizations and that relationships must be present in authentic partnerships are supported by literature (Dempster et al., 2016; Ermine, 2007; Frawley & Fasoli, 2012; Fulford et al, 2007; G. Johnson et al., 2018; Ottmann, 2009; Peters, 2015). Peggy spoke about the incredible importance of kinship, a recognized Tipi Teaching (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009), in Indigenous cultures and how impersonal business-like partnerships feel foreign to Indigenous people. Peggy advocated for partnerships to be formed on kinship bonds and used the statement "friend-to-friend". In order to form kinship bonds, participants stated that there was one clear path towards creating these bonds: spending time together getting to know one-another prior to talking business. Participants also professed the importance of kinship based on trust and respect and how partnerships built on kinship bonds will allow for a quicker path to forgiveness if things get contentious.

Partnerships forged on kinship bonds that allow for a free flow of information in an ethical space, will still fail to be authentic unless they embrace joint decision-making responsibilities. Colonial dispositions and practices have excluded Indigenous people from

engaging in decision making. Morally, there is a need for change (Grande, 2008, 2010; Ma Rhae, 2015; Saul, 2014). The *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action* (2015) heavily feature the principle of joint decision making. Participants' identification of the need to reform power imbalances and hierarchical structures that impede joint decision making are prominent in literature (Buckmiller, 2015; G. Johnson et al. 2018; Ma Rhae, 2015; St. Denis, 2010; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Specifically, Dale advocated for partnerships that were formed on a co-governance model where shared decision-making occurred based on agreed upon vision and goals. Richards' work in British Columbia highlights the power of such models as well as the hesitancy of school districts to embrace them. Richards and colleagues (2008) wrote:

> from these district comparisons, we concluded that collaboration between school-district personnel and local Aboriginal communities is a prerequisite to improved academic outcomes. While many districts recognize this, others remain reluctant to share decision-making (p. 14).

If moral grounds are not enough to sway school districts to embrace joint decision making, perhaps the benefit for student learning outcomes evidenced in British Columbia will convince the apprehensive.

In addition to addressing partnerships with agencies external to school districts, participants also spoke of the need to be purposeful in partnering with Indigenous staff members at the school and system level. This theme prominently featured a call to ensure that the right voices are brought to decision making tables regardless of whether the person holds the title that may traditionally be required to be part of the meeting or committee. This theme was grounded on the need to ensure that Indigenous perspectives were always included (and not as an afterthought) and to support the sense of empowerment and value felt by Indigenous educators (St. Denis, 2010). Participants also addressed the colonial culture of educational systems and specifically identified that humour has been suppressed. Humour will be addressed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Implications for Leaders. Authentic partnerships are based on three conditions that must all be present: kinship, ethical space, and shared decision making. Leaders at school and system levels must foster the conditions to create authentic partnerships with Indigenous people and

groups. To achieve authentic partnerships, colonial structures such as rigid hierarchies, Western business-like notions of partnership, and the dominance of Western knowledge and practices, will need to be reformed. Leaders must commit significant time to the creation and maintenance of relationships with partners and must learn to honour and appreciate the worldviews of others. Partnerships should be founded on the principle of joint decision making; this will require leaders to become comfortable with sharing power and ownership. Done well, authentic partnerships have great potential for dramatic change at the school and system level. Done poorly, all children and Canadians will suffer the future consequences of strained and mistrusting relations, risking the continuance of inequitable school contexts that maintain poor educational outcomes.

The leadership described above warrants further exploration as it appears to align well with Raelin's (2011, 2016) notion of leadership-as-practice based on the premise of collaborative agency. Raelin (2011, 2016) described an understanding of leadership that was not focused on an individual and their place in organizational hierarchy, or their traits. Rather, Raelin focused on the collaborative and relational processes that activate the agency of a community of actors. Raelin (2011) stated that leadership-as-practice "is seen as an alternative to the dominant Western tradition of centering leadership within the individual, replacing this orientation with a focus on practice including the social interactions among the practitioners to the activity in question" (p. 199). As such Raelin described leadership derived from lateral democratic relationships not hierarchical imposition. Raelin (2016) argued that the interactions of actors empowered to engage in problem solving may allow the interruption and replacement of hegemonic practices that otherwise may have been thoughtlessly continued.

Racism

Racism is ubiquitous across society (Battiste, 2013; K. Brown & Jackson, 2013; Cole, 2012; Cranston, 2020; Quijada Cerecer, 2013; Singleton, 2015; Slaughter & Singh, 2020; West, 2017) and participants of the study readily acknowledged the impact of racism on personal experiences and the experiences of students, families, and staff as they navigated schools and educational systems. The awareness of participants to the racism around them was amplified by the very public events unfolding in the United States during the time of the first research conversations. This increased awareness was addressed by several participants. In an invited

lecture to the University of Manitoba Faculty of Education; Jerome Cranston, Dean of the University of Regina Faculty of Education, asked virtual attendees who worked in a variety of early-learning through post-secondary contexts across Canada a rhetorical question about whether they had a problem with systemic racism and racism in their school contexts. Cranston's answer was clear "let me be emphatic, you do have a problem with it" (September 30, 2020). Cranston went on to state that denying the existence of racism impairs progress; however, once racism is acknowledged in school systems, there are educational actions that can be taken to vitiate racism's damaging effects. Literature, current events, and experiences of participants all clearly identify the continued and devastating impacts of racism on society and educational systems.

Participants articulated that SUSD had acknowledged the existence of racism and had recently undertaken efforts to avert the detrimental impacts; however, some stated directly or told stories that indicated that progress to date was inadequate and was yet to significantly alter the experiences of racialized students, families, and staff. Notably, participants discussed two important recent initiatives that SUSD had undertaken. The first was mandatory three-year equity training for all school-based and central office educational leaders which was in its first-year of implementation when the pandemic closed schools. Research clearly supports the need for learning opportunities targeted to leaders' development in areas of importance for equity, such as the program described by participants (Capper & Young, 2014; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Theoharis, 2007, 2010). This need is necessitated based on the traditional training most educational leaders receive (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Morris & Chapman, 2020; Pete et al., 2013). The other SUSD program identified by participants was a mandatory opportunity for all educational assistants and office assistants to engage in learning specifically about racism. SUSD seized these employees' available time during the school shut down in Spring 2020, to provide facilitated learning opportunities. Literature is unambiguous on the need to teachers to engage in anti-racism training (Higgins et al., 2015; Michie, 2007; Pete et al., 2013; Quijada Cerecer, 2013; Singleton, 2015; St. Denis, 2007, 2010). While this literature often fails to single out educational assistants and other non-teaching staff working in schools, given these staff members close work with students and their general lack of exposure to anti-racism training, the need for these groups to benefit from this form of training is palpable. In the current study, multiple participants

recognized the immense importance of the office assistant in being a welcoming first contact for the school; given this importance, the inclusion of the office assistants in the training also appears to be significant. Given the recent commitment to training select employee groups, perhaps change within SUSD and its schools will be noticeable in the near future.

PSCS was in its infancy with a teacher-led anti-racist committee that provided professional learning opportunities for staff. Stella and Matt shared that the formation of this committee was fostered by their learning in their leadership equity training; it appeared that a central idea of SUSD's leadership learning strategy was to have school leaders take their learning back to their school staff. It was too early to form a sense of the impact of this new learning at the school level, especially since they had only had a few learning opportunities prior to the shutdown, but participants noted staff engagement in anti-racism learning as an optimistic sign of future impact. Participants' validation of the importance of anti-racist learning and pedagogy is supported by abundant literature (Burleigh & Burm, 2014; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Higgins et al., 2015; Michie, 2007; Pete et al., 2013; Singleton, 2015; St. Denis, 2007).

Participants also spoke clearly about Canada's history of oppression of Indigenous peoples. Some white participants also clearly identified their white privilege and that their privilege was entrenched in oppression of others (Burleigh & Burm, 2014; Higgins et al., 2015; Korteweg & Fiddler, 2018; McIntosh, 1988; Pete et al., 2013). That Canada has a history of purposeful government policies and actions aimed at annihilation, assimilation, and segregation of Indigenous peoples, knowledges, and ways of being is well-documented (Saul, 2014; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015; Vowel, 2015). The direct association between past and current policies and practices and myriad contemporary oppressive forces has also been established (Battiste, 2010, 2013; Brayboy, 2013, 2014; Grande, 2000, 2004, 2010; Ma Rhea, 2015; Mulcahy, 2017). Multiple participants addressed the importance of education systems in addressing and countering Canada's colonial legacy. The need to decolonize Canada's schools has been fiercely advocated (Battiste, 2010; Pete et al., 2013; Peters, 2015; St. Denis, 2007, 2010). Participants in the current study addressed the continued failure of schools and other public institutions and called on SUSD and inner-city schools to do better for Indigenous students. To counter the colonial legacy of schools, participants advocated for changes in practice that would afford Indigenous students the best possible facilities to learn in, programs to

attend, and educators to learn from. They also advocated for responsive curriculum that privileges Indigenous knowledge and ways of being, schools and school divisions that honour Indigenous perspective, critically aware and culturally competent educators, and an end of racist practices. In short, participants advocated for significant change to counter colonization. Change was identified as being required from the top of educational systems, beginning with the Ministry of Education, right down to the day-to-day practices in school offices and classrooms. Many of the changes requested by participants to aid in decolonizing education were seen to be potential strategies and actions to create more inclusive environments for Indigenous staff members to thrive; creating climates in schools for Indigenous staff members to flourish will be addressed later in this chapter.

One theme that emerged throughout the study was the importance of allies. The presence and support of non-Indigenous allies was seen by participants to be of fundamental importance for a variety of reasons including combating racism and colonialism in schools and systems, advancing cultural infusion, supporting Indigenous staff and families, and increasing student achievement. A study conducted by St. Denis (2010) identified a number of characteristics and behaviours exhibited by non-Indigenous educators who were acknowledged by their Indigenous colleagues as allies of Indigenous students, staff, and overall efforts to increase Indigenous perspectives and content in schools. Congruent with St. Denis's findings, the participants of the current study found that allies were genuine, made commitments to personal learning, were good listeners, were not afraid to speak up, and had an action orientation. Additionally, St. Denis (2010) found that allies took initiative to engage in cultural and community events, exhibited a sense of humour, were accepting of Indigenous colleagues, and worked behind the scenes to support efforts. While this last group of characteristics were not directly addressed within participants of the current study's comments on allyship, they all were addressed as items of importance in the study. Importantly, scholars who have examined settler-Indigenous allyship are clear that allies are needed to support the work but should not take the work over (Peters, 2015; St. Denis, 2010, Swiftwolfe, 2019). Sherry's statement that allies need to "listen more than they talk" and need to take a stance of "I am here with you, I am not speaking for you" is very similar to St. Denis's (2010) assertion that allies "understood the importance of participating without taking over" (p. 54).

Stella, Matt, and Greg each articulated and exhibited a number of the characteristics of allies identified in literature. St. Denis (2010) made particular mention of the importance of allies in leadership positions especially in their capacity to mentor, validate, provide emotional support, and help Indigenous staff to navigate the school system. In order for leaders to become allies, there is foundational work which they must continually engage in including critical reflection and identifying and challenging personal biases and privileges (Cranston, 2020; MacKinnon, 2000; Peters, 2015; Shields, 2004; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011; Wallin & Peden, 2014). Swiftwolfe (2019) specifically implored potential allies to interrogate their own motivations to ensure that they were not engaging in allyship for self-serving impetuses. Potentially a good litmus test for school leader allyship are the criteria for indigenist leaders presented by Ma Rhae (2015) which include a commitment to critical reflection, empathy, and social justice that permeates all aspects of one's life.

Implications for Leaders. Implications of this section are important for this study and for the enactment of leadership of schools within racialized communities. Leaders must have a heightened awareness and criticality. It is essential that leaders recognize the existence and damaging effects of racism as well as Canada's colonial legacy and the very real impacts felt today. It appears evident that leaders will benefit from additional training and may benefit from increased criticality that may arise from exposure to lenses such as CRT and TribalCrit. Leaders must recognize that silence and inaction do not make them impartial, they make them complicit with damaging hegemony. White leaders must commit to being an ally of racialized students, families, staff, and champion efforts to decolonize and Indigenize education.

Teaching

Within the teaching theme, participants identified the uniqueness of teaching in inner-city contexts. This pronounced difference, from teaching in more affluent communities, led to participants identifying the important dispositional traits, promising pedagogy, and differentiated staffing for inner-city schools. Recent studies examining promising pedagogy for Indigenous students of Saskatchewan have been undertaken (Berryman et al., 2014; Goulet & Goulet, 2014; Stelmach et al., 2017) and will be significantly referenced within this section as the current study reinforces many of their findings.

Repeatedly in the study, participants referenced dispositional traits of teachers as being prerequisites to successfully working with students and families in inner-city schools. Key among these dispositional traits were the importance of a teacher's desire to work in these schools, privileging relationality, supporting students holistically, and holding high expectations. Participants seemed to equate the desire to work in inner-city schools with an increased propensity to hold the other dispositional traits identified. Conversely, participants held that educators placed in inner-city schools who did not want to be there could potentially cause harm based on a potential lack of the dispositional traits required. Recent Saskatchewan-based research identified the harmful impacts of negative teacher disposition on the learning and experiences of students (Berryman et al., 2014; Stelmach et al., 2017). Participants acknowledged that working in inner-city schools can be difficult and mentally and physically draining. Willie identified the potential damage when a teacher does not want to be working in a school as he reiterated "it is hard, that could be torture for yourself every day, torture for your kids, torture for everyone." Given the innumerable very negative statements made by students about their encounters with teachers in their study, Stelmach and colleagues (2017) stated that teachers must engage in self-reflection and reconsider whether the profession is for them. Participants of the current study did not recommend that teachers leave the profession; however, a number did acknowledge that an educator who does not want to be working in an inner-city school, should have the opportunity to leave the school.

The importance placed on relationships in the current study reinforce findings from previous studies examining teaching Indigenous students in Saskatchewan that conclude that relationships are foundational (Berryman et al., 2014; Goulet & Goulet, 2014; Stelmach et al., 2017). The fundamental importance of relationships to teaching Indigenous students is also prevalent in international research on teaching Indigenous children (Bergstrom et al., 2004; Bishop et al., 2014; Manning at al., 2019; J. Martin et al., 2017). Goulet and Goulet (2014) argued that "teacher-student relationships are foundational to engaging Indigenous children in learning" (p. 98). Goulet and Goulet's notion of student-teacher relationships included a deep genuine care for their students, sharing your humanness, as well as developing trust, respect, and reciprocity. Stella used the term vulnerability when she stated on a number of occasions the importance of educators letting students know who they are on personal level; this aligns closely

with Goulet and Goulet's (2014) idea of sharing one's humanness. Aspects of developing and displaying deep genuine care, trust, respect, and reciprocity were woven throughout conversations in the current study. Saskatchewan's *Seeking Their Voices* research identified that the word relationships proliferated their literature review on quality teaching for Indigenous students as well as the transcripts from their study (Berryman et al., 2014). Berryman and colleagues (2014) identified the immense importance of student-teacher relationships based on personal connection and caring as well as teacher-parent and community relationships.

The importance of parent engagement has been addressed elsewhere in this chapter as being vitally important in inner-city schools (Evans, 2013; Goodall, 2017; Ishimaru, 2013) it is also raised in Saskatchewan specific literature on engaging Indigenous parents and community members (Bell et al., 2004; Berryman et al., 2014; Goulet & Goulet, 2014; Pushor et al., 2005; Saskatchewan Learning, 2004; Stelmach et al., 2017). Berryman et al., (2014) identified the importance of educators purposefully working to create conditions for parent and community engagement both on the school landscape and within the broader community. Educators committed to getting to know community members outside of the school by attending community, cultural, and student events was seen by participants as an important aspect of building relationships with students, parents, and community members. Attending an event in itself does not appear to be enough. Peggy's words about attending school and community events and seeing white educators huddled together and not interacting with Indigenous community members highlights the importance of attending events to purposefully engage with the community. Participants' articulation of the need for inner-city educators to possess a disposition of relationality is well supported.

The need for educators to have a disposition for supporting students holistically was also frequently contended in the study and was deeply embedded in the way the PSCS staff worked. This finding is supported by similar findings on the importance of holistic supports when working with Indigenous students (Bell et al., 2004; Berryman et al., 2014; Canadian Council on Learning 2007, 2009; Fulford et al., 2007; Goulet & Goulet, 2014; J. Martin et al. 2017; Saskatchewan Learning, 2004). Stella and Matt modeled the importance of holistic supports with the PSCS staff as they framed staff learning on a holistic model and provided time and supports for staff to learn, implement, and reflect. Given the significant deleterious impacts of poverty

(Bradshaw, 2007; Employment and Social Development Canada, 2018; Sharma, 2012; Silver, 2014), racism (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; West, 2017; Young & Liable, 2000) and trauma (Aguiar & Halseth, 2015; Berger & Quiros, 2014; Blitz et al., 2016; Ko et al., 2008) that are faced by many students attending inner-city schools, holistic supports appear warranted to ensure that students are ready to learn.

Stella and Matt both addressed the importance of their staff having an understanding of trauma and a disposition that would allow them to quickly and appropriately respond to students who may require support. The importance of educators developing trauma-informed practices has been stated (Aguiar & Halseth, 2015; Berger & Quiros, 2014; Blitz et al., 2016; Ko et al., 2008). On the reason her staff has focused so much time on understanding and responding to trauma, Stella stated:

> It is that social-emotional piece, that trauma piece for staff and for students. You know. the academic piece is important, too. That's why we have schools, for the intellectual, academic piece. But we know now that there's so many other factors involved in teaching and learning.

Importantly, as Stella stated, a focus on holistic supports and supporting students with trauma must be in unison with the maintenance of high expectations. Maintaining a balance of holistic support and high expectations is a key characteristic for successful teaching (Berryman et a., 2017; Goulet & Goulet, 2014); this aligns with Greg's statement that teachers need to be able to marry these two important dispositional traits.

That teachers must hold high expectations for student learning has been well established in Saskatchewan studies on supporting Indigenous students (Berryman et al., 2017; Goulet & Goulet, 2014; Stelmach et al., 2017), studies of high-performing high-poverty schools (Bennett & Murakami, 2016; Carter, 1999, 2000; Chenoweth, 2007, 2009; Flessa et al., 2010; Henchey, 2001; Parker & Flessa, 2011; Reeves, 2003), and educational literature in general (Barone, 2006; Fisher et al., 2016; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Riley & Ungerleider, 2012). Participants in the study were steadfast in advocating for the need for teachers to hold high expectations for all learners and to reject deficit narratives that stand in the way of student success (Barone, 2006; Leithwood, 2008; Levin, 1995; Noguera, 2003; Ramahlo et al., 2010). Barry did note that high expectations for learning were not universal in inner-city schools:

> are you there to actually educate? Are you just there to create a band aid? Are you there just to babysit because there's so many people educating in Community Schools that see school as just a place to house the children.

Barry's identification of educators who do not hold high expectations for student learning supports findings from other urban jurisdictions (Carter, 1999, 2000; Levin, 1995; Noguera, 2003; Reeves, 2011; Riley & Ungerleider, 2012). Low expectations for learning and the likely poor learning results for students whom low expectations are held can quickly accumulate and lead to persistent gaps and decreased student motivation (Riley & Ungerleider, 2012). Teachers working in inner-city schools must hold high expectations for student learning.

The need for educators to have the right disposition and desire to work in inner-city schools was frequently contended in the study, so too was the need for exceptional teaching practices that would accelerate student learning. The importance of teachers' practice on student performance is known as is the significant variance in student performance depending on the quality of the teacher to which students are assigned (Fisher et al., 2016; Lee, 2018). This appears to be especially true for students living in disadvantaged urban communities (Haberman, 1991, 1995; Willms, 2010; Wodtke et al., 2011). Unfortunately, research has identified that "disadvantaged students are more likely to be taught by low-quality teachers every year" (Lee, 2018, p. 359) which intensifies achievement gaps. Unsurprisingly, given the importance of teachers, studies of high functioning high poverty schools overwhelmingly provide recommendations on the improvement of collective teaching practice as the essential task of improving student learning (Carter, 1999; Chenoweth, 2007, 2009; Haberman, 1991, 1995; Gaskell & Levin, 2012; Wiliam, 2011). Great pedagogy is needed to close persistent gaps in the face of significant challenges. It is noteworthy, within the current study where participants have critiqued Western notions of success as being too narrow, that high-functioning high poverty schools research are based on these Western notions of success and schools are identified as targets for study based on performance on standardized assessments. Despite this, there should be little disagreement that improving teaching practice will be essential to improving success, however it is defined, in inner-city schools.

Provided the unique context of Saskatchewan inner-city schools, participants called for an examination of teaching practice that was successful specifically within these schools. Sherry

identified that there was a need for SUSD to examine and learn from promising practices within their own inner-city schools:

> look here is somebody who did a great job at changing the data for the kids at (name of inner-city school). What is it that they do? We need to investigate that. What is it that they do that is different than everyone else? There is no sense in looking at the context of these other schools. Within our (inner-city) schools, where are the gems? Where is that promising practice happening? Let's start mining the good so that we can address the challenges. There are some things happening in pockets that haven't really been investigated. Why wouldn't we, because if I have a grade 2 teacher at (name of inner-city school) that is able to bring kids multiple levels forward to be at grade level by the end of the year, I want to know what that teacher is doing. I want to share that and maybe have that teacher do some work with other teachers in these core schools. How do we leverage the good that is happening to better the whole system?

Sherry's suggestion of looking to identify powerful pedagogy internally is supported by Donohoo's (2017) finding that the provision of vicarious experiences of teachers who are having success in similar circumstances can be a powerful path towards developing efficacy. While in the above statement Sherry spoke specifically about students' levels of attainment, she along with other participants were adamant that the response of educators needed to be broader, and more holistic, that just instructional responses.

Promising practices identified by participants that appeared to be having impact in SUSD inner-city classrooms included differentiated supports for students to ensure that they were learning specific skills based on their individual needs. Multiple participants spoke about the impact of embedded support programs where support teachers and staff do not pull children out for remedial programing, but rather co-teach with the classroom teacher to allow for smaller and more targeted instructional groupings and decreased student-teacher ratio. The promise of embedded support models was recognized as beneficial at PSCS by both Stella and Matt and more broadly by Greg and Sherry. Equity-oriented scholars argue that students deserve the right to high-quality instruction as well as freedom from unnecessary streaming or segregation. (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Theoharis, 2007, 2010; Theoharis & Brooks, 2012). This line of advocacy aligns well with the embedded model of support discussed by participants.

The provision of one-to-one tutor support in reading provided by retired teachers was also identified by both the PSCS administrative team and SUSD staff as a promising program. However, it is notable that this support required outside funding and fell outside of the purview of teachers. Greg advanced the provincial curriculum as a support, especially if teachers gained a deep understanding of curricula and how to leverage curricula in service of their students' needs. While it is tremendous that an outside funding source affords the opportunity for this support to take place within SUSD schools, the one-to-one model impacts a relatively small number of students and may even provide a reason for teachers to not differentiate within their classroom if they believe that another educator will meet their students' needs. Further, these efforts appear to be unsustainable should outside funding conclude. In-class improvements appear to be more impactful for a greater number of students and is also more sustainable.

Other promising practices that were identified by participants as being vital for teachers in inner-city schools have been discussed in more detail elsewhere in this chapter. These practices include anti-oppressive practices, infusing Indigenous cultures and ways of being meaningfully into their teaching, and providing holistic supports. Overwhelmingly, participants declared the need for teachers in inner-city schools to be expert relationship builders. The need for teachers to form relationships with Indigenous students is prevalent in literature (Bell et al., 2004; Bergstrom et al., 2003; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Fulford et al.,2007; Goulet & Goulet, 2014). Indigenous youth and other educational stakeholders continuously identify teacher-student relationships as either inhibitors or facilitators of student success (Bergstrom et al., 2003; Berryman et al., 2014; Bishop et al., 2014; Stelmach et al., 2017). The importance of supportive relationships between teacher and student are at the heart of two teaching models recently created based on Saskatchewan specific research on achieving increased Indigenous student success (Following Their Voices, n.d.; Goulet & Goulet, 2014). There appears to be a set of dispositional traits and teaching practices that literature and participants agree are essential for supporting success of Indigenous students in Saskatchewan inner-city schools. The existence of prerequisite dispositional traits is concerning provided Dale's contention that one of the reasons for a lack of improvement in Saskatchewan Community Schools in the past 40 years is that school divisions are "not staffing according to philosophy. We are basically saying this person

goes here, like chips on a board" without privileging the traits evident in successful inner-city teachers.

It is well understood that staffing schools is an important aspect of the role of school administrators (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2015; Kearnery et al., 2012; Leithwood, 2012; Leithwood & Straus, 2009). Many studies of high-functioning high-poverty schools advocate for differentiated staffing to allow for the selection of teachers who have both the skill set and disposition to lift student learning (see for example Carter, 2000; Chenoweth & Theokas, 2015; Haberman, 1995). In the current study the need for inner-city schools to be staffed with teachers with exemplary teaching practice was seen to be of paramount importance. Research has identified significant increases in teacher effectiveness during their first few years of their career (Haberman, 2007; Lee, 2018). Given the need for exceptional teachers in inner-city schools and the clear identification that beginning teachers have significant room to develop, the SUSD practice identified by Barry and Willie of having many teachers in their formative years placed in inner-city schools could well be compounding achievement gaps. Participants also recognized the importance of having educators in inner-city schools being a dispositional match to the needs of the community they would be serving. Further, all participants who were educators advanced that purposeful staffing was a necessary component of inner-city improvement efforts. In addition to elevating the learning of students, participants also noted other important opportunities that could be presented through purposeful staffing efforts including creating school staffs more representative of the student body.

Greg noted the current state of cultural misalignment of many of SUSD's inner-city educators who were teaching in communities very different from the ones that they were raised in. Greg's statement paired with Indigenous educator participants' statements of their sense of isolation highlights that most of the educators in SUSD's inner-city schools are white, while the majority of students they teach are not. This finding aligns with other Saskatchewan findings of underrepresentation of Indigenous people in the educational workforce (Berryman et al., 2014; Cottrell & Orlowski, 2014; Howe, 2006, 2017). Literature exists which identifies many positive effects of students being taught by teachers of the same racial and/or cultural background (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Egalite & Kisida, 2018; Wright et al., 2017). Taken together, these factors create urgency for the often recognized need to increase the Indigenous workforce in

Saskatchewan (Berryman et al., 2014; Cottrell & Orlowski, 2014; Howe, 2006, 2017). Howe (2017), a Saskatchewan economist, went as far as to declare that due to their positive impact on students largely manifested through a role model effect, graduates of an Indigenous teachers' program "are literally worth their weight in gold" (p. 2).

Despite their own clearly stated desires to work in, or continue to work in, inner-city schools, participants also identified the existence of dominant narratives of inner-city schools as non-desirable locations to work. This narrative was reinforced by a number of participants who recognized that many educators saw placement in an inner-city school as a punitive measure for bad teachers or had teachers wondering what they did wrong to be placed there. There was a general desire of participants to take a strong stance against these narratives and to build powerful counter narratives based on the joy of working in inner-city schools and the tremendous impact that you can have teaching there. Participants desired a future state where high-quality veteran teachers with the right disposition would self-select to teach in inner-city schools. Ideally, they would also choose to remain for a number of years allowing for enhanced staff cohesion, instructional continuity, and sequential professional development.

The findings from the current study align with research on placement of teachers. Literature on the phenomenon of teacher sorting highlights that the most qualified teachers teach in more socio-economically advantaged neighbourhoods (Clotfelter et al., 2007; S. M. Johnson et al., 2004; Lankford et al., 2002; Lee, 2018; Luschei & Jeong, 2018). Research presents a landscape of discrepancy between teacher quality in high and low poverty schools that is both striking and predictable (Lankford et al., 2002). Luschei and Jeong (2018) explored teacher sorting patterns internationally and found that the inequity of where teachers teach is an international problem that is notable in most nations but is most pronounced in wealthy nations including Canada. Lee (2018) stated "disadvantaged students are more likely to be taught by low-quality teachers every year" (p. 359) creating cumulative disadvantage when what disadvantaged students truly need is the opposite, great teachers every year. S. M. Johnson et al. (2004) stated that their findings on urban teacher sorting patterns of teacher assignment to schools represented "broad patterns of inequity, which can have severe consequences for low-income students" (p. 2). It is notable that studies exploring teacher sorting have been criticized for using metrics that are poor proxies for teacher quality in their evaluations (Hanushek &

Rivkin, 2012). However, even those who critique other characteristics utilized in these studies, such as advanced degrees or college program attended, agree that teachers with less than two years' experience is a predictive measure of lack of teacher quality (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2012; Lee, 2018) which highlights literature that is clear that teachers typically experience a significant increase in effectiveness within their first few years (Clotfelter et al., 2007; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Henry et al., 2011; Lee, 2018;). Danielson (2013) stated that unlike many other professions, the expectations of beginning teachers are identical to experienced teachers often leading to novice teachers struggling for survival in their first few years in the profession. Beginning teacher struggles are more pronounced in urban schools with a significant number of beginning teachers which can lead to the creation of a novice-oriented teaching culture that impedes teacher development (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

The clear understating from research that teachers experience significant increases in effectiveness during the formative years warrants consideration given that participants identified that inner-city schools in SUSD often have a significant number of early career teachers. S. M. Johnson et al. (2004) examined the support provided to new teachers working in affluent and high poverty neighbourhood and concluded that beginning teachers in poorer schools receive less supports in the vital areas of mentorship and curricular support. They also cited one of their previous studies (S. M. Johnson & Birkeland, 2003) which found that teachers are more likely to start their careers in lower-income schools; a finding made clear when of the 50 participants each of those who relocated to a new school moved to a school with less poverty than their first placement. The common practice of having beginning teachers start their careers in high poverty schools appears to be highly problematic both for teacher development but more importantly for the students in high poverty schools who require excellent teaching and instead are often burdened with novice teachers struggling to develop. There is a clear need for educational policies designed to disrupt the established practice of inequitable sorting of teachers based on quality and/or career stage into high- and low-income schools (Clotfelter et al., 2006; Haberman, 1995; Gaskell & Levin, 2012; Guin, 2004; S. M. Johnson et al., 2004; Lankford et al., 2002; Lee, 2018; Luschei & Jeong, 2018).

Research indicates the need for stability of staff in poor urban schools (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2015; Clotfelter et al., 2007; Guin, 2004). Urban schools in low-income areas

experience the challenge of rapid staff turnover at disproportionate rates which decreases the effectiveness of staff collaboration and professional development (Guin, 2004), both of which are identified by research as being vital to developing strong instructional programs across the school (Chenoweth, 2007, 2009; Chenoweth & Theokas, 2011; Flessa et al., 2010; Henchey, 2001; Kearney & Herrington, 2010; Parker & Flessa, 2011; Reeves, 2003). Creating a cumulative effect of students benefiting from successive quality teachers must be the goal of urban schools and school divisions (Gaskell & Levin 2012; Lee, 2018) and it appears that rapid teacher turnover is a significant inhibitor towards realizing this important goal. Policy is also required to incentivize teachers remaining in inner-city schools for longer durations (Guin, 2004; Lee, 2018; Lankford et al., 2002).

Implications for Leaders. The implications of this section on quality teaching have the potential to have the greatest impact on improving student success, no matter how success is defined. It appears clear that a vision of successful teaching disposition and practice needs to be determined and teachers with these traits and skills sought to serve in the schools where they are most needed. This necessitates reforms to normalized staffing processes that allow for quality veteran teachers to sort themselves into low-poverty schools which in turn necessitates many novice teachers' placement in inner-city schools during the developmental phase of their career. School leaders will play an important role in the advocacy for this important change in practice and in the purposeful staffing of positions over which they can exert control.

Even if fortunate enough to be staffed with a stable, quality, veteran staff, leaders will need to determine impactful teaching actions within their own school and look for opportunities to vicariously learn from promising practices in schools with similar contexts. Good practices should also be mined from Saskatchewan specific research on supporting Indigenous student success (Following Their Voices, n.d.; Goulet & Goulet, 2014). Once impactful inner-city teaching practices are mined, they need to be fostered through purposeful resourcing and professional development. Through rigorous and collaborative professional learning systems, quality teaching practices can be aligned across grades allowing for a cumulative effect of consecutive years of effective teaching. Following shared instructional leadership competencies, leaders will need to be able to identify and support good teaching and create conditions for teachers and their students to flourish. Intentionality must be placed on creating conditions which

are conducive to the thriving of Indigenous staff members as leaders strive to create a more representative staff. The implications of ensuring excellent teaching are immense, therefore, inner-city school leaders must pay significant attention to the quality and conditions of teaching in their schools.

Leadership

The theme of leadership in inner-city schools was expected to emerge given the intent of the study to examine inner-city school leadership. Six areas of findings warrant significant consideration: the uniqueness of inner-city school leadership, placement of novice administrators in inner-city schools, attributes of successful inner-city school leaders, promising actions of leaders, the need for purposeful and continuous development of leaders, and elements identified that appear important in decolonizing leadership practice. The implications of this section validate the current study and informed important revisions of the leadership model presented in the previous chapter.

Participants were resoundingly clear that inner-city schools are significantly different than schools serving more affluent neighbourhoods and that given these differences, that leadership should not be exercised in a uniform way across all schools. Reflecting on her experiences with leadership development, Sherry contended that "we have talked about leadership as a whole and in general, but our (inner-city Indigenous) kids and our families require a different kind of leadership. It is that whole idea of it not being a one-size-fits-all." An emerging area of understanding in leadership literature is the importance of school leaders deeply understanding the context in which they are employed and being able to enact their leadership in alignment with that context for maximal impact (Blakesley, 2011; Eacott, 2019; Hallinger, 2015; Hallinger, 2018; Leithwood et al., 2020). Leithwood and colleagues (2020) identified that "the evidence base about contextual influences on school leadership practices has expanded significantly" (p. 5) in the past decade. Eacott (2019) argued that there cannot be a single view of leadership and that recognizing the centrality of context "requires standards for impact that are enacted in context" (p. 68), with the context, not specific actions, as the leader's central focus. Hallinger (2018) stated "optimizing leadership practices for a specific school at a specific moment in time must take into account multiple layers of the widely shared context" (p. 19) which includes the economic, political, and socio-cultural contexts from the national level

right down to the micro contexts of school communities. Literature on culturally responsive leadership privileges leaders understanding and responding to the cultural contexts in which they serve (Blakesley, 2011; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Khalifa et al., 2016; Roegman, 2017; Scott, 2017). This study was premised on the need to understand leadership enactments within a specific context; participants and literature have validated this importance. It is essential that inner-city leaders understand their context and be able to explore and enact leadership in a manner that aligns with the needs of their community.

Confluence of economic, political, and socio-cultural contextual factors appears to have established a norm of placement of novice administrators in inner-city schools. As addressed earlier in this chapter the phenomenon of teacher sorting has compounded inequitable outcomes for marginalized students. Participants in the current study identified a similar trend of sorting in SUSD whereby novice administrators are often placed in inner-city schools just as Stella began her principalship at PSCS. Clotfelter and colleagues (2007) examined the placement of school administrators and identified a similar pattern to what they found with teachers; the quality of administrators, as measured by a number of factors including years in role, placed in high-poverty schools is lower than in more advantaged neighbourhoods. As literature on teacher development clearly indicates rapid growth during their first few years, it seems plausible that this finding can be extrapolated to the development of school leaders. Bluestein and Goldschmidt (2021) studied the impact of California principals based on student academic performance and the duration of time required for principals to have a positive impact on student learning. They found that principals need at least a year to improve academic performance and that "school context influences a principal's ability to improve achievement growth over time. Specifically, schools with large at-risk populations are estimated to need an additional two years to demonstrate academic growth" (p. 21). Bluestein and Goldschmidt's finding highlights both the contextual complexity of schools with high levels of poverty and the significant challenge presented to these schools if they are faced with rapid principal turnover. Rapid principal turnover appears even more problematic if the newly appointed principals continue to be new-to-role leaders. Given the complexities of school-based leadership roles, research examining the development of proficient leaders clearly identifies a need for very purposeful development of those who aspire to and are new to administrative roles (Bush, 2018; Davis et al., 2020; Dodson,

2015; S. P. Gordon, 2020). Myriad new duties in the realms of management and instructional leadership led Dodson (2015) to recommend principal induction periods involving significant mentorship of not less than three years.

The contextual importance of leadership evident in recent leadership literature (Blakesley, 2011; Eacott, 2019; Hallinger, 2018; Roegman, 2017) was obvious to participants who readily identified a set of attributes and actions that they deemed to be vital to successful leadership in Saskatchewan inner-city schools. Amongst the attributes that participants deemed to be imperative for leaders in inner-city schools were listening, patience, trustworthiness, openness, vulnerability, humility, hopefulness, and ability to recognize biases. Participants seemed to believe that these attributes were more important than actions, as Sherry stated that important leadership actions could be taught but many of the attributes were dispositional and therefore harder to develop if they were not already in place. Listening was addressed by multiple participants but especially clearly articulated by Joe, as not just as the ability to listen but as a more active process of seeking to hear, asking the right questions of the right people, listening with humility, and acting in accordance with what was learned. The need for inner-city leaders to have humility was contended. Participants shared that leaders need to be humble enough to identify that they do not know everything, and that the knowledge they possess is not superior to the knowledge of others. This notion of humility appears important for leaders to engage in reflective practices; better understand themselves, their school context, and their place in that school community; authentically partner with community members; and learn from knowledge sources that have traditionally not been tapped into by educators such as Elders, parents, and community members. Important actions for inner-city leaders were primarily identified within the areas of instructional, distributed, and culturally responsive leadership and in setting a positive climate in the school. The importance of inner-city school leaders modelling continuous learning in these areas was strongly stated.

The study also identified a number of important considerations for decolonizing leadership. Khalifa and colleagues (et al., 2018) identified five strands that aligned with Indigenous decolonizing school leadership: focusing on self-knowledge and self-reflection, privileging local ancestral knowledge, empowering the community, ensuring community voice and values are present, expressing spirituality and altruism through interconnectedness and high

ethical standards, and collective communication. Important elements of leadership identified by participants and privileged within the presented model align closely with the five strands identified by Khalifa and colleagues. Notably, their strand of collective communication has at its core replacing hierarchical leadership structures and one-way communication with collective leadership and two-way communication flows which are also central to the understanding of leadership in the current study. In addition to the strands from Khalifa et al (2018), this study also identified the importance school-based leaders adopting the stance of an ally and identified specific aspects of Indigenous culture that should be privileged in educational settings, notably humour and kinship. Identified practices appear to have great promise for decolonizing leadership.

Implications for Leaders. The implications of this section paired with the implications of previous and forthcoming sections provide clear credence for the research question and for the development of a differentiated model of leadership specific to the context of inner-city schools. The proposed model, with revisions, was presented in the previous chapter. This section also provides implications for system leaders tasked with the placement of teachers and administrators. The findings hint at inequitable staffing processes that disproportionately burden inner-city students with novice teachers and leaders. The section also identifies attributes that are presented as important for leadership in this context and therefore warrant consideration when administrators are assigned to schools. Broad areas to target for development of leaders and the need for continuous leader learning, especially in the beginning of their leadership career were also addressed. There also appears a need to support leaders in understanding limitations of colonial leadership models and to help leaders begin practicing decolonizing leadership practices, such as those in the five strands identified by Khalifa and colleagues (et al., 2018).

Unanticipated Findings

Given the significant literature review undertaken at the beginning of the study on a breadth of important topics paired with my time as a leader in inner-city schools, most of the themes that emerged from the study were somewhat anticipated. There were a few themes that emerged that I had not considered at the outset of the study. Unanticipated themes of the importance of senior leaders, humour, and supporting Indigenous staff members add a great richness to understanding inner-city school leadership and warrant special consideration.

Importance of Senior Leaders

A theme that ran across almost all other themes was the importance of support from leaders in senior level positions within school systems. Participants felt strongly that if leadership of inner-city schools were to be viewed differently, and specific actions be taken within schools to improve student learning and relationships with key stakeholders, that it would not be possible without the clear support from leaders occupying positions at the very top of systems. The importance of senior level leadership is present in literature on urban school reform (Childress et al., 2006; Gaskell & Levin, 2012) and improving Indigenous student success (Gaskell & Levin, 2012; Richards, 2008, 2014). The theme of the importance of senior leaders appeared to be especially pertinent to participants when they were discussing the need for leaders to work differently in parent engagement, cultural responsiveness, anti-racist pedagogy, partnerships, and reframing notions of student success. Senior level leaders positioning was viewed as favorable for critically examining policies, procedures, and practices and for providing accountability for staff action or inaction.

Literature on system level leaders indicates that these leaders need to be viewed as part of the solution, not the problem (Childress et al., 2006). Childress and colleagues (2006) were clear that to achieve "excellence on a broadscale requires a districtwide strategy" (p. 55) carried out by senior leaders. Sherry made a clear statement that supported this contention:

> You have to have the support and the belief of the people who are in those positions of power. Until you have that it is hard to do that in a systematic way. Until we have that kind of support right from the very top …until we have people believing that this is important and not just the Indigenous people believing that this is important, it is going to be very difficult to do.

Greg shared similar thinking from his perspective as a senior leader:

> People want to do the right thing, but they also don't want to get into trouble with the ministry and superintendents. Senior administration also want to do the right thing but they also have a lot of pressure exerted on them by the ministry… there are all these constraints to doing the right thing, to actually responding to the moral imperative.

Senior level leaders appear to have a significant role to play in supporting schools and school-based leaders in doing the right thing; it also appears that the ministry has a significant role in terms of structures and support for making change possible.

This cross-theme finding of the importance of senior level leaders was also made tangible within the study through clear examples of senior level leaders who provided supportive leadership that empowered action. Of note Barry, Dale, and Sherry each identified a group of senior level leaders who had provided exemplary leadership specifically in the area of cultural responsiveness. The stories they told of these leaders' work highlighted the essence of authentic partnership, creating supportive environments for Indigenous staff to thrive, and significant commitment of financial resources and risk taking to work in ways that had not been done before. The need for diverse perspectives within a school division's cohort of senior leaders, especially having Indigenous leaders serving in these roles, was advanced in the study.

The importance of senior leaders recognizing and prioritizing the need to do better in inner-city schools and therefore resourcing schools differently was frequently contended in the study. This finding aligns with previous research which makes clear the vital role of senior level leaders in distributing resources in alignment with priorities (Childress et al., 2006; Gaskell & Levin, 2012; Sharratt & Fullan, 2009). Specifically, within the study participants called for differentiated staffing levels and ensuring the high-quality of staff assigned to inner-city schools as important aspects of improvement efforts that they thought could be easily attained through supportive central office leaders.

Implications for Leaders. This finding clearly indicates an urgent need for senior level leadership action to improve inner-city education. A major implication of this finding is exploring an expansion to the proposed leadership model to include the vital aspects of the work of senior leaders. There also appears to be both a need for senior leaders to provide high expectations for leaders in inner-city schools as well as the support required to achieve those high expectations.

Humour

Once the theme of humour emerged from the transcripts it seemed so obvious that I am not sure how I did not anticipate it. The research conversations themselves were full of laughter and my experiences with Indigenous people and participating in Indigenous ceremonies have

always been full of humour. There is an emerging Canadian literature base examining the ubiquity of humour in Indigenous cultures (Copage, 2019; Leddy, 2018). Indigenous participants identified the omnipresence of humour in their cultures and in particular ascribed humour to building, maintaining and gauging health of relationships, managing difficult circumstances, healing, maintaining humility, developing a sense of team synergy, and teaching. These findings are also supported by literature (Copage, 2019; Leddy, 2018). Myriad other aspects of the importance of humour in Indigenous cultures have also been reported including creating safety for conversations on difficult topics, reclaiming words and stereotypes, upholding community values, promoting humility, and showing affection (Copage, 2019; Leddy, 2018). Given the omnipresence of humour in Indigenous cultures, Leddy (2018) advanced humour as "a powerful tool for decolonization" (p. 10).

Implications for Leaders. The current study showcased how the obstruction of humour within an educational system had damaging effects on Indigenous staff members. Specifically, Dale's story about the directive given to his former team to cut out the laughter appears rooted in coloniality and a lack of understanding Indigenous ways of being. Greg's telling of his humourectomy as a superintendent, for fear of offending, is further evidence of the lack of value placed on humour within educational systems. There is a paradigmatic disconnect in the value placed on humour in Indigenous and Western societies. This divergence in value provides a clear opportunity for decolonizing action, the purposeful inclusion of humour as an upheld value in education systems. Just as Willie shared that humour can be used as a gauge for the health of interpersonal relationships, perhaps the value placed on humour has the potential to act as a gauge for the health and decolonization of educational systems.

Supporting Indigenous Staff Members

A significant theme from the study were the challenges faced by Indigenous staff members working in provincial school systems. Challenges identified by participants included isolation, navigating euro-centric norms, being thrust into an expert role on all things Indigenous, and the sense of working harder to be validated. Participants argued that there was a pronounced need to increase the number of Indigenous people working in school systems. The need to expand the number of Indigenous teachers is a finding that is also prominent in Canadian literature (Bell et al., 2004; Oloo & Kiramba, 2019; St. Denis, 2010; Wright e al., 2017).

Significant expansion of the Indigenous education work force will be required to be instrumental in addressing Indigenous employee isolation. Participants' advocation for recruitment strategies and retention strategies for Indigenous staff mirrored findings from previous research (St. Denis, 2010).

St. Denis's (2010) finding that Indigenous educators often have their credentials and capabilities questioned was pointedly stated by Dale: "from the moment you are hired; you have to prove yourself as competent and capable." Just as the Indigenous educators in this study were graduates of Indigenous teacher education programs (ITEP), so too are many Indigenous teachers currently working and training to teach in Saskatchewan. Western Canadian ITEP programs have been identified for providing teacher candidates with safe, supportive, and caring environments to develop as teachers and to celebrate their Indigenous identities (Oloo & Kiramba, 2019). An example of these programs is the Saskatchewan ITEP teacher education model called Wâhkôhtowin which is premised in Cree epistemology around learning, kinship, and relationality (Wallin & Scribe, in press). Clearly, there is a need for school and division leadership to ensure that racist deficit narratives about ITEP programs are suitably dismissed. Instead of questioning ITEP program graduates' abilities, there appears to be an opportunity to examine how these programs have fostered a sense of safety for Indigenous teachers and to attempt to replicate these conditions within provincial school systems. In the current study, Indigenous participants stated a need to meet with other Indigenous educators to validate their worldview and to share experiences without fear of repercussions.

There also appears to be a significant shift required in the value placed on Indigenous ways of being and knowing in school systems. Participants discussed how they were frequently called upon to be experts of all things Indigenous, even if the information sought related to tribal knowledge or cultural practices of a group to which they did not belong. The heavy reliance of their colleagues on Indigenous matters at times felt exhausting. When it came to teaching and leadership, there was a clear sense that Indigenous employees needed to work harder than non-Indigenous employees just to be recognized and validated. Indigenous participants identified at times feeling a lack of support in their work; this parallels St. Denis's (2010) finding that Indigenous teachers encountered lack of support or even faced active resistance. This finding led St. Denis (2010) to advocate for fostering non-Indigenous allies in education systems who would

be supportive of conditions conducive to successful integration of Indigenous content and thriving Indigenous educators. St. Denis (2010) recommended that education systems "ensure that Aboriginal teachers are meaningful participants in all working groups, policy development initiatives and funding determinations that deal with education" (p. 9). Participants of the current study advocated for the need for space to be created for Indigenous employees, even if they do not hold the right title, to be involved meaningfully in committees. Participants noted that allies may need to clear the way for Indigenous involvement in these committees and that hierarchical structures that may impede involvement of Indigenous employees should be challenged.

Implications for Leaders. The implications of this finding for leadership in inner-city schools are plentiful and significant. Allyship from leaders and teachers appears to be a requirement as do the creation of safe spaces for expressing cultural identify and open dialogue. Leaders must also seek to expand their Indigenous staff through purposeful hiring and creating the conditions conducive to retention and thriving including validating knowledge systems and ways of being as well as credentials, contributions, and hard work. Leaders should be thoughtful in making invitations to Indigenous staff to be involved in decision making while being mindful to not overburden or ask for expertise in areas in which they are not experts.

Limitations of Findings

As acknowledged in the opening chapter this study has a number of limitations. This study was purposefully situated within the very narrow context of an urban elementary school in a provincial education system located in a neighbourhood impacted by complex racialized poverty. The study was delimited to participants from one school, school division, and community which limits the generalizability of findings, though it offers a rich description of context. While the study aimed to decolonize leadership practice, the location for the study, a provincial school within a large provincial school system, was a highly colonial context. Out of the control of the research design was the broader context in which the study occurred. Conducting the study in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic had significant impact on the study. Specifically, the pandemic made it more challenging than expected to recruit participants, especially those originally intended. It also impacted the methods I had intended to use, including the hosting of sharing circles and focus groups with parents and teachers. The pandemic also placed safety precautions on data collection which complicated the study.

However, I believe that the use of technology to aid in data collection fostered meaningful conversations. Significant North American events and societal dialogue relating to racial equity with the growth of the Black and Indigenous Lives Matter movement were omnipresent during the study which potentially made themes of race more present within this study than they may have been if data collection had begun even a few months earlier.

I was fortunate to have been provided guidance by a group of Indigenous advisors who helped guide me throughout the research process and who challenged my thinking. As a novice researcher utilizing a research paradigm for the first time, and one based on a knowledge system not my own, I acknowledge that I may well have made mistakes during my research journey. Any mistakes in setting up the study, maintaining methodological fidelity, analyzing data, and disseminating data are mine and mine alone. Given the limitations on the findings of the study, it needs to be acknowledged that the conclusions drawn from the study have the same limitations.

Contribution to Literature

The current study has made a number of contributions to the extant literature. Most notably the areas of contribution include decolonizing school leadership, contextual enactments of leadership, Indigenous notions of success, and being a non-Indigenous researcher utilizing an Indigenous research paradigm.

The study provides practical insights into decolonization of leadership practices. The need to decolonize education has been theorized (Battiste, 2010; 2013; Grande, 2010; Manning et al., 2020; Khalifa et al., 2018), yet few practical examples exist within the literature (see for example Goulet & Goulet, 2014). This study sought to learn from community members and educators what it may look like to decolonize leadership practice specifically in inner-city elementary schools in Saskatchewan. The findings of the study align well with the five strands of Indigenous decolonizing leadership identified by Khalifa et al. (2018). There appears to be significant promise in supporting overall decolonization of schools through school-based leadership practices.

The study aimed to provide a practical illustration of literature that has advocated for contextual enactments of leadership (Blakesley, 2011; Eacott, 2019; Hallinger, 2015; Hallinger, 2018; Leithwood et al., 2020; Roegman, 2017). The study approached leadership by acknowledging both that there exist a set of key leadership practices that are impactful for

improving student learning (Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2020; Marzano et al., 2005; Robinson et al., 2008) and that these leadership practices must be carefully enacted in concert within the context that the leader serves. As such, the results of the study support leadership standards and frameworks if they are carefully created and enacted with a deep understanding and appreciation for the micro-context of the school community.

The study helped expand the understandings of the views of educational success held by Indigenous community members and educators specifically within one urban inner-city context. It is widely understood that in the education sector, notions of success are prescribed through a Western paradigm and subsequently focus narrowly on academic achievement (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007, 2009; Deer, 2013; Ishimaru et al., 2016). Findings from the current study imply the need for a holistic vision of success for Saskatchewan's inner-city Indigenous students. Features of the more robust view of success that were advocated for by Indigenous participants included elements of happiness, respect, empowerment, relationality, sense of belonging and confidence. Additionally, the importance of knowing one's culture and having cultural pride were seen as paramount; notably this also included the learning of Indigenous languages. In advocating for a holistic vision of success, the value of academic success was never dismissed. The notions of success that were advocated in the current study closely align with findings from other studies that were conducted in partnership with Indigenous peoples (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; Goulet & Goulet, 2014).

I believe that as a non-Indigenous researcher, studying a highly Indigenous context with predominantly Indigenous participants that I have learned many lessons that may be applicable for other non-Indigenous researchers seeking to be involved in similar research projects. Khalifa et al (2018) stated that "it is not possible for non-Indigenous researchers to ever fully understand the needs of Indigenous peoples, nations, and communities" (p. 10). I entered the study aware of many limitations as a non-Indigenous researcher seeking to utilize an Indigenous research paradigm to better understand inner-city schools primarily serving Indigenous students. I navigated the study with critical awareness and consistently sought to challenge my assumptions through ongoing reflexivity (Henhawk, 2013; K. Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Stelmach, 2009). I was supported in working within an Indigenous research paradigm through doctoral course work as well as through the incredible generosity of Indigenous friends and advisors. Notably, I did

not engage in the study ignorant of local Indigenous cultures and ways of being and knowing. My more than a decade long commitment to learning through Indigenous ceremony provided me with insights into Indigenous cultures and ways of being. The teachings I have gained from many strong relationships with local Indigenous people have served me well and served as a foundation for the study. It better equipped me for the requisite reflexivity both individually and with knowledgeable supporters of the study. I engaged in research conversations utilizing the conversational method (Kovach, 2010) that were flexible, informal, and dialogic and were based on relationality and protocols, even as they became more complex during the pandemic. While I accept that I will not ever fully understand, this study has provided me with significant insights; insights which I hope align with the intent to privilege Indigenous knowledge and challenge the supremacy of my own Western knowledge systems. If this study has no other impact, it has at least changed me and the way that I view education, leadership, success, relationships, humour, and knowledge.

Implications for Practice, Theory, and Research

The study has a number of implications for practice, theory, and research. Key implications are addressed below. These implications are provided in addition to the unresolved questions specific to the leadership conceptualization provided in chapter five.

Implications for Practice

It should be reiterated that the study is premised by an understanding of the importance of leadership enacted in context. To that end, these implications are intended specifically for leadership in the Saskatchewan inner-city elementary school context and may not be applicable in other contexts even if they appear similar; as even within similar contexts there can be significant variation (Hallinger, 2018).

Given the significant finding regarding the need for leadership at the provincial and school division levels to support school level leaders, implications for provincial and division leadership are addressed prior to exploring implications for school leadership practice. Implications for supporting leadership development are also addressed.

Provincial Leadership and Policy. The current study has provided insight into the significant challenges faced by students, families, and educators in inner-city schools where there is a concentration of Indigenous people living in complex poverty. Making commitments to

increase educational levels is a mainstay in poverty reduction strategies (Anyon, 2005; Howe, 2006; Noguera, 2003; Richards, 2008; Silver, 2014). The continued failure to narrow the significant gap in educational attainment levels for Indigenous students points to the difficulty of attaining success without significant government action. While I believe that improving leadership and teaching must be part of the answer, I wholly agree with Orlowski and Cottrell (2019) who argued "only substantial compensatory educational funding as part of a wider program of redistribution and poverty reduction, can address the *educational debt* and ensure equitable educational outcomes for Indigenous learners in Saskatchewan" (p. 6). Saskatchewan must take immediate, significant, and prolonged action to begin to resolve the unconscionable poverty facing Indigenous peoples. Purposeful government action must include considerable compensatory educational funding to communities where Indigenous people live which would be protected over the period of many years. This would be in stark contrast to recent budgets which have resulted in a hemorrhage of financial resources from Saskatchewan school divisions. Urban school divisions have limited ability to appropriately allocate resources to the schools with the highest level of need, thus rendering the Community School model near obsolete. In the face of unconscionable poverty levels and persistent educational gaps, it is morally indefensible for government not to take immediate corrective action.

The incongruence of the provincially mandated School Community Council (SCC) model with the needs of families and educators was a finding of the study. The SCC model was mandated in Saskatchewan in 2006 to develop shared responsibility and facilitate parent and community engagement. SCC's appeared to function on the periphery of other engagement efforts which were seen as more valuable and better attended. The study's findings align with critiques of the SCC model as failing to meet their stated purposes (Preston, 2011; Stelmach, 2016) and failing to appropriately engage in partnership with Indigenous peoples (Martell, 2008). SCC policy should be significantly altered to allow for greater flexibility in operation and ultimately the ability to decolonize parent and community engagement processes away from mandated formalized meetings. Perhaps in reformulating SCC policy, the Ministry of Education will not again miss the important opportunity for deep consultation with Indigenous peoples (Martell, 2008).

Saskatchewan has not followed other Canadian provinces' leads and developed a set of leadership standards. This study provides insights for Saskatchewan educational leaders should there be an interest in the development of provincial leadership standards. Those building provincial standards must heed warnings on the potential for such standards to be decontextualized, hegemonic, and mechanistic (Cranston & Whitford, 2018; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Khalifa et al, 2018; Ma Rhae, 2015; Riveros et al., 2016). There must be authentic consultation with Indigenous peoples and organizations from the very inception of the process. The school/community context in which a leader enacts their leadership should be central to leadership understanding. Standards must emphasize considerations of equity, especially for Indigenous peoples. The leadership standards should honour the importance of senior level leaders and encompass division level leadership as well. A provincial leadership model created with the above criteria could support the development of leadership across Saskatchewan specifically in the areas of recruitment, development, mentorship, self-assessment, and evaluation and would provide university programs and provincial professional development units with guiding targets. As cautioned in this study, there are inherent dangers in promoting uniformity across dissimilar contexts and adopting leadership standards based largely on a Western knowledge base. Leadership standards should only be adopted if all identified criteria are present.

Strong opinions were shared about narrowly defined notions of success that permeate education in Saskatchewan that emanate from Western assumptions. While I believe that it is important for inner-city school leaders to work with their community to set their own vision of success, I also believe that this study illuminated the need for the Ministry of Education to do some work on broadening the provincial vision of success. Any reexamination of notions of success must prominently include Indigenous stakeholders from the inception of the process. A renewed vision of success should impact the goals set for Saskatchewan educators to pursue. A more holistic provincial vision of success may also afford Saskatchewan educators additional flexibility and support in working differently for the benefit of students.

A final significant implication of the study that warrants consideration at the provincial level is the need to reexamine or create staffing policies. Of note this study identified two critical areas related to equity that are rooted in staffing considerations: the placement of administrators

and the need to increase the number Indigenous employees at all levels in the education sector. The study identified that the preponderance of principals assigned to inner-city schools are, and have been, novice principals. This practice seems to be reinforced by provincial collective bargaining which aligns principal's administrative allowance with the number of staff supervised (Saskatchewan Teachers Federation, 2019a). As many inner-city elementary schools have quite small populations they are also school sites where administrators have lesser financial reward. This appears to have created a path in urban center principalship whereby principals start in small schools, including inner-city schools, and over their career work towards larger paychecks in larger mostly suburban schools. This appears to have created an inequitable situation where veteran principals serve in larger, often more affluent schools and neophyte principals serve in smaller schools often with higher levels of need. Rather than make changes to remedy policy that has reinforced inequity, recent collective bargaining has reinforced it with the creation of Article 4.6.2.1 which stipulates:

> Where a Principal is transferred by the employing board of education to another principalship in a school having fewer personnel equivalents than the school from which the Principal is transferred, the annual allowance shall be not less than the annual allowance for which the Principal was eligible prior to the transfer for a maximum of three years. This Clause is effective August 31, 2019 and replaces Clause 4.6.2 on the effective date. (Saskatchewan Teachers Federation, 2019a, p. 11).

This new clause replaced what was colloquially known as the red circle clause which protected administrators from losing pay if they were transferred to a school with a lower staff equivalency. Article 4.6.2.1 seems destined to solidify a legacy of inequity for small schools where veteran principals will not desire to lead them or will ask to be transferred after only two years to a larger school to evade a reduction in pay. It is my strong opinion that this new article must be redacted so soon as possible and that policy must be created to support, or even reward, veteran principals who ask to serve in inner-city schools regardless of the size of the staff. While provincial bargaining does not differentiate teacher salary based on school location there should also be an examination of policy at the provincial level that will support the placement of exceptional veteran teachers in schools with the greatest need as it appears from this study that urban school divisions are currently failing to do this. A good first step will be exploration of the

distribution of Saskatchewan teachers and leaders in cities and of school division staffing policies and practices that have created this distribution.

A second significant finding relating to employment was a clear recognition of the relatively small percentage of individuals serving in the education sector who are Indigenous. Increasingly, the Indigenous education workforce of Saskatchewan at all levels of the sector was seen by participants as a positive step for myriad reasons. Expanding the number of Indigenous employees in all levels of the workforce should be championed by the government. This important issue has been explored in Saskatchewan (Carr-Stewart & Dray, 2010; Howe, 2006; 2017) and there is agreement that there is a need for supportive policy and programs. Any policy aimed at increasing the representative workforce must be shaped through deep consultation with Indigenous peoples and organizations.

School-Division Leadership and Policy. The study identified a number of areas where leadership at the school division level is of the utmost importance. Areas of implication at the school division level include staffing, allocation of resources, and the need to be purposeful in decolonizing.

While I believe that there is a need for leadership from the provincial level in the important area of staffing policies, school divisions currently hold the responsibility for hiring and allocation of their staff. Similar to provincial implications for staffing, school divisions should be implored to examine their practices to ensure that they are actively working to increase the number of Indigenous people in all levels of their organization. This will require attention to recruitment, hiring, promotion, and retention strategies which should all be orchestrated with Indigenous employees. This study has identified the need to create purposeful opportunities to listen to Indigenous employees to learn about what is and is not working for them and about purposeful action that will create safer spaces for employees to express their Indigeneity.

The study also raised implications for school divisions to critically reflect on their staffing processes specifically in examining the distribution of teachers and leaders by career stage to inner-city schools. A recommendation is to conduct annual audits of teacher and leader allocations to their schools based on quintile groupings of neighborhoods based on neighbourhood mean income. Changes to policy and practice should be imminent if divisions

identify that veteran teachers and leaders are disproportionately allocated to more affluent communities.

The study has identified a conceptualization for leadership in inner-city schools in Saskatchewan which highlights just how complicated leadership in these schools is. While leadership in any school is complex this study has identified a significant number of factors that are amplified when leading an inner-city school. This complexity paired with the importance of leadership in supporting student success (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2004, 2020; Robinson et al., 2008) and implementing vital aspects to these schools such as cultural responsiveness (Anuik et al., 2010; Khalifa et al., 2016; Khalifa et al., 2019; J. Martin et al., 2020; Wallin & Peden, 2014), anti-racist pedagogy (Khalifa et al., 2013; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011; Young & Liable 2000), and parent engagement (Fitzgerald & Militello, 2016; Hands, 2014; Hubbard & Hands, 2011; Ishimaru, 2013, Ishimaru et al., 2016; Pushor & Amendt, 2018), highlight the need for school divisions to be very purposeful in the creation of leadership teams in these schools with complementary skills sets. I contend that heroic notions of leadership whereby one leader alone can meet the innumerable demands they are faced with is fallacy. School divisions must be purposeful in fostering school-based leadership teams who have diverse skills and who can work together to lead the school. Additionally, in recognition of the heightened demands on inner-city administrators and the pronounced need to elevate learning for students in these schools, divisions should recognize the importance of leaders and increase the administrative time allocations to these schools where currently most vice-principals, such as Matt, spend the majority of their assigned time teaching.

The leadership team should also be thought of more broadly than just the principal and vice-principal and should also include the expertise brought to the school by other school staff, parents, and community leaders. Participants contended that inner-city schools require resources well beyond those required in suburban schools with many of the advocated for resources being potential leaders for the school and community. Additional and or enhanced resources which were advocated included Elder, knowledge Keeper, and language speaker supports, community liaison and counsellor supports, as well as a host of health and mental supports. School divisions also have influence over leadership of parents and community members and should foster conditions that will lead to deeper levels of school-community partnership. These conditions

may include clear belief statements and goals, provision of professional development for teachers and leaders, creating opportunities for parents and community members to express their views to division leaders, and supporting the form of leadership described in this study.

Leadership from school divisions also appears to be vital to change practice in other important areas. The importance of senior level leaders in upholding or challenging norms was identified in the study. In particular, senior level leaders were identified in the study for both actions that upheld colonial practices and those that challenged them and had potential to begin decolonizing systems. A small group of senior leaders were continually referred to for the positive impact that they had had on SUSD. Key characteristics that were shared about these leaders were their abilities to work in relationship even if they occupied higher roles in the organizational structure, to seek diverse voices, to act promptly and appropriately, to allocate resources, and to create safe spaces for Indigenous employees. A key implication of this study is the need for school divisions to privilege the hiring, retention, and promotion of senior leaders who are Indigenous and/or show a clear propensity for the work and a clear track record of allyship.

School-Based Leadership. The advanced conceptualization of leadership is one that I have confidence recommending for practice within the specific schools for which it was envisioned. Implications for leadership practice specific to the elements of the advanced conceptualization have been addressed in chapter five. In addition to the implications for school-based leaders that have already been addressed which were specific to elements of the conceptualization, I believe that there are three other significant implications from the study specific to school-based leaders: administrator tenure, succession planning, and collaboration.

Provided that the presented conceptualization of leadership for inner-city schools is based on both a deep knowledge of the school and community context and authentic partnerships with community, length of tenure of administrators should be considered. Urban school divisions can transfer administrators without creating the hardship that might exist in transferring rural school leaders to a different community; however, the hardship of transfer might be felt by the school and community. Administrator transfer policies often lead to leaders transitioning between schools every few years. Rapid leader turnover appears to be counter-intuitive to deep contextual knowledge and partnership. An implication of this study should be reexamining leader transfer

polices and potentially looking for ways to support leaders in remaining within inner-city schools for longer durations. The removal of the red circle clause from provincial bargaining will be a significant barrier to maintaining tenure for veteran leaders.

It is possible that the effects of leader transfer could be mitigated through purposeful succession planning. My own personal experience of transitioning from the vice-principalship to the principalship within the same inner-city school was a positive experience for both myself and the school. Perhaps the greatest benefit for me was having knowledge of the staff, students, and families as well as the work that had taken place within the school over the previous two years. While it may not always be possible to have the vice-principal transition to the principalship in the same school, this could be considered a promising practice for ensuring that the new leader has requisite knowledge and relationships. If an incoming leader is new to the school community it will be important to ensure a period of purposeful induction into the school and community. In addition to meeting staff, this induction period should include the opportunity to meet parents and community members and be introduced to the various ways that school staff and community members work together.

The study also illuminated the need for inner-city school leaders to support one-another given how different their schools are from other city schools. There appears to be natural opportunities for mentorship for new inner-city leaders provided by leaders who have been successfully working in inner-city schools for a period of time. There also appears to be a need for inner-city school leaders regardless of years of service in their school to have a support network of other leaders in similar schools. Such networks could provide opportunities for dialogue about leadership in the inner-city context as well as safe spaces for critical reflection on personal biases and leadership practice. These networks could allow for leaders to share promising practices and to problem solve. School divisions should privilege opportunities for collaboration and mentorship for inner-city leaders; if these opportunities are not provided to school leaders, they should create their own networks.

Leadership Preparation and Professional Development Programs. This study identified areas with implications for programs that support the preparation and professional development of leaders. This may include university programs in educational leadership, provincial professional development units, and school division specific leadership programs.

This study identified two elements of leadership that should be central to preparation programs: understanding the enactments of leadership in context, and the importance of leading for equity. Leadership preparation and professional development should focus on developing understanding of promising leadership actions, but must also center these understandings on the local context and the manner in which the leader must work with their staff and community. Contextual understandings will be beneficial for all current and potential leaders and will ideally ensure that leaders do not thoughtlessly enact leadership standards (Riveros et al., 2016). Tied to the understanding of leadership in context is the need to lead for equity in all school contexts. Leading for equity will look different depending on the context of the school; however, equity considerations must proliferate school leadership (Capper & Young, 2014; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Newton & Jutras, 2022; Theoharis, 2007, 2010; Shields, 2010). Leadership for equity includes many important aspects including understanding and reflecting on one's positionality and biases, actively working to eliminate hegemonic policies and practices, creating deeper partnerships with families and community, and lifting success rates of members of marginalized communities (Capper & Young, 2014; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Theoharis, 2007, 2010). Leadership preparation and professional development programs should be renewed to center these important elements.

Implications for Theory

The study has multiple implications for theory most notably in the areas of standards-based leadership, contextual enactments of leadership, cultural responsiveness, application of an Indigenous decolonizing lens, and parent engagement.

The standards-based leadership movement has become preeminent in educational leadership literature and is driving leadership practice in many educational jurisdictions. Multiple studies have identified a similar set of leadership actions that have a positive impact on student learning (Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2004, 2020; Marzano et al., 2005; Reeves, 2011; Robinson et al., 2008) and these studies have prompted the creation of leadership frameworks (see for example Hall et al., 2016; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2004, 2020; Marzano et al., 2005; Reeves, 2011; Robinson, 2011) which have gained significant traction and have clear congruence in actions (Dempster, 2009; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Lambert & Bouchamma, 2019). Enactments of leadership must be expanded to include cultural

understandings (Blakesley, 2011; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Khalifa et al., 2016; Scott, 2017) and equity as central features and not extraneous afterthoughts (Archambault & Garon, 2013; Capper & Young, 2014; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Shields, 2010; Theoharis, 2010). The validity of these frameworks has also been questioned based on the Eurocentric assumptions on which they are based especially for schools that serve many non-Caucasian students (Cranston & Whitford, 2018; Fallon & Paquette, 2014; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1998; Ma Rhae, 2015; J. Martin, et al., 2017). This study helped identify that decontextualized enactments of decontextualized leadership standards have potentially contributed to the lower academic attainment of inner-city Indigenous students in Saskatchewan.

A growing theoretical base calls for greater alignment of leadership with contextual factors (Eacott, 2019; Hallinger, 2015; Hallinger, 2018; Leithwood et al., 2020) and specifically for leadership in Indigenous school contexts to be responsive to these contexts (Blakesley, 2011; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Ma Rhae, 2015; Roegman, 2017; Scott, 2017). The current study has attempted to bridge multiple conflicting theories and to make new meaning that could be applied in practice. Through an examination of theories of leadership standards, including their strengths and inadequacies, as well as contextual specific enactments of leadership, a leadership model specific to Saskatchewan inner-city schools was formulated. This study advanced a much different framework for leadership, one that honours knowledge gained from leadership standard models, yet was based specifically in a particular context and was formed in part by participants with a great knowledge of local contextual factors. The study provides one example of a contextually specific leadership framework, which given the prominence of leadership standards and the decontextualized critiques, appears to be an area for significant additional theorization and research (Hallinger, 2018). The study also illuminates the promise of leadership-as-practice (Raelin, 2011, 2016) as a lens to examine collective leadership by a community of agents. Notably, there also appears to be power in this conceptualization of leadership in levelling hierarchies and challenging hegemonic practices.

Culture was discussed in a more profound manner than what is commonly articulated in the literature base on cultural responsiveness. Participants clearly advocated for inner-city schools to maintain and enhance culturally responsive practices, but with a more intentional focus on anti-racist pedagogy. The importance of language featured prominently in the study as

did the immense importance of recognizing the diversity of Indigenous peoples. Participants emphatically spoke about the agency of Indigenous people and the need for decolonizing of school systems to ensure greater opportunity for authentic Indigenous leadership and inclusion of Indigenous ways of being. Participants advocated for increased and sustained agency from Indigenous people, including parents and community members, employees, and Elders. This deeper, more critical and agentic form of cultural responsiveness should be championed.

In exploring leadership in a Canadian context, attention must be paid to decolonizing. Significant scholarship has identified prevalent and destructive colonial forces in educational systems (Battiste, 2010, 2013; Brayboy, 2013, 2014; Grande, 2000, 2004, 2010; Ma Rhea, 2015). This study reinforced the need to decolonize Saskatchewan educational systems overall and specifically the urgent need to decolonize highly Indigenous inner-city schools. While decolonization of education has been widely theorized at the outset of the study, I identified a paucity of research specific to decolonizing Saskatchewan inner-city schools. Participants identified damaging colonial aspects of one school district highlighting that colonial forces remain pervasive (Brayboy, 2005, 2013, 2014). The current study advances some practical principles for decolonization of Saskatchewan schools including purposefully leveling hierarchies to balance power; privileging Indigenous ways of knowing and being including culture, language, kinship, and humour; honouring parent and community voice; forming authentic relationships and partnerships; deepening personal reflection on self and biases leading to a greater ability to appreciate knowledge systems and experiences different from one's own; creating safe spaces for Indigenous students, families, and staff; and honouring Elders and Knowledge Keepers. The need to move decolonizing from theory to practice is significant and must be based, like this study, on the voices of Indigenous people.

The importance of achieving a family-centric parent engagement paradigm has been theorized (Ishimaru et al., 2016; Pushor, 2013a; Pushor, 2015). Likewise, the need for school leaders to lead in a manner conducive to the creation of conditions for this form of deep learning-centered two-way engagement has also been argued (Ishimaru et al., 2016, 2019; Pushor & Amendt, 2018). The literature review for this study did highlight that parent engagement often sits on the periphery of leadership frameworks and standards and is not addressed in a meaningful way in many studies of high-performing high-poverty schools. The findings of this

study provide support for ensuring that parent engagement (in its deeper and more meaningful family-centric form) must be included as a central component for leadership standards and should be considered in any study of high-performing high-poverty schools. The findings of this study support the model of family-school partnerships proposed by Mapp and Bergman (2019), specifically that there are challenges that must be overcome both for parents and educators and the need for conditions and goals to move partnerships beyond traditional school-centric paradigms.

Implications for Research

A significant implication for research was the paradigm on which the study was conducted and my positionality as a non-Indigenous researcher. This study was conducted utilizing Indigenous research methodologies (Aveling, 2013; Kovach, 2009, 2014, 2018; S. Wilson, 2008) and I adhered to high ethical standards as outlined in the relational axiology section in the third chapter by ensuring that the study was built around the four Rs of respect, reciprocity, relevancy, and responsibility (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). Notably, prior to beginning my doctoral studies, I had been engaged in a cultural learning journey. Through this journey my eyes were opened to cultures and ways of knowing and being not my own. This journey also afforded me the opportunity to foster relationships that ultimately were integral for the study in terms of having cultural supporters and attaining participants. Prior to the study, I undertook doctoral course work that allowed me to explore the uniqueness of Indigenous methodologies and the need for non-Indigenous peoples to think and work differently. During all stages of the study, I ensured a high level of reflexivity that centered on my positionality and my known limitations (Henhawk, 2013; K. Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Stelmach, 2009) and sought ongoing support through generous individuals who supported me throughout the study as cultural advisors (Castledon et al., 2008). While the study began in ceremony, the pandemic caused pause in my commitment to attend ceremony; however, I did continue to attend ceremony where possible and will again as restrictions lift. The pandemic did cause me to rethink many aspects of the study. One of the critical changes to the study was moving most of the research conversations to a virtual format. I appreciate the wisdom of one of my advisors who implored me to continue the study and shared the recommendation of using food delivery services to still be able to purchase a warm drink and snack for participants during virtual conversations; being able to

share a drink and snack added to the sense of relationship in these conversations. While the in-person meetings were certainly my preferred format for research conversations, I did learn that virtual conversations were beneficial and maintained a wonderful relational feel. I advance that the purposefulness with which I undertook this study including utilizing an Indigenous research paradigm, my prework in cultural learning and relationship formation, ongoing reflexivity, support of cultural advisors, and focus on relational axiology are a template for other non-Indigenous researchers seeking to conduct research with Indigenous peoples.

I also advance that the manner in which this study was conducted aligns with the decolonizing principles shared in the previous section. In essence this study conducted by a non-Indigenous researcher was an act of decolonizing aimed at shedding light on future decolonization, individually and systemically. Indigenous participants of the current study were supportive of a non-Indigenous researcher seeking to help answer questions of decolonization. While it is of the utmost importance that Indigenous peoples are engaged in decolonizing work, non-Indigenous people will also be required to disrupt their Western thinking and engage in decolonization, so long as they engage in the process in a good way.

Suggestions for Further Research. I have learned much through the course of the study; however, I have also been faced with emerging questions. The following are potential areas for further research associated with the study.

The pandemic imposed multiple limitations on the study. One of the most significant limitations was the difficulty in attaining participants, especially parents and teachers given the significant shift in responsibilities imposed by the pandemic which forced a revisioning from the original case study design. A wonderful opportunity to have insights from parents and teachers into the proposed model of inner-city leadership would be to engage in a study where the leadership conceptualization was being employed. I believe that the conceptualization warrants consideration in action. I can envision a follow-up study in an inner-city school where the conceptualization is being actualized, seeking the insights of a similar group of participants that would be supplemented with focus groups/sharing circles of teachers and parents to help gauge the impact of this form of leadership on the decolonization of the school and impacts on school-family partnerships and student learning.

An area where I have remaining questions is in the role of leaders in helping move a school community beyond barriers that have reinforced traditional views of parent involvement towards deeper family-school partnerships. Participants in the study all discussed the need to improve engagement with parents. The staff of PSCS shared a desire to engage with families;however, participants struggled to articulate a clear path towards deeper engagement that was truly family-centric and student learning focused. Pushor and Amendt (2018) suggested that a significant barrier to more systemic parent engagement efforts was the lack of leadership imploring critical reflection on beliefs about parents' roles in their children's education. The PSCS example shows a leadership team personally engaged in this reflection (Stella has been on this reflective path for years) and encouraging this reflection in their staff, yet they still appeared to be stymied from moving to deeper engagement despite this being an articulated area of interest and action (especially pre-pandemic). There appears to be a need for further study of inner-city school communities where leadership has a clear philosophy of parent engagement and has begun the work of challenging staff beliefs to see the path, pitfalls, and solutions that the school team navigates with community members to create a desired state on family-school partnerships.

The study identified potentially inequitable staffing practices at the teacher and school-based leader level, whereby novice or less-desirable individuals were placed into inner-city schools at disproportionate rates. The phenomenon of teacher and administrator sorting is well recognized internationally (Clotfelter et al., 2007; S. M. Johnson et al., 2004; Lankford et al., 2002; Lee, 2018; Luschei & Jeong, 2018) and conversations about placement of educators during the current study highlight a need to study this phenomenon and the potential impacts on student achievement associated with staffing in Saskatchewan inner-city schools. I believe that there is an urgent need to explore the distribution of teachers and school leaders in Saskatchewan's cities with an emphasis on career stage and school placement based on socio-economic factors. Such studies may well point to the need for policy reform.

Participants spoke passionately about the unexpected finding of the importance of senior leadership for advancing change for Indigenous students and staff. This was not an intended focus of the current study but appears to warrant significant consideration. During the course of the study, participants frequently referred to impactful leadership of a common group of previous

SUSD senior leaders. Perhaps individuals such as those identified during conversations for this study could be the foundation of a study of senior level leadership for equity in Saskatchewan.

While many provinces have created provincial leadership standards, Saskatchewan has not, thereby leaving each school division to prescribe, develop, and assess their own vision of leadership. Given the significant diversity of contexts in the vast province of Saskatchewan and the lack of a common vision of leadership across the province, the Saskatchewan school leader landscape appears ripe for continued study. Hallinger (2018) stated that the natural progression of scholarship in educational leadership is to focus on contextual enactments of leadership. This study explored leadership in one very specific Saskatchewan context; there appears to be ample opportunity to also explore contextual enactments of leadership in other Saskatchewan settings. Ideally these studies of leadership in context would occur prior to Saskatchewan following other provinces and adopting a set of decontextualized provincial leadership standards.

A prominent aspect of the study and the proposed conceptualization was the purposeful leveling of hierarchies. Hierarchies were seen by participants to be a powerful hegemonic tool that preserved power and reinforced the dominance of Western ways of being, thinking, and doing. The purposeful leveling of hierarchies including senior leader to school leader, school leader to school staff, educator to parent; was seen as a powerful force in decolonizing education. Given the immense possibilities for partnership and doing things differently that are presented through replacing hierarchies with more communal structures, I see this as a significant area for continued study. Do there exist school districts and schools where such significant changes in organization and power structures have occurred? What may be the indicators of success and potential barriers in towards models of shared responsibility?

While the conceptualization was intended specifically for leadership within Saskatchewan inner-city elementary schools, Sherry, an Indigenous educational leader stated that she identified with the conceptualization more so than she identified with the leadership model to which she was currently held accountable, despite not currently leading an inner-city school. While the conceptualization was advanced specifically for leadership in inner-city schools, given the significant insights of Indigenous participants, I believe that other Indigenous leaders or leaders developing an Indigenist mindset may also identify with aspects of the conceptualization. This may hint at the conceptualization, and/or the processes used to create the conceptualization

with Indigenous peoples, having utility outside of its original design. A potentially interesting research project may be exploring elements of the model with diverse Indigenous participants from across Canada to see if there are any elements that are seen to be commonly beneficial.

Final Thoughts

It is well known that Saskatchewan has clear and persistent educational gaps between Indigenous students and their non-Indigenous peers. There are undeniable truths that have contributed to and allowed for the perpetuation of these discrepancies. Colonial structures, policies, and thinking have created systems where for generations Indigenous failure was expected and acceptable. The levels of poverty in Saskatchewan for Indigenous people and families are appalling. The legacy of trauma associated with residential school survivors and their kin remain palpable. Societal and institutional racism remain. These factors are all rooted in Canada's colonial history and present. We must do better.

If we are to do better, schools must be a source of change. All schools and educators have a significant role to play in contributing to change. This urgency for change is even more apparent in Saskatchewan's inner-city schools that serve high proportions of Indigenous students living in the very poverty created by colonial systems. Students and families living in these communities face many barriers and unique challenges. For educational gaps to be closed in Saskatchewan, there is a pronounced need for change in these schools.

In order to improve schooling in Saskatchewan inner-city schools, attention must be paid to the importance of infusing Indigenous cultures, privileging family engagement, defining and rigorously pursuing success, working in partnership, and including anti-racist pedagogy as part of an overall exemplary instructional program. By addressing these important areas schools will make strides towards decolonizing and improving.

School-based leaders play a vital role in any effort to change schools. The role of school-based leaders in improving inner-city schools and learning outcomes for Indigenous learners cannot be overstated. The model of leadership advanced within this study calls for school-based leaders to decolonize their practice by co-leading their schools with parents and community members as well as staff. Leaders must be purposeful in ensuring that the school is a place where all voices are heard and honoured and that people of diverse backgrounds will engage together in

improvement efforts. Leaders should activate the school community to help define success for the students and to empower the community to walk alongside staff members as this vision is pursued. Leaders must consider how to activate both the community and school staff to support each other's growth and development to support student achievement and the creation of a school climate that is reflective of the broader community. Leaders should situate themselves as allies to the students and community and promote caring and culturally appropriate teaching that includes steadfastly high expectations for students. By addressing these important areas, leaders will make strides towards decolonizing and improving their leadership practice and schools.

Leadership is required by school division senior leaders and government and ministry officials. Senior leaders must be seen as allies of students, families, and communities. There is a need for senior leadership to identify and promote Indigenous ways of being including the importance of humour and kinship in their organizations. There is a pronounced need to continue to focus on Saskatchewan's Indigenous students and elevating their learning. This must include the promotion of the infusion of Indigenous cultures in all schools. Importantly, especially in the age of austerity budgets, it is imperative that senior leaders and officials create and enact policies that purposefully privilege the learning of Indigenous students. Recommended policies include those that intentionally place outstanding teachers and administrators into schools with the highest number of Indigenous students; privilege the voices of Elders in guiding educational practices; ensure enhanced resources and funding to schools with high Indigenous student populations; and increase the number of Indigenous employees in all roles in the educational sector. Notably, there is also a need to examine and challenge the colonial hierarchies that senior leaders sit atop. By addressing these important areas leaders will make strides towards decolonizing and improving education in Saskatchewan.

In writing this report I join many other Saskatchewan researchers in calling for long-term collaborative efforts and targeted funding to address the plight of Indigenous people in Saskatchewan. In particular there is a need to rally around inner-city Indigenous students and families to ensure the best possible learning experiences. We can and must do better! I commit to being part of the change.

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Appendix A: Behavioural Ethics Certificate of Approval

UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) 11/Mar/2020

Certificate of Approval

Application ID: 1740

Principal Investigator: Dawn Wallin

Department: Department of Educational Administration

Locations Where Research Activities are Conducted: Saskatchewan, Canada

Student(s): Michael Jutras

Funder(s):

Sponsor:

Title: Decolonizing Leadership Practices in Inner-City Schools Effected by Complex Poverty

Approved On: 11/Mar/2020

Expiry Date: 10/Mar/2021

Approval Of: Behavioural Research Ethics Application

Recruitment Scripts (Schools and School Divisions)

Letters of Information (Schools and School Divisions)

Study information sheet

Approach Script (Focus Groups and Sharing Circles)

Consent Forms (Conversation, Focus Groups and Sharing Circles)

Draft Questions

Acknowledgment Of:

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 2014). The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board 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 original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol or consent process or documents.

Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair for Research Ethics Board consideration in advance of its implementation.

ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the REB Chair for Board consideration within one month prior to the current expiry date each year the project remains open, and upon project completion. Please refer to the following website for further instructions: https://vpresearch.usask.ca/researchers/forms.php.

Digitally Approved by Stephanie Martin
Vice-Chair, Behavioural Research Ethics Board
University of Saskatchewan

1 / 1

Appendix B: Participant Consent Form - Conversation

Participant Consent Form – Conversation

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled: Decolonizing Leadership Practices in Inner-City Schools Affected by Complex Poverty

Student Researcher(s): Mr. Mickey Jutras, PhD Candidate, Department of Educational Administration, University of Saskatchewan. Phone: 306.321.4999., Email: mej273@usask.ca

Principal Investigator/Supervisor: Dr. Dawn C. Wallin, Associate Dean, Undergraduate Programs, Partnerships, and Research, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan. Phone: 306.966.7564, Email: dawn.wallin@usask.ca

Purpose and Objectives of the Research: The study intends to offer a Saskatchewan conceptualization of school-based leadership that is responsive to the inner-city Indigenous context

Objectives:

1. To create a vision of school-based leadership for the inner-city context of Saskatchewan created in partnership with Indigenous community members;
2. To create with Indigenous community members an understanding of holistic student success and possible actions that a school may take to realize this vision;

3. To shed light on the intricacies of the role of inner-city school-based leaders and the tensions they face when working with expectations placed upon them by provincial and local school divisions that may not be effective or appropriate in all contexts
4. To gain a greater understanding of the challenges that inner-city school-based leaders face;
5. To understand the need for strategic resourcing, improved professional supports, and opportunities for enhanced leadership development;
6. To develop recommendations for leadership development and professional development specific to the inner-city context.

Procedures:

- You will be invited to participate in a one-on-one conversation that will not exceed 90 minutes.
- The Conversation will be audio recorded; you may request that the recorder be turned off at any time without giving a reason.
- You will be invited to select the location and time of the conversations
- Conversations will be transcribed in their entirety by Mr. Jutras or confidential transcribers. Those assisting with transcription have signed a confidentiality agreement.
- Once transcribed, full transcripts of the conversation will be sent back to participants via email with a request to review and confirm the information. This is your opportunity to add, alter, or delete information from the transcript as you see fit. Participants will have one week to review transcripts and request any changes. If after one-week participants have not verified their transcripts, the transcripts will be utilized as they are.
- Please feel free to ask any questions regarding the procedures and goals of the study or your role.

Funded by:

- This study is not funded.

Potential Risks:

- In general, there is minimal risk to participation, however, there is a foreseeable risk that questions related to Indigenous education could lead to emotional risk for individuals, particularly if they or their families have been affected by intergenerational trauma from residential schools.
- Participation in the study is strictly voluntary. Participants are free to withdraw at any stage of the study without any repercussions. Participants who are triggered through conversations will be made aware of the names and contacts of local counselors and Elders in the community who are able to provide support.

Potential Benefits:

- *The* intent of the research is to critically examine current enactments of leadership in inner-city schools in Saskatchewan and that this critical examination be undertaken with Indigenous leaders and community members. The hope is that a conceptualization of more appropriate leadership for schools serving large populations of Indigenous students in inner-cities will be realized.

Compensation:

- No compensation or reimbursements will be offered. However, in observing protocol, tobacco or other culturally appropriate gifts will be offered. You will be offered a snack and beverage during conversations.

Confidentiality:

- The primary purpose for this study is to inform a doctoral thesis, however, information from the study may also be utilized in future publications.
- All data from one-on-one conversations will be kept strictly confidential. Transcripts will be stripped of all identifiers. Identifying data will be stored separately.

- No identifiers will be used in the dissemination of results of this study. Should any quotations be used to support study findings, all identifying information would be stripped from the quotation and either a personal pseudonym or a role descriptor will be attributed to the quotation.
- Given the targeted nature of this study, on elementary schools within urban Saskatchewan neighbourhoods impacted by complex poverty, the number of potential research sites is somewhat limited. In publications participants will be referred to by their role. To provide the highest level of confidentiality possible, pseudonyms will be utilized for all participants. Further the school, neighborhood, and city in which the school are located will all be referred to by pseudonyms.

Please put a check mark on the corresponding line(s) to grant or deny your permission:

I grant permission to be audio recorded	

Please only select one option below:

The pseudonym I choose for myself is: _____	
Please choose a pseudonym for me	

Storage of Data:

- *The list of* those who provide consent will be stored separately from the data in locked filing cabinets within Dr. Wallin's office and on password protected University of Saskatchewan servers. The data will also be backed up on the University of Saskatchewan Data Store server with any file sharing moving through the University of Saskatchewan secure USask OneDrive .
- Data will be stored for a minimum of 5 years post publication as per University of Saskatchewan guidelines.

- All research materials (print, electronic, and/or physical) deemed to not be necessary for further research purposes will be destroyed as per University of Saskatchewan protocols after five years. Any data that are prudent to keep if they may be useful for future research purposes and/or has been recommended to be kept by the cultural advisory committee will be stripped of any and all identifiers and a name-code index will be created by Mr. Jutras that will be kept in a separate and secure location in Dr. Wallin's office.

Right to Withdraw:

- Your participation is voluntary and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. You may withdraw from the research project for any reason, at any time without explanation or penalty of any sort.
- Should you wish to withdraw, you will be asked to alert Mr. Jutras verbally, by email, or by telephone as to your decision without any need to provide a reason. Any data that you have contributed to the study will be destroyed.
- Participation or non-participation will not affect employment or an individual's standing with the school. Whether participants choose to participate or not in a data collection opportunity will have no effect on their class standing, their role, or how they will be treated.

Follow up:

- Reports of results will be available in paper or by email.
- Results will be disseminated to participants and the participating school and community.

Questions or Concerns:

- Contact the researcher(s) using the information at the top of page 1.
- This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights

as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office: ethics.office@usask.ca; 306-966-2975; out of town participants may call toll free 1-888-966-2975.

Consent:

- For this study participants can select the mode of consent from oral or signed consent. Ongoing consent will be sought for each new data collection event.

Continued or On-going Consent:

- It is possible that the research may request a second opportunity for a conversation. Consent will be re-established prior to each data collection event.

Signed Consent:

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the description provided. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	*Signature*	*Date*

_____	_____
Researcher's Signature	*Date*

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Oral Consent:

I read and explained this consent form to the participant before receiving the participant's consent, and the participant had knowledge of its contents and appeared to understand it. Please note that this information will also be recorded in the research logbook.

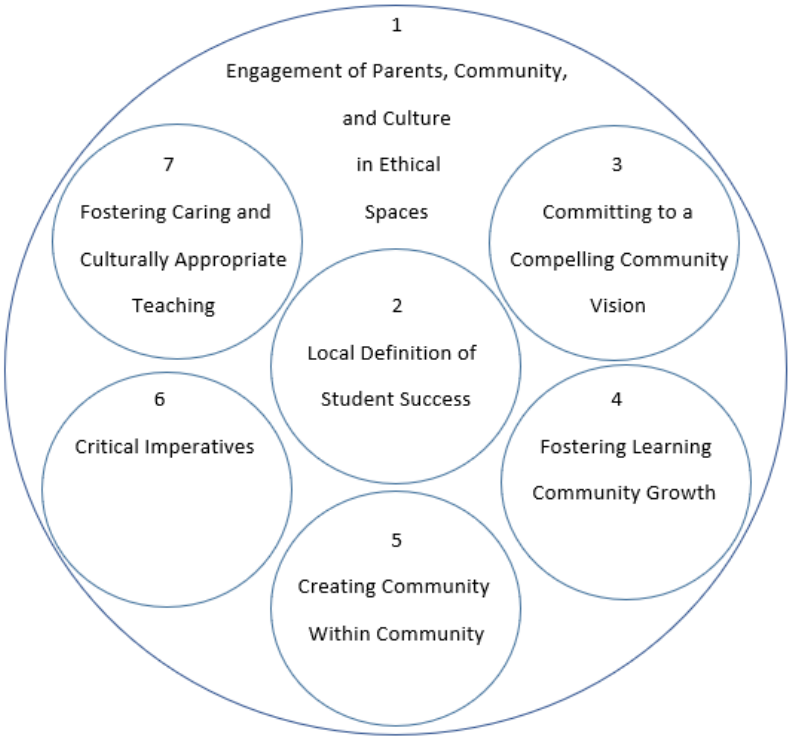
Name of Participant	*Researcher's Signature*	*Date*

Appendix C: Working Model for Contextually Engaged Leadership for Saskatchewan Inner-City Schools

Based on variance between inner-city communities and the need for communities to be authentically engaged in setting the learning vision for their schools, this conceptualization of leadership must be grounded in community, the specific community in which the leaders serve.

The proposed conceptualization of leadership is centered on student success, although a vision of success in which the community is authentically engaged in creating. Divergent from Western leadership models, it does not consider context as an afterthought: its foundation is culture and community. This contextually engaged leadership contains many contributions prominent in Western enactments of leadership, however, these actions grow from the foundation of culture and community and are thus informed by and accountable to the communities they serve.

Figure 2. Initial Conceptual Model for Leadership for Saskatchewan Inner-City Schools



Engagement of Parents, Community, and Culture in Ethical Spaces

- Fundamental shift in school-community partnerships to one based on harmonious appreciation of others including their knowledge and knowledge systems
- Premised on activation of cultural, community, and parent knowledge in educational programing
- Aims to create a state of shared ownership
- Additional efforts made to welcome Indigenous community members to combat intergenerational mistrust and current power imbalances

Local Definition of Student Success

- Seminal mission for community is to establish their vision of success which can extend beyond euro-centric norms of success
- Must be owned by community members
- Seen as living and evolving

Committing to a Compelling Community Vision

- Vision is formed from the communities understanding of student success
- School and community leaders co-construct the vision for the school
- Pursuit of a small number of goals
- Inclusion of community in the monitoring of progress
- High expectations for success held and communicated by all

Fostering Learning Community Growth

- Creating sense of collective efficacy through creation of shared purpose and actions
- Collaborative culture
- School staff learn alongside and from parents and community members
- Purposely rejecting strict supervisory processes with collaborative opportunities
- Distributive leadership which will add to sustainability of efforts if any key school or community member leaves

Creating Community Within Community

- Creating a safe and culturally affirming space embedded in and supported by the community
- School staff as guest hosts

- Based on relationships
- Parents and Community members as resources for their school
- Parents and community members having impact on allocation of resources within the school

Critical Imperatives (both critically important and require critical thinking and reflection)

- Especially important given that most inner-city leaders and staff members hold Euro-centric paradigms
- Identify bias and privilege and be cognizant of these when making decisions
- Anti-racist/anti-oppressive pedagogy and allyship
- Grow and show cultural competence and responsiveness
- Creating conditions conducive to Indigenous educators flourishing

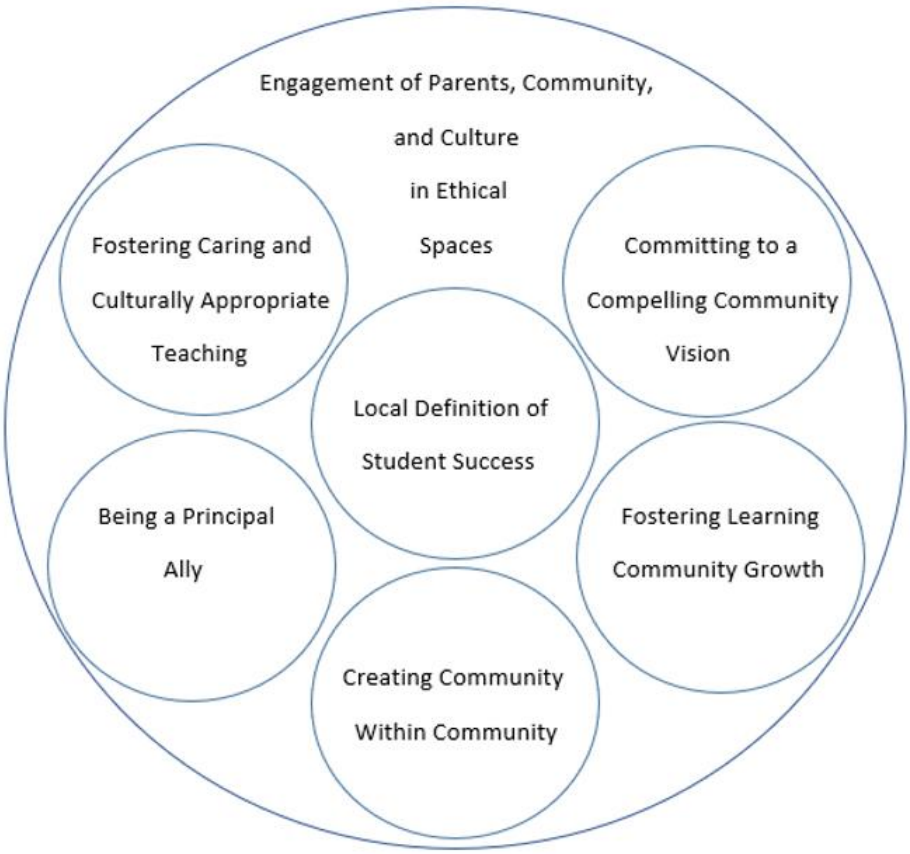
Fostering Culturally Appropriate Teaching

- Ensuring that Indigenous culture and language permeate all aspects of the school and curriculum
- Prioritize parent engagement focused on learning (as opposed to traditional family involvement)
- Trauma informed practice
- Anti-racist/anti-oppressive
- Individualized responsive instruction
- High expectations

Appendix D: Model for Contextually Engaged Leadership for Saskatchewan Inner-City Schools with Bulleted Lists

Based on variance between inner-city communities and the need for communities to be authentically engaged in setting the learning vision for their schools, this conceptualization of leadership must be grounded in community, the specific community in which the leaders serve.

The proposed conceptualization of leadership is centered on student success, although a vision of success in which the community is authentically engaged in creating. Divergent from Western leadership models, it does not consider context as an afterthought: its foundation is culture and community. This contextually engaged leadership contains many contributions prominent in Western enactments of leadership, however, these actions grow from the foundation of culture and community and are thus informed and supported by the communities they serve creating a shared responsibility.



Engagement of Parents, Community, and Culture in Ethical Spaces

- Fundamental shift in school-community partnerships to one based on harmonious appreciation of others including their knowledge and knowledge systems
- Premised on Indigenous ways of being including the importance of kinship and humour
- Premised on activation of cultural, community, and parent knowledge in educational programing
- Aims to create a state of shared ownership (which is fostered and maintained)
- Additional efforts made to welcome Indigenous community members to combat intergenerational mistrust and current power imbalances

Local Definition of Student Success

- Seminal mission for community is to establish their vision of success which can (must) extend beyond euro-centric norms of success (and be holistic)
- Must be owned in partnership by community members and staff
- Seen as living and evolving

Committing to a Compelling Community Vision

- Vision is formed from the communities understanding of student success
- School and community leaders co-construct the vision for the school (and together work to shape the narrative of their vision in action)
- Pursuit of a small number of goals
- Inclusion of community in the monitoring of progress
- High expectations for success held and communicated by all
- Leader as ally; and fosters development of allies

Fostering Learning Community Growth

- Creating sense of collective efficacy through creation of shared purpose and actions
- Collaborative culture
- School staff learn alongside and from Elders, parents, and community members
- Purposely rejecting strict supervisory processes with collaborative opportunities
- Distributive leadership which will add to sustainability of efforts if any key school or community member leaves

Creating Community Within Community

- Creating a safe and culturally affirming space embedded in and supported by the community
- School staff as guest hosts
- Based on relationships
- Parents and Community members as resources for their school
- Parents and community members having impact on allocation of resources within the school
- Includes importance of kinship and humour
- Importance placed on creating safe and affirming spaces for the flourishing of Indigenous staff members (also building a more representative staff through recruitment and retention)

Critical Imperatives (both critically important and require critical thinking and reflection)

- Especially important given that most inner-city leaders and staff members hold Euro-centric paradigms
- Identify bias and privilege and be cognizant of these when making decisions
- Anti-racist/anti-oppressive pedagogy and allyship
- Grow and show cultural competence and responsiveness
- Creating conditions conducive to Indigenous educators flourishing

Fostering Culturally Appropriate Teaching

- Ensuring that Indigenous culture and language permeate all aspects of the school and curriculum
- Prioritize parent engagement focused on learning (as opposed to traditional family involvement) and engagement of Elders and Knowledge Keepers
- Relationships as central
- Trauma informed practice
- Anti-racist/anti-oppressive
- Individualized responsive instruction
- High expectations

Important extension of model:

- The model's original creation was strictly focused on school-based leaders; however, participants have made it profoundly clear that the model must be embraced by senior leaders if it is to be embraced in a meaningful way