

ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY

INFORMING TECHNOLOGY-ASSISTED SCHOOL LEADER PATHWAYS USING:

METIS SETTLEMENTS OF ALBERTA DIGITAL BUNDLES

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## FGS Approval Page



### Approval of Dissertation

The undersigned certify that they have read the dissertation entitled

**INFORMING TECHNOLOGY-ASSISTED SCHOOL LEADER PATHWAYS USING: METIS  
SETTLEMENTS OF ALBERTA DIGITAL BUNDLES**

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Floyd and Marcella Thompson, who raised their family on the Kikino Metis Settlement. Through hardship, they did far more than survive; they ensured our family had every opportunity to thrive. We always had love, food to eat, a roof over our heads, and land that provided, held, and welcomed us.

Our mom passed away in July 2025, and sadly, she will not witness me walking across the graduation stage. I take solace in the times we spent together as she listened to me chatter about what I was learning. To my dad, I dedicate this work as a testament to your teaching: there is power in knowing our history.

To Dayna and Stetson, my daughter and grandson, I leave this gift for you. A gift of love, perseverance, and learning that never ends.

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You walked on our land, you honoured our medicine, and then you rested. Dr. Debra Hoven, you honoured me with your Knowledge and deep respect for shared Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Your encouragement to seek guidance from my ancestors has profoundly shaped my learning journey in enduring ways.

To Dr. Janelle Baker, Dr. Yvonne Poitras Pratt, and Dr. Jennifer Markides, your guidance has strengthened this Metis research and nurtured my growth as a Metis scholar. Rooted in respect for the Knowledge and voices of the Metis Settlements of Alberta and beyond, you welcomed me into unfamiliar spaces, stayed beside me, and now continue to lend me strength.

Finally, I offer my deepest love to the Elders, Knowledge Holders, and Knowledge Keepers of the Metis Settlements of Alberta, who welcomed me at their respective kitchen tables. Your guidance throughout this research, your stories, teachings, and patience opened pathways of understanding that could only come from lived experience and ancestral Knowledge. To Paul Courtoreille and Floyd Thompson, thank you for trusting me with your wisdom and for reminding me to listen with all that I am. Thank you for reminding me that learning is a responsibility carried with humility, respect, and care. This work is strong because of you.

### **Abstract**

The people of the Metis Settlements of Alberta have long-held values of identity and self-determination that relate to individual and collective perseverance in surviving and living their lives as Metis people on lands designated to them under the Metis Population Betterment Act of 1938. As a province, Alberta and its people have progressed and prospered. At the same time, the Metis people have endured and continue to suffer deprivations directly related to education outcomes. The hope of the Metis people within the Settlements continues to lie in the opportunity to conduct themselves in meaningful dialogue with the Province of Alberta in a manner that is respectful and values their Knowledge. However, there has been little research on how Metis Settlement culture and history, as shared by Elders, Knowledge Holders, and Knowledge Keepers, could benefit the development of school leaders. A Metis Settlement culturally relevant school leader curriculum that describes Metis Settlement experiences and includes perspectives originating from Metis teaching and learning systems is vital. This research study was conducted using a storytelling methodological framework to inform the development of a Metis Settlement online prototype module for the teaching and learning of history, culture, and languages. A conversational method was employed to engage Elders, Knowledge Holders, Knowledge Keepers, and community members, who shared stories and informed the design of an online module. Community members ultimately described how they want to be recognized by school leaders, how local Knowledge can support these ideas, and how storytelling can be leveraged to educate school leaders about what matters to the Metis people in the education system.

*Keywords:* Indigenous Educational Leadership, Metis Settlements of Alberta, Storytelling

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## Preface

This section is written to provide some context for the reader. It is presented in anticipation of and in response to readers, both accustomed and unaccustomed to Indigenous research paradigm presentation, as well as those new to and those familiar with Metis Knowledge traditions. I will begin with Kimmerer's (2013) concept of relationality through genealogy to facilitate an understanding of an Indigenous research paradigm. Following protocol, I will introduce myself to set relational space. Next, I will address cross-cultural communication as I communicate with Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers. Finally, I will explain the writing style and how it was chosen. I intend to build *wâsakâm ohci kîkwaya*, a reciprocal relationship between the readers of this story, myself as the storyteller, and the Knowledge I have learned from past and present members of the eight Metis Settlements of Alberta.

Metis lawyer, Jean Teillet (2019) describes social glue as the circumstances, values, and dreams that bound the freemen voyageurs in the Canadian North-West. That social glue bound people together to create a culture that is alive and well today in Metis people. Ancestral connections to these freemen have relational importance to the Metis Settlement of Alberta people as we are part of the living proof of a united culture of Metis people who maintain an emotional commitment to independence and freedom. We love hearing and learning stories about the journeys our ancestors took across Canada, first as employees of the fur trade and later as men who married Indigenous women. It would be the children of those first mixed marriages who would battle Canadian politicians to live a lifestyle based on freedom of movement, maintain the ability to establish themselves as allies according to Indigenous traditions of diplomacy, and share and live on what they identified as their land. As ancestors of these

freemen who battled ever westward, many of the Metis Settlements of Alberta people today, including myself, are descendants of those freemen who would eventually arrive on the lands we call home.

The *nehiyawewin: itwewina Cree: Words Dictionary* identifies wahkohtowin as a Cree word that references all relations with all things around and within us (Wolvengrey, 2001). It is in the spirit of wahkohtowin that the story I am about to tell will add to the accounts of my ancestors, past and present, and will open pathways to my ancestors in the future. To me, this is the essence of relationality. I am merely the storyteller, and while this story is mine to share, it belongs to all of us. It is our collective story.

tansi, kahkiyawiyak. Laurie Thompson nitisiyihkason. Marcella, nikawiy ikwa Floyd Thompson, nohtawiy. Kikino Metis Settlement ohci nîya. Hello, everyone. My name is Laurie Thompson. My parents are Marcella and Floyd Thompson. I am nêhiyaw-Metis from the Kikino Metis Settlement. As a long-serving educator on First Nations and Metis Settlement land, I have learned the importance of building conceptual connections between what an Indigenous learner knows and what they are learning. I have learned the importance of local context for history, culture, customs, and language. I believe there are many ways to access knowledge, including inherent Knowledge that has been passed down through ancestors and exists in my being, experiential Knowledge tied to Mother Earth, spiritual Knowledge connected to ceremony, and intellectual Knowledge held in stories. At this time, I invite your physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental being into this story space. Introducing myself and sharing some of my beliefs will create space to explore common ground so we can move together as learners, as I become what the Cree call a nitwaciwin.

To clarify how place shapes Indigenous Knowledge among Metis peoples, it is important to distinguish Settlement-based lives from those sustained in other urban and rural areas. Metis Settlements' Indigenous Knowledge is not categorically different from that of Metis living in areas other than the Settlements, but it often differs in content, emphasis, and the social supports that sustain it. Both settings share common foundations of histories, kinship, language influences, oral traditions, and land-based practices; yet Settlements tend to preserve stronger place-based knowledge, local governance, and institutional support found in schools, Elders' councils, and cultural programs that aid intergenerational transmission. Metis living in other areas, especially urban or dispersed contexts, rely more on networks, organizations, and fragmented or differently institutionalized pathways for passing on Knowledge. Because colonial processes and varied experiences of dispossession shape what is remembered and prioritized, Metis Indigenous Knowledge should be treated as plural, context-specific, and defined by communities rather than generalized.

Determining common ground in cross-cultural communication is necessary for me, as the writer, and for readers to begin to see and understand the same things (Wilson, 2008). Explaining how my logic works, the pattern of my cultural communication style, the terms I use, and my role in the process set the context, background, and meaning of this story. To readers who identify with Metis culture, please note that I do not mean to disrespect what you know. I have no way of knowing each reader's cultural context. I come from a good, open, and honest heart, and, in this spirit, I do not want to presume what is known, given the role of colonialism in Canadian lives. The perspective presented here has opened many doors for understanding. First, my professional observations as an Indigenous educational school leader have informed my worldviews. Next, my experiences as an emerging Indigenous scholar sharing my experiences

with the Metis Settlements of Alberta General Council have shaped my thoughts and ideas around this specialized topic. Finally, growing up in the Kikino Metis Settlement and sharing my father's love of politics and history set the foundation from which I have matured in my personal and academic life. I live with all my relatives in the beautiful settlement lands known as Kikino, and they have shaped the story I now share with you.

### **natonikêw**

I am choosing to write this story by including the stories of the early settlers, the people, allies, and accomplices who supported them, and continue to support today, the Metis Settlements of Alberta, to strengthen their languages, culture, and history. In social justice scholarship, allyship is viewed as an active practice in which individuals provide support and foster awareness by listening, learning, and speaking up, especially when their own identity confers privilege in a given context. An accomplice shifts the focus to dismantling systemic oppression by challenging systems in which the risk to social, professional, or physical standing is higher and in which the nature of action is based on trust and accountability (Finlay, 2020; Hodges, 2023). The reader will notice two font styles: Times New Roman font denotes an academic style. The italicized Times New Roman font denotes historical storytellers gathered from community resources, both published and unpublished, that have been shared with me as an educator over the years. I am employing this approach in keeping with Indigenous relationality to ensure relational accountability (Wilson, 2008) to develop ideas connected to past, current, and future relationships (Donald, 2022). Depicting the voices of the community through italicization is a device that allows me to respect storytelling as an oral tradition and to include the local community in shaping the content and process of sharing the knowledge that emerged from this research. The dual voices cover new ideas or corroborate presented ideas and may

sometimes seem disjointed. I am the writer, and it is my intent to honour and privilege academic and Metis Settlements Elders, Knowledge Holders and Keepers.

**Terms, Words, and Meanings**

âcimostakewin	storytelling
Accomplice	An individual who stands and acts with Indigenous people. They are prepared to allow Indigenous people to define the issue and the required action. They work behind the scenes, celebrate success, and know their boundaries (Finlay, 2020).
Ally	An individual who is proactive in Indigenous space and promotes Indigenous voices above their own (Finlay, 2020).
Conversational method	A way of gathering knowledge and established within Indigenous research. The method honours oral traditions and is accepted and supported within an Indigenous research paradigm (Kovach, 2009).
Cree language	The dialect of the Metis Settlements of Alberta existing primarily in the forms of Plains Cree (y-dialect) and Woodland Cree (th-dialect).
Digital storytelling	A means of media agency to support revitalization of cultural traditions (Poitras Pratt, 2020).
Elder	The University of Alberta Elder Protocol and Guidelines (2012) established Elder as a term describing a role that is recognized and identified by their respective community according to the service

they provide. An Elder is considered exceptionally wise in the ways of their culture. They are recognized for their wisdom, stability, humour, and their ability to know what is appropriate in a particular situation.

etah ka mâcipayik kîkway

in the beginning

First Nations

Refers to a group of people officially known as Indians under the Indian Act, and does not include Inuit or Metis populations; a general term (Vowel, 2016)

Indigenous

Refers to Indigenous peoples throughout the world. Includes First Nations, Inuit, and Metis Peoples in Canada (Vowel, 2016); is always an adjective (Younging, 2018).

Indigenous Peoples

Distinctive societies of First Nations, Metis, Metis Settlements of Alberta, and Inuit in Canada (Younging, 2018).

Indigenous epistemology

Is axiologically embedded. A distinct way of knowing that is relational and subjective. Rooted in Indigenous worldviews and inclusive of an ethical and spiritual base between people, nature, and the cosmos (Kovach, 2021).

Indigenous knowledge	Is holistic, animate, and relationally embedded within community, place, and kin and contextualized within Indigenous culture (Kovach, 2021).
Indigenous educational leadership	Describes school leadership management and instructional practices embedded in conditions that facilitate Indigenous inclusion (Toulouse, 2016).
Indigenous methodology	Is anchored in Indigenous epistemology, theory, ethics, story, and community; includes both theory and methods or the thinking and doing of conducting research (Kovach, 2021).
ki-mâmâsisînaw	our auntie
Knowledge Holder	A person who can truly define Indigenous Knowledge for their community ( <a href="https://www.canada.ca/en.html">https://www.canada.ca/en.html</a> ).
Knowledge Keeper	From a Metis community perspective, a Knowledge Keeper has Traditional Knowledge and/or practice that is distinct to a Metis community (Poitras Pratt, 2020).
kwayask kikway & miyo-wîcêhtowin	balance and harmony
mamitoneyyihcikan	thought
Metis	Indigenous People who emerged during the fur trade from the intermarriage of people of European

	<p>descent and people of Indigenous descent (Younging, 2018). The Metis Settlements of Alberta omit the acute accent on the /e/ to align with the legal terminology established by the <i>Metis Settlements Act</i> (1990).</p>
Metis Settlements of Alberta	<p>Describes a Metis political entity having a permanent population, a definite occupied land territory, a government, and the ability to enter into relations with other groups. Located in the province of Alberta are Buffalo Lake Metis Settlement, East Prairie Metis Settlement, Elizabeth Metis Settlement, Fishing Lake Metis Settlement, Gift Lake Metis Settlement, Kikino Metis Settlement, Paddle Prairie Metis Settlement, and Peavine Metis Settlement. Established in 1938 under the Metis Population Betterment Act (Pocklington, 1991; Younging, 2018).</p>
nakayâskamohtahitowina	<p>the act of introducing yourself to someone, introductory in nature</p>
nakayaskamohtahiwewin	<p>introduction</p>
natonikêw	<p>s/he searches</p>
nêhiyaw	<p>Cree person</p>
nitwaciwin	<p>noun: seeker; searcher; to seek trails</p>

nitawiciwin	verb: to seek trails; revitalize it; mostly oral
nitisiyihkâson	is my name
ohci niya	is where I am from
tansi	hello, how are you
wâhkôhtowin	kinship
wâsakâm ohci kîkwaya	something all around oneself
Western	Refers to a dominant Eurocentric framework of knowledge production, inquiry, and methods that originated in Europe and spread globally through colonization; used interchangeably with Euro-Western and colonial terminology (Kovach, 2021).

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Overview**

Indigenous Knowledge is a term used to describe knowledge that is passed down from Elders, Indigenous Knowledge Holders, and Knowledge Keepers and encompasses all aspects of an Indigenous worldview, including, values, language, culture, and history (Dion, 2022).

Currently, there are limited opportunities to learn about Indigenous Knowledge as it relates to the Metis Settlements of Alberta in school leadership training in Canada. To address this issue, I explored how storytelling using the conversational method (Kovach, 2021) with Elders, Indigenous Knowledge Keepers, and Knowledge Holders supported the elemental design of an online module building foundational knowledge relevant to the Metis Settlements of Alberta.

### **Background**

This section begins by situating the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its 94 Calls to Action within an educational context, recognizing their role in guiding pathways toward relational accountability and ethical practice in research. It then reflects on the placement of technology within the historical and lived experiences of the Metis, acknowledging both continuity and change in our relationships with tools of communication and learning. Finally, it discusses the distinctive context of the Metis Settlements of Alberta, honouring their histories, governance, and ways of knowing as foundational to this research journey.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) and Calls to Action 62 and 63 represent the intent to redress the legacy of Residential Schools and advance the process of reconciliation in Canada. Calls to Action 62 and 63 focus on collaboration with partners and Indigenous people to develop curriculum, integrate Indigenous knowledge into the classroom,

and include Indigenous content in education. The research shared in this writing took place at the community level and continued the recommended work of developing and implementing the learning resources specific to the local context of Indigenous people and to identify teacher training needs related to these specific Calls to Action (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

In its final report, the commission concluded that the school system in Canada amounted to cultural genocide (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Recognizing the critical loss of Indigenous languages and the urgent need to preserve and promote Indigenous culture, the United Nations declared 2022-2032 the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (United Nations, 2019). Both groups, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the United Nations, understand the sustained effort required by Indigenous people and their allies to increase revitalization efforts for languages, culture, and history in Indigenous communities across the globe. These revitalization efforts include the Metis Settlements of Alberta. Media tools have become increasingly valued in support of Indigenous identity and in challenging cultural domination within education systems (Wilson, 2008). Revitalization efforts within the Metis Settlements explored the work of Fishing Lake Metis Settlement scholar Dr. Yvonne Poitras Pratt and her seminal digital storytelling project with local community Elders. The research presented in this writing contributes to revitalization efforts by identifying available knowledge and creating a unique opportunity for sustainable change in education by supporting identity and strengthening family, school, and community relationships.

Indigenous people have adopted and adapted tools as they progressed through time. As Indigenous communities grapple with revitalization strategies, they are turning towards the adoption and adaptation of modern tools, including digital technologies (Carpenter et al., 2017;

Galla, 2016, 2018). A quick overview of the introduction of technology to the world at large shows that personal computers were introduced in 1976, when the Apple Computer 1 was released (National Geographic Society, 2014). As the Metis Settlements were grappling to get power lines in all the communities, the following decade brought the IBM personal computer. It would be the following decades of the 1990s through 2000s that would bring a multitude of technologies, such as video discs, CD-ROMs, digital video, virtual reality, and the Internet, that would lead the transition from consumption of technology to active use of technology for personal purposes, including e-learning (Hillyer, 2020). Today, the Internet continues to support existing and emerging e-learning technologies, allowing users to search for information, download files, and communicate asynchronously and synchronously. Using tools that include e-mail, videos, chat, and webcams, these e-learning technologies have opened opportunities for practitioners who teach (Kanuka, 2008). Today, we see an array of computer and digital multimedia tools being used by Metis Settlements Knowledge Holders and Knowledge Keepers as they explore how their use could enhance community development.

Jennifer Wemigwans is from Wikwemikong Unceded Territory on Manitoulin Island, Ontario, Canada. Dr. Wemigwans is currently the Director, Indigenous Digital Practice at the University of Toronto, and her scholarly interests include education, Indigenous Knowledge, and new media technologies. Wemigwans (2018) highlights Indigenous communities that actively use audio, video, and multimedia technologies for self-determination, idea-sharing, revitalization and nation-building. Wemigwans categorized these uses of technology as culturally safe. Her development of the [FourDirectionsTeachings.com](http://FourDirectionsTeachings.com) website was central to her research and demonstrated how technology encompasses an array of objects, methods, systems, tools, and practices that range from low to high interaction levels. Prior to Wemigwans' work with

Indigenous people, researchers Anderson and Dron (2011) referred to interactive technologies as the third generation, and possibly the fourth and fifth generations, depending on the depth of intelligence in the database or the incorporation of Web 2.0. Anderson and Dron's research highlight the caution that technologies are essentially databases beyond individual control for storing and defining who owns the data. In essence, scholars emphasize that computer technology can be beneficial to Indigenous cultural safety practices or a distracting, unnecessary tool (Cote-Meek & Moeke-Pickering, 2020; Dion, 2009; Wemigwans, 2018).

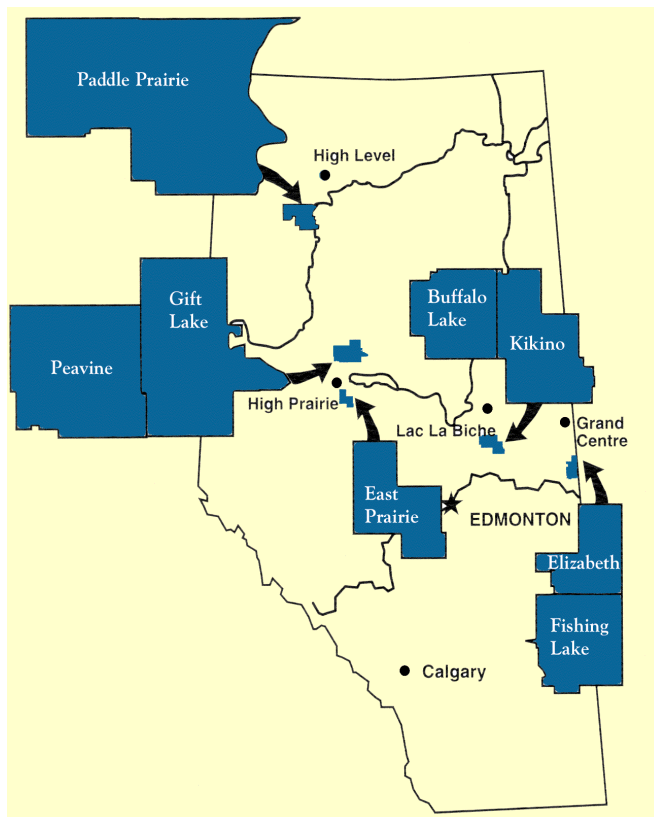
The focus of this research will be on the former. Wemigwans (2018) describes access as a critical area in which technology plays a role in Indigenous cultural safety efforts. The identified benefits of preservation, revitalization, and maintenance can also be applied. Situated within their own history in Canada and their lands within the province of Alberta, the Metis Settlements of Alberta are in a time where the convergence of people, community, and the digital realities of revitalization, and the role of school leaders within that moment, could be explored.

From their political inception, early Metis leaders outlined concerns that included health, education, and the general welfare of the Metis people. These realities would form the outline of the Provincial Ewing Commission investigation, which was reported on in 1936 (Wall, 2008). Health, education, and general welfare continue to be identified as priority areas for Metis Settlement leadership today (Metis Settlements General Council, 2022). This same Health Board report presents data showing that low high school completion rates are associated with low post-secondary completion rates. The report further provided the 2021 Metis Settlement census data showing a total of 29 individuals across the eight communities holding a completed undergraduate or postgraduate degree. The Metis Settlements of Alberta population comprises approximately 5,600 people living in eight settlements spread throughout northern Alberta, as

depicted in Figure 1 (Metis Settlements General Council, 2022). The Metis Settlements General Council prioritizes education and maintains the Strategic Training Initiatives Society to ensure that settlement members have meaningful opportunities for employment (Metis Settlements General Council, n.d.). Schools become necessary partners in educating members to continue on a path to employment, and school leaders can support effective change. However, achieving this change requires a shift from traditional administrative management toward a more responsive form of educational leadership, predicated on leaders who can navigate the intersection of provincial standards and Settlement needs through a commitment to Indigenous Knowledge.

### Figure 1

*Map of Metis Settlements of Alberta (Settlement Investment Corporation 2023).*



Consequently, educational leadership is essential for change. School leaders who are able to apply flexibility in their thinking, who can accept multiple ways of knowing, and who commit to understanding from other perspectives have immense influence on school culture. Dr. Marie Battiste is from the Potlotek First Nation in Nova Scotia, with a scholarly focus on education, decolonization, and Indigenous Knowledge. Her studies add that ongoing exploration of ways school leaders can shape their schools has resulted in leadership education that identifies the positive impacts of privileging learner perspectives as necessary to improve educational attainment levels of Indigenous learners to those of all Canadians (Battiste, 2013). Simply put, there is a growing body of educational research supporting the idea that leadership efforts can help provide culturally appropriate and relevant relationships among learners, educational services, and community resources (Battiste, 2013; Donald, Glanfield, & Sterenberg, 2011; Kenny & Ngaroimata Fraser, 2012). Battiste (2013) concludes that education that considers the strength of Indigenous Knowledge, school leadership, and the community would be commensurable with Indigenous Knowledge.

### **Positionality**

I acknowledge that the culture of Metis Settlements of Alberta comprises a unique axiology, ontology, and epistemology grounded in Metis values and Metis identity (Archibald, 2008; Fiola, 2021; Quinless, 2022). I further acknowledge that the Metis have long-held epistemologies derived from their Indigenous ancestral lines. These long-held Indigenous epistemological views continue to be transmitted as ways of thinking governed by natural laws (Fiola, 2021; Kenny & Ngaroimata Fraser, 2012). Based on my lived experience, I have come to understand that Indigenous Knowledge exists that cannot be researched, as it is sacred. Additionally, I have come to understand that some knowledge must be informed by lived

experience and cannot be learned from reading, such as the ongoing negative historical impacts. Lastly, I acknowledge that there are Euro-Western methodological approaches that may be adapted to support Indigenous epistemologies, and the storytelling methodology will uphold my connection to Metis reality and support my research purpose (Battiste, 2013; Fiola, 2021; Kovach, 2021; Vowel, 2016).

My positionality reflects my location as a Metis scholar and school principal, whose identity and research stance have been shaped by time spent on Settlement land. My early years were spent growing up on Kikino Metis Settlement land, where I first learned that place holds memory, story, and teaching. Even as a child, following my grandparents in the yard, in the bush, or in local places, always helping and doing small chores, I understood, though not yet in academic terms, that land forms relationships long before institutions do. Those early experiences prepared me for the next chapter of my life as an educator, in which my identity, worldview, and sense of responsibility deepened within communities characterized by kinship, resilience, and collective care. Growing up in Kikino, surrounded by muskeg, jackpines, willow flats, lakeshores, poplar stands, and gravel roads, I learned that knowledge is relational and that learning begins long before and continues long after formal schooling. The rhythms of community life, hunting, harvesting, gathering, visiting, and listening to stories shared around kitchen tables, taught me who I was and how I belonged. These experiences grounded my understanding of reciprocity, humility, and accountability, and they continue to guide how I carry myself as both a researcher and an educational leader.

As a school principal, having begun my career in a First Nations school and later working in a Metis Settlement public school, I understand leadership as a deeply relational practice shaped by land, history, and community teachings. My role requires more than administrative

expertise; it calls for relational awareness, cultural humility, and a commitment to honouring Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. The lessons I learned growing up in Kikino included listening before speaking, seeking guidance from Elders, valuing collective insight, and recognizing that every story carries responsibility, informing the decisions I make in school and the way I approach research with and alongside community members. I do not stand outside the research; my lived experience positions me within it, carrying responsibilities not only to academic integrity but to the children, families, and Knowledge Keepers, including my dad, who continue to shape my understanding of leadership.

My research emerges from this convergence of identity, experience, and responsibility. Having lived, learned, and led on both First Nations and Metis lands, I understand that educational leadership in Indigenous contexts must be grounded in relational accountability, land-based understanding, and the lived realities of the communities served. The stories, teachings, and relationships cultivated throughout my life and this research guided how I designed, interpreted, and shared this work. As a Metis scholar-principal, I approached this research as a continuation of a lifelong learning journey, one rooted in land, strengthened by community, and carried forward with the teachings gifted to me by those who walked these lands before me. This positionality shapes my ethical commitments, my interpretations, and my dedication to ensuring that this work honours the voices, histories, and futures of the Metis Settlements of Alberta.

### **Purpose**

This research employed a storytelling methodology utilized by Indigenous scholars (Archibald, 2008; Kimmerer, 2013; Poitras Pratt & Bodnaresko, 2023) within an Indigenous research paradigm to gather Knowledge from Metis Settlement Elders, Knowledge Holders,

Knowledge Keepers, and other community members residing in the eight Metis Settlements of Alberta. Additionally, this research builds upon the work of Sherry Farrell Racette (2022), an Algonquin/Metis/Irish scholar who developed Kitchen Table Theory, in which the kitchen table serves as a sovereign and creative space for intergenerational learning, storytelling, and community-building. Racette's (2022) work prioritizes informal and relational ways of knowing, which enabled me to learn with and from the community members while demonstrating respect for the expertise held within the Settlements.

Donald et al. (2011) similarly emphasizes the importance of ethical relationality, a framework that recognizes Knowledge as emerging through relationships and shared historical contexts. When considered together, Racette's community-grounded perspective and Donald's theoretical articulation of relational engagement reinforce the principle that communities are active contributors to Knowledge generation rather than passive subjects of research. The information gathered ultimately focused on aspects of Indigenous Knowledge related to Metis Settlements in Alberta that could be included in an online module designed to better inform school leaders. Alberta school leaders are required to obtain leadership certification that includes developing foundational knowledge of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit with the intent of enhancing leadership competencies. This research brought forward Metis Settlements-specific foundational knowledge necessary for school leaders to provide educational experiences for Metis learners in culturally safe, respectful, and contextually grounded ways.

Expanding and enhancing school leader training to more effectively support Metis learners has the potential to contribute to an education system that improves student outcomes and addresses long-standing inequities. Strengthening school leadership preparation to confront systemic racism and the continued underrepresentation of Metis Settlements-trained school

leaders and reinforcing the value of ongoing professional development remain essential for creating safer, more respectful, and more effective learning environments (Battiste, 2013; Poitras Pratt, 2020). The importance of this work was underscored during Alberta Education's (2018) transition to the new leadership and teacher quality standards, which identified persistent challenges in providing quality education that meaningfully includes Indigenous Knowledges. These challenges included limited numbers of Indigenous educators, insufficient training resources, and a disconnect between local Indigenous communities and the government departments responsible for school leader certification.

The form of Indigenous Knowledge taken up in this study was a strengths-based approach grounded in Metis perspectives, beliefs, and values that shape contemporary Metis Settlement worldviews, consistent with broader Indigenous worldviews (Campbell, 1973, 2019; Kovach, 2021; Poitras Pratt, 2020). Indigenous Knowledge, traditionally transmitted by Elders, Knowledge Holders, and Knowledge Keepers across generations, has supported the survival, resilience, and thriving of Indigenous peoples, including the Metis Settlements of Alberta. As Indigenous communities continue to practice their unique traditions, they retain social, cultural, economic, and political characteristics that are distinct from those of the dominant society (Battiste, 2013). For the Metis Settlements of Alberta, such Knowledge has been continually shaped by governance structures, land-based practices, and the impacts of political and policy decisions. These Knowledges constitute the foundational understandings required of school leaders as articulated in Alberta's Leadership Quality Standards (Alberta Education, 2018). Indigenous Knowledges and Metis Settlement worldviews are further examined in this chapter's theoretical and conceptual framework and in the literature review in Chapters Two and Three.

## **Delineation of Problem: Including History and Background**

There is limited literature describing how Metis Settlement populations are geographically and culturally distinct from other Indigenous peoples. The existing literature is limited to a few scholars and is primarily found in government reports. Understanding the intricacies of the geographical and cultural context of these differences will help inform school leaders' foundational knowledge of the Metis Settlement people. In her decolonizing study that took up digital storytelling within the Fishing Lake Metis Settlement community, Poitras Pratt (2020) recommended that research in this area be conducted through an Indigenous cultural lens using practical approaches that are respectful of local community customs and protocols (Poitras Pratt, 2020). Another Metis scholar who wrote about the Metis Settlement communities is Elmer Ghostkeeper from the Paddle Prairie Metis Settlement, who wrote about the concept of spiritual exchange (2007). Both Poitras Pratt and Ghostkeeper articulate how research should be designed in partnership with local communities using local Indigenous Knowledge principles and Metis principles on ethical research (National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2010) as guidelines. The inclusion of appropriate cultural traditions, combined with an acceptable research design, was integral to upholding Indigenous values, as communities and higher education institutions addressed a framework for Truth and Reconciliation policies (Dion, 2022).

Alberta Education acknowledges that the system needs to provide culturally appropriate orientation training for school leaders (Alberta Education, 2018). Yet an extensive review of scholarly literature and conversations with Knowledge Holders revealed that few Metis Settlement-specific educational resources are available, with only a few notable exceptions in print or digital form. Finally, the ongoing call for culturally appropriate training for school leaders extends beyond Alberta to the rest of Canada.

The Calls to Action in the 2015 Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada include specific Calls to Action related to education and education for reconciliation. First, Call to Action 63 speaks to the identification of teacher-training needs related to Aboriginal people. Next, Call 64 addresses the need for education that is inclusive of Aboriginal spiritual beliefs and practices, developed in collaboration with Aboriginal Elders. Following is Call 65, which speaks to the need for advancing the understanding of reconciliation through research. Finally, Call 66 calls for a national network to share information and best practices. Collectively, these Calls to Action are vital, as they highlight that the education system must recognize Indigenous people's distinct educational needs and act on them.

### **My Storywork**

Dr. Jo-ann Archibald (Q'um Q'um Xiiem) coined the term Indigenous Storywork (2008) to describe a holistic framework for understanding how stories can educate the heart, mind, body, and spirit. Drawing on Archibald's work, I titled this section *My Storywork* to reflect my own engagement with this framework as a Metis researcher learning through stories shared by Elders, Knowledge Holders, and community members. While Archibald articulates Storywork as a methodological and pedagogical approach grounded in Indigenous principles, this section represents my personal reflection on how those teachings shaped my understanding of the research journey and the responsibilities that accompany listening to and carrying community stories.

Through years of work with Stó:lō and Coast Salish Elders, Archibald established the methodology of values, including respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy. With the aim of addressing some of the issues discussed in the previous sections, I studied the Knowledge shared by members of Metis Settlements of Alberta

that could be integrated into an online leadership course for northern Alberta school principals. My Indigenous study, which will be expanded upon in the following section, began by self-examining my own school leadership preparation experiences, with an emphasis on the challenges I faced as a Metis person and in thinking Metis, and on the application of Euro-Western language and practices in my work. Identifying the Knowledge of Metis Settlement members, this study focused on how the Metis want to be recognized and understood, how Metis Knowledge supports these ideas, and how storytelling can transform school leaders. In this study, I maintained ethical consideration for the storytellers' voices. I encouraged listening and collaboration in conversations aimed at sharing perspectives on leadership considerations that could be incorporated into module development. With the intent of promoting community authority, expertise, and wisdom, the participants and I collaborated to bring alongside Indigenous ways of knowing and doing in school leadership practices

### **wahkohtowin and School-based Leadership**

A review of the literature, as discussed in Chapters Two and Three, reveals that scholarship on the Metis Settlements of Alberta remains limited. Where literature does exist, it is often centered on political structures and governance (Andersen, 2014; Pocklington, 1991; Wall, 2008), or the Settlements appear only briefly within broader narratives (Teillet, 2019; Metis Association of Alberta et al., 1981). As an Indigenous educational school leader, I noted that a CASS/ATA (2022) report titled, *Report on Indigenous Teachers and Leaders in Alberta's Public School System*, assists school leaders in comprehending Indigenous communities by highlighting systemic challenges faced by Indigenous educators, which similarly affect Indigenous students and families. A focused search for literature connecting computer or digital multi-media and the Metis Settlements returned limited findings. Within the limited findings, two publications stood

out. The first was *Digital Storytelling in Indigenous Education: A Decolonizing Journey for a Metis Community* by Yvonne Poitras Pratt (2020), and the recall of local Elders of the Metis Settlements of Alberta E-Index Readiness Project carried out by Function Four Limited (2010) that delivered a community-level vision for digital development for the Kikino Metis Settlement (F. Thompson, personal communication, January 3, 2026). This paucity of research highlights a gap that speaks directly to the lived realities, educational needs, and leadership contexts of Metis Settlement communities.

The conceptual foundations for this study emerged from three interwoven sources: personal experience, literature, and theory (Cohen et.al., 2018). My personal interests arose through ongoing conversations with Metis Settlement members about revitalizing language, history, and culture. Many Elders, during community meetings and gatherings, have voiced their concern that our people are struggling because we are becoming disconnected from who we are and from the history that grounds us. Their teachings compelled me to explore both written and oral sources to understand what Knowledge exists, and what Knowledge is needed, to guide this study, particularly within school leadership contexts where identity, belonging, and relationships shape learning. I therefore center frameworks that privilege relationality and community-engagement practice, notably Kirkness and Barnhardt's Four R's, respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility, as practical principles for reframing school leadership in ways that support cultural continuity and community priorities (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). I also attend to the analysis of systemic barriers to Indigenous well-being and education, drawing on Verna St. Denis's work on anti-Indigenous racism to foreground how discriminatory practices and policies continue to constrain Metis students, families, and leaders (St. Denis, 2011).

An Indigenous research paradigm asserts that Knowledge is fundamentally relational, acknowledging multiple realities that emerge through connections with people, land, ancestors, and all of creation. Within this paradigm, Knowledge is not owned or discovered; it is shared, nurtured, and carried responsibly. Wilson (2008) reminds us that research realities are created through relationships, an understanding that aligns Indigenous approaches to school-based leadership, where the strength and well-being of a school community emerge through respectful, reciprocal relationships. Reading Wilson alongside Kirkness and Barnhardt's Four R's underscores the ethical and practical obligations of leaders to ensure relevance and reciprocity in curriculum, policy, and practice (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). Simultaneously, centering St. Denis (2011) compels attention to the ways racism is embedded in educational systems and to the need for leadership that actively dismantles discriminatory structures while fostering culturally sustaining, equitable learning environments.

For me, as a Metis Settlement member and researcher, this relational worldview is essential. It ensures that neither people nor Knowledge are objectified and that I remain accountable in fulfilling my responsibilities within the research-learning relationship. Relational accountability means that this research must benefit Metis Settlement communities and honour the languages, land, community, animals, water, sky, and ancestors, past, present, and future, that shape Indigenous Knowledge systems (Archibald, 2008; Donald, 2012).

In this study, relationality is grounded in an Indigenous ontology and collective consciousness linked to the land and inherent to Metis Settlement people themselves. Wilson (2008) further proposes that researchers situate themselves alongside participants, listening and learning in ways that reflect Indigenous ceremonial practices. This ceremonial aspect underscored respect, responsibility, and ongoing communication, principles that parallel

Indigenous models of school-based leadership, where leaders are accountable to their relationships, guided by community values, and committed to creating learning environments rooted in belonging, reciprocity, and collective well-being.

In considering appropriate frameworks to guide the conceptualization of relationality in this research, the Canadian Council on Learning's Metis Holistic Learning Model (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007) was also examined. The model presents Metis learning as a lifelong, cyclical process grounded in relationships between the individual, family, community, land, and spirit. However, while the Metis model provided valuable insight into Metis approaches to learning, this study ultimately adopted an Indigenous Wholistic Framework to better reflect the historical and cultural realities of the Metis Settlements of Alberta. The Settlements are communities formed through the interweaving of First Nations and Metis ancestries, kinship systems, and land-based relationships. Selecting a wholistic Indigenous approach therefore allowed the research to honour these interconnected First Nations roots while still respecting Metis identity and ways of knowing embedded within settlement life.

### **Indigenous Wholistic Framework**

Indigenous Wholistic Framework (IWF) (Pidgeon, 2019) is a conceptual tool that provided the framework for my study. As a Metis educator, it is important for me to ensure that the whole being, physically, emotionally, spiritually, and mentally of myself and the storytellers, is interconnected to our community relational systems. Building ethical and relational principles, including respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and relevance, is a key feature of IWF that supported the co-construction of the understandings this research required. As the chosen theoretical base, IWF assisted in incorporating community Knowledge and integrating body, mind, and spirit to empower Indigenous success, with a focus on shared community and school

leader responsibility and accountability (Pidgeon, 2019). Additionally, IWF allows the research process to further build understanding of Metis experiences within a historical, social, political, and economic framework. Ultimately, employing IWF within this research lent insight into the nature of balance, harmony, and living a good life; all factors that contribute to achieving a sense of peace and balance (Absolon, 2019).

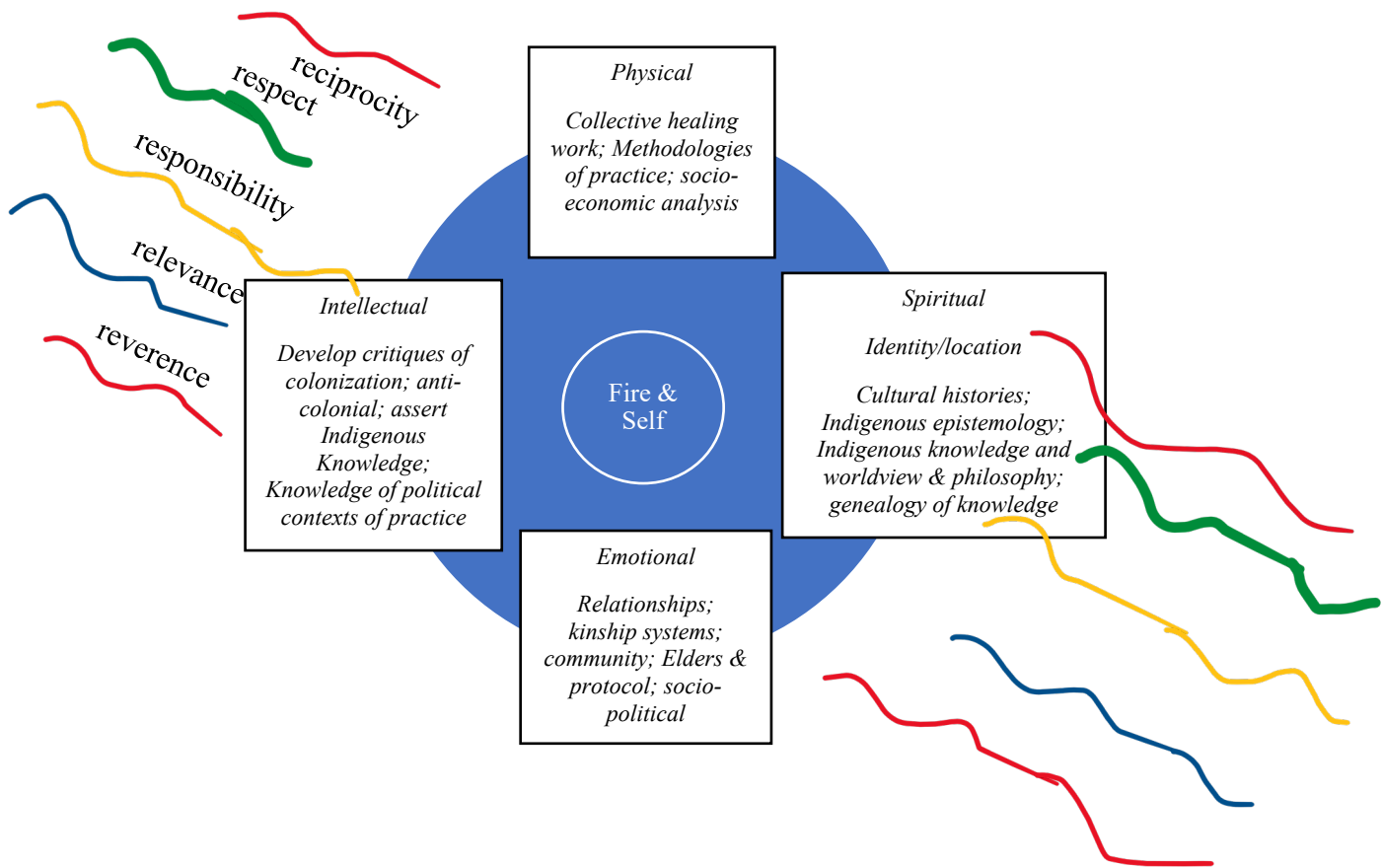
Indigenous Wholistic Framework employs the four directions. Beginning in the east, we began the research with a discussion of spirit and vision. I consulted with advisors Courtoreille and Thompson to determine the starting communities and to review the research questions. Moving to the South, discussions of relationships, community, and heart emerged. As I travelled to communities, engaged in storytelling experiences, asked my questions, and returned for clarification, the discussions became more enriching as the teachings were incorporated into the module. Moving west brought further stories of ancestors and the importance of Indigenous Knowledge and Indigenous Knowledge production. The storytellers were clear regarding what could go into the module and what could not. Leadership learning experiences, history, and well-documented cultural Knowledge could go in. Teachings of deep spiritual ceremony could not be shared in the module but were left as opportunities for the community to determine their future sharing following community or individual protocol. The north presented ideas of healing as well as movements and actions that guide practice. As the storytellers and I studied the nature and potential outcomes of our findings, the collective sense of agency and voice grew. The conversation was not about power, privilege, or bias, but about control of Knowledge, ability to share that Knowledge, purpose of Knowledge, creating advantages for community, and treating people right when it comes to education. At the center of IWF is fire. Where fire exists and where all four doorways intersect and interrelate, there is harmony, balance, and self. Indigenous

Wholistic Theory aligns with Indigenous views in that all things have relational points of connectivity, which will allow the online module design to integrate appropriate teaching, learning, and assessment action. The emergence of the fishing net symbolized this section of the framework as the net represented the ontology, axiology, epistemology, methodology, and anchoring aspects of the research, including Knowledge itself and Elders. Finally, bringing all the components together resulted in a learning object framed as a Metis cart wheel. The details of these components will be shared in Chapter Six.

Shawn Wilson (2008) argues that, within an Indigenous research paradigm, the diversity of Indigenous research processes is grounded in Indigenous knowledge, cultures, and protocols in relation to the place and land on which the research is carried out. Unlike postcolonial theory, an Indigenous theoretical approach privileges Indigenous ontology and epistemology. By leveraging Indigenous knowledge as the language that mediates one group's dominance over another, Indigenous academics communicate and actively employ an understanding of their reality and goals (Battiste, 2013; Fiola, 2015; Kovach, 2021; Smith, 2021). Carrying through with the Indigenous Wholistic Framework assisted in the analysis of this research by providing a lens through which to understand the micro and macro structures of the Metis Settlements of Alberta system. As seen in Figure 2 below, the four directions are surrounded by Indigenous values of reciprocity, respect, responsibility, relevance, and reverence. These values tie our past to our present and extend to our future. More discussion of Indigenous Wholistic Theory and Indigenous pedagogy appears in the literature review in Chapter 2.

## **Figure 2**

*Indigenous wholistic theoretical framework*



This model describes the process of this study, the knowledge co-creation among Metis Settlement people, and the development of an online module to support Indigenous educational leadership knowledge, skills, and attributes.

### Research Question

As presented in the previous section, this IWF study asked how storytelling and Indigenous Knowledge from a Metis Settlements of Alberta perspective can inform the development of an online module for K-12 school leaders working in northern Alberta schools.

The main research question was supported by the following sub-questions, allowing participants to modify or address aspects during the various phases of the study:

1. How do Metis Settlement people want to be recognized and understood by school leaders?
1. As shared by participants, how can Metis Settlements Indigenous Knowledge support these ideas?
2. How can storytelling be used to help educate school leaders about Metis Settlements of Alberta Indigenous Knowledge and approaches to living that can support school leader transformation?

### **Learning To Be In Kinship**

I chose this storytelling learning journey, with a focus on the Metis Settlements of Alberta and school leaders, because I believe schools have the potential to represent Indigenous students and their lived experiences. Fyre Jean Graveline is a Metis scholar who uses circle work to uphold Indigenous worldviews. Graveline (1998) explores talking circles as a space that affirms the lived experiences of marginalized peoples, including Indigenous peoples. A core component of Graveline's methodology is the concept of self-in-relation, where she emphasizes cultural location and identity as central to the learning and research process. Additional studies have shown that circle work and learning about the land require relationships, and that relationships are necessary to bring Indigenous students and their lived experiences to the forefront of educator practice, including school leader practice (Roberts, 2024). Holding themselves accountable, school leaders engage in a process that Roberts (2024) describes as "stop, pause, reflect, repeat...over and over" (p. 191), which can result in meaningful school leader transformation. Such experiences would emerge from an orientation toward relationships, land, history, culture, and language as part of the story. For school leaders, this paradigm invites a leadership stance inclusive of relational accountability, humility, and shared purpose.

School leader standards in Alberta invite a leadership orientation grounded in relational accountability, kinship pedagogies, and the inclusion of community knowledge, grounded in lived experiences, attentiveness, and care for community well-being. Adopting a Metis approach means creating spaces, such as a kitchen table, where humility, reciprocity, humour, and collective problem-solving may guide interactions with students, families, and staff (Gaudet & Rancourt, 2024; Racette, 2022; Tait, 2024). Such an approach reframes hierarchical decision-making to a practice built upon belonging, story, and shared responsibility. Encouraging school leaders to listen deeply to community voices, privileging Indigenous ways of knowing alongside other knowledges, and supporting teaching and learning that reflects Metis Settlements histories, values, and land-based relationships are enacted in a relational model of practice that strengthens trust, fosters culturally grounded learning environments, and aligns with the Indigenous Wholistic Framework for wholistic educational leadership. I chose to complete my research study within the Metis Settlements of Alberta setting as I felt it represented the understanding and pedagogical considerations of school leaders required to know that embedded in story is what King (2003) describes as what the Elders understood about human growth and development.

### **Significance of Study**

The significance of this study lies in its use of Indigenous Knowledge from the Metis Settlements of Alberta to develop a leadership module that will enhance school leader education through learning technologies. As this study addresses the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (2015) Calls to Action, mentioned earlier, it has the potential to influence leadership preparation and continuous learning. Where conventional leadership models prioritize managerial processes and traditional teacher pedagogical support, this research demonstrates

how story actions and principles, such as deep listening and reflective practice of shared governance, and land-informed decision-making, can reshape leadership practices in ways that bring forward relational, cultural, and place-based dimensions of leadership that reflect Metis Settlements. Such insights have implications for school divisions, policy developers, and local and provincial leadership certification programs, informing how they address practical operational reconciliation commitments in concrete, culturally grounded ways. Furthermore, the study contributes to the broader discourse on education that foregrounds Indigenous children, communities, and Knowledge by illustrating how school leaders can actively lead alongside Indigenous communities within educational structures. Additionally, this shift is not merely conceptual; it may influence how resources are allocated, depending on how decisions are made and how Metis school communities collectively define success in schools. In its approach, this study advances understandings of how Indigenous educational leadership can contribute to educational equity, history, culture, and language revitalization, and Metis Settlement's self-determination. Finally, this study is significant for its potential to generate positive, self-determined impacts on students, families, and communities. When school leaders actively engage with restorying practices of honouring the land, including ceremony, respect and value Elders' Knowledge, and community voice, schools become safe spaces where student identities reflect, value, and affirm they belong. This contributes to improved student engagement, leading to improved attendance and learning outcomes (Roberts, 2024). By documenting and analyzing these leadership shifts, the study provides foundational knowledge for future research and offers practical guidance for leaders committed to living and being relational, culturally responsive, and land-connected in approaches to education.

## **Indigenous Research Paradigm**

This research is situated within the unique histories, governance structures, and community relationships of the Metis Settlements of Alberta, establishing my responsibility, as researcher, to uphold Metis values such as respect, reciprocity, kinship, and collective well-being. Choosing an Indigenous research paradigm, I am clarifying why this study was approached in the way it was, and how the resulting knowledge honours the community context from which it emerged.

An Indigenous research paradigm encompasses the worldviews, values, and Knowledge systems of Indigenous peoples. Acting as a lens that guides every aspect of the research process, the approach is not objective or detached, and the researcher is not an outsider. Indigenous paradigm positions research as a relational, ethical, and community-anchored practice in which Knowledge is living, interconnected, and embedded in relationships with people, ancestors, land, language, and spirit. Within this paradigm, the purpose of research is to contribute positively to community well-being, cultural continuity, and collective futures.

Central to the Indigenous research paradigm is the value of relationality. Here, the Cree word *wahkohtowin* provides the researcher with pathways to responsibility and accountability. Responsibilities to all relations, and accountability for how the Knowledge is gathered, interpreted, and shared, means research done with communities, honouring the expertise of Elders, Knowledge Holders, and Knowledge Keepers through respectful, reciprocal, and community-cultural processes. In the Indigenous research paradigm, story, ceremony, land-based experiences, and Indigenous languages are legitimate and rigorous sources of knowledge.

The value of reciprocity within the paradigm requires the research process to ensure that it gives back to the people who shared Knowledge. As part of this process, the community must

understand that the research results will benefit the community, strengthen relationships, and reflect local teaching. Finally, Indigenous paradigms emphasize holism, the understanding that Knowledge cannot be separated into discrete categories. Physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of experience are braided, and research must honour this nature of knowing and being. The methods, ethics, and analysis within an Indigenous paradigm reflect a respect for interconnectedness, cyclical processes of teaching and learning, and the understanding that Knowledge carries responsibilities. Overall, an Indigenous research paradigm reframes research as a relational, ethical, and culturally grounded practice that centers Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. It ensures the research process honours community expertise, supports self-determination, and contributes to the wellness, betterment, and continual growth of Indigenous peoples.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The overall objective of this research was to investigate aspects of Indigenous Knowledge from Metis Settlements in Alberta that informed an online education module for K-12 school leaders in Northern Alberta. Identifying the principles that guided the design and implementation of the online module will support how the Metis Settlements of Alberta wish to be recognized within school leader training.

Reviewing Indigenous Knowledge through a First Nations lens would have limited the scope of this research and missed the Metis Settlement identity of the participants; therefore, the focus was on Metis Settlements of Alberta Indigenous Knowledge as shared by the participants. This study included Metis people who grew up on or continue to reside within the boundaries of the Metis Settlements of Alberta and did not include Metis who live in other rural and urban centers. This research acknowledged Elders, Knowledge Holders, and Knowledge Keepers as

individuals identified by the community. Next, questions regarding classroom teacher training needs were beyond the scope of this study, insofar as the Alberta education teacher standards address applying foundational knowledge, and the school leader standard addresses building foundational knowledge. Finally, maintaining an authentic Metis Settlements of Alberta-led research process, the online module was not reviewed with school leaders. Wilson (2008) describes this last statement as an act of empowerment for Indigenous communities that is informed and shaped by Indigenous worldviews and community cultural practices.

Survival and meaning making are social interactions that form a narrative based on the contexts of time, place, and purpose. This is Indigenous Knowledge. A storytelling methodological framework (Dion, 2022; Kovach, 2021; Poitras Pratt, 2020) was the best way to approach the research questions, as Indigenous Knowledge has been shared through oracy for lifetimes. By engaging Elders, Knowledge Holders, and Knowledge Keepers, the conversational method contextualized research-specific goals and objectives related to cultural safety and online module design while empowering the participants to control and direct what they wished to share. The Indigenous Wholistic Theoretical Framework offered an approach to organizing content within the online module.

The focus of this research was the Metis Settlements of Alberta, and the study locations included Buffalo Lake Metis Settlement, East Prairie Metis Settlement, Elizabeth Metis Settlement, Fishing Lake Metis Settlement, Gift Lake Metis Settlement, Kikino Metis Settlement, Paddle Prairie Metis Settlement, and Peavine Metis Settlement. Initially, 16-20 individuals were to be recruited using purposive and convenience sampling and invited into the process. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018) outline the benefits of purposive sampling, including convenience and opportunistic approaches. Convenience sampling is based on ease of

access to the participant. This approach was useful considering how far apart the eight Metis Settlements of Alberta are. Opportunistic sampling provided events and activities where community members were already gathered, such as Elizabeth and Gift Lake culture camps. Purposive sampling refers to criterion sampling strategies in which participants are invited to take part based on their possession of characteristics sought for a specific purpose. Specific to this research, I recruited participants via a Facebook search, as I had posted the poster.

Conversations took place over four months; drafting the module took six months; going back to the communities for approval of the module's content and design took an additional month; and writing up the findings took two months. Finally, taking the findings to the participants and concluding the writing of the dissertation, the total time for this research was eleven months.

### **Summary and Organization of Remaining Chapters**

My study focused on creating an opportunity for Metis Settlements of Alberta people to self-reflect on their own beliefs, values, and Indigenous Knowledge related to school leadership. Through conversations, actions, and reflection, my research addressed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's education-related Calls to Action. Drawing on an Indigenous research paradigm, storytelling participants within my study shared, acknowledged, and reflected on their community's interpretation of Indigenous leadership teaching and learning to not only build awareness but also to encourage acceptance and understanding in the ways of knowing and doing in the Metis Settlements of Alberta. Chapter Two offers Knowledge found in the past voices of the Metis Settlements while Chapter Three offers knowledge gained from contemporary literature on the topics of the TRC's Calls to Action (2015) and Indigenous education in Canada. Chapter Four explores the theoretical framework, research methodology, data analysis approaches, and the ethical foundation for my Indigenous Wholistic Framework

research study. Chapters Five through Seven address the study processes, challenges, story gathering, emergent themes, and an interpretive analysis of the research stories. Finally, Chapter Eight presents conclusions, addresses the study limitations, and offers consideration for future research opportunities.

## CHAPTER 2: WEAVING THE ANCESTORS VOICES

The following literature review depicts a selection of stories of Indigenous and allied scholars in their collective bid to attain a level of education for all Indigenous learners in a manner that is inclusive and respectful of Indigenous ways of knowing and being. This chapter is meaningful and necessary to me as a Metis scholar as relationships, respect, and reciprocity guide my personal research principles (Donald, 2012). Of great importance to me is to ensure that my work is first for the people of my community, second, supports my personal growth, and finally, must give back in some way to the Metis Settlements of Alberta. To maintain this focus, I look to my Metis sash which is interwoven with multicoloured threads. Each strand tells the diverse stories of our ancestry, including trials, tribulations, hopes, and triumphs within its weave. While each strand tells its own story, the collective strands tell a legacy of perseverance, strength, and hope for a time that celebrates the knowledge and contributions of Metis people while connecting the past, present, and future. As I seek knowledge that will support my own and future Indigenous educational leadership transformation, I am committed to building on the work of others (Fiola, 2015; Wilson, 2008).

This literature review chapter reflects the limits to published and online accessible materials to reflect the experiences of Metis Settlements of Alberta populations. It is therefore a departure from the expected format of a literature review. The first chapter underscores the experiences, initiatives, needs, and realities of the Metis Settlements of Alberta, as they relate to education. The additional sources of information come from outside peer-reviewed academic literature and include publications by the Federation of Metis Settlements, limited policy texts specific to the Metis Settlements of Alberta, community photographs, and kitchen-table

conversations with community members. Chapter three follows the traditional format of a literature review and details the historical context of education in Canada, including residential schools, school leader training, technology and multimedia, and the Indigenous Wholistic Theoretical Framework on which this research was built.

## **Introduction**

To honour relational accountability and positionality as a methodological requirement, because Knowledge is relational, contextual, and situated, I must begin by reintroducing myself. My name is Laurie Thompson, and I was born into this story in March 1970. Raised on the Kikino Metis Settlement, I grew up watching, listening, and learning from my father, Floyd Thompson, who was involved in Metis Settlement politics from age twenty-two. Although he retired from elected leadership in the fall of 2017, Dad remains aware of how stories of the history, culture, and language play out in the leadership of the Metis Settlements of Alberta.

While I can share some of the stories told to me, I have invited the voices of our Metis Settlements of Alberta ancestors and allies to assist me. By bringing forward the stories and voices of past Metis colony leaders and members, I express my deep admiration for the ancestors and know that I am making my own small contribution in working towards a future where Metis knowledge is valued and respected. I have retained as much of the story's flow as possible by using direct quotes, indicated in italics, taken from stories recorded in Settlement history books published by the Federation of Metis Settlements in the mid-1980s. Where it was possible to preserve and retain partisan impacts on the Metis Settlement people, the tone from reports, misnaming in pieces, and language and phrases are reused in this writing to share the lived experiences of the Metis people regarding terminology utilized by the Alberta Government. I acknowledge that working with historical records that document the Metis experiences of

assimilation and oppression and the accompanying terminology can create feelings of distress, grief, and pain. The re-creation of terms such as settler, colonies, and others is intentional and necessary to portray the lived experience of government policy among the Metis represented in this writing.

Despite policy challenges, a vision for a future of Metis Settlement land remained. The words of Robert Aulotte who hailed from the Fishing Lake Metis Settlement, and spoken in 1977, reminds us to never forget, “...*just so the younger generation won't forget we old folks had suffered to claim the land for them*” (Horstman & May, 1982, p. 27). The memories that I share from these individuals who built the settlements into what they are today include determination and hope for education. The early Settlement settlers focused on the knowledge that “preservation of the Metis culture will to a large extent depend on the educational process” (Horstman & May, 1982, p. 47). The same educational process that held hope has resulted in an education crisis for the Metis Settlements people, impacting their lives for generations. In the words of the Ewing Commission Report (1936), the following quote provides insight into the paternalistic treatment intended to foster assimilation into the fabric of Canadian political ideals, which would challenge the Metis people in moving forward as self-governing people.

*Opinions may differ as to the amount and kind of education which ought to be given to one who is at present living and will probably continue after his school days are ended, to live the life of the Indian or the nomad. In any case the controversy cannot affect the desirability of giving to the Metis child an ordinary public-school education, coupled with an elementary training in agriculture, and in addition giving the girls elementary training in sewing and knitting. The evidence is, that in all these settlements where there are no white schools large numbers of children are growing up without any education.*

(Royal Commission Appointed to Investigate the Conditions of the Half-Breed Population in Alberta, 1936, p.7)

The following sections situate the educational experiences of the Metis Settlements of Alberta within their historical, cultural, and governance contexts. A literature review in academic research serves to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a specific topic, provide credibility and legitimacy to the research, clarify key concepts, and establish the context for the study (Cohen et al., 2018). Including this section is therefore essential for bridging gaps in readers' understanding and drawing on published and publicly accessible materials that describe the historical development, experiences, initiatives, needs, and lived realities of the Metis Settlements of Alberta. As the only land-based Metis governance structure in Canada, the experiences of Metis Settlement communities are shaped by a distinct history connected to the lands designated under the Metis Population Betterment Act.

## **History of the Metis Settlements of Alberta: Emergence and Evolution of Metis**

### *Educational Leadership*

Metis people have long recognized the importance of education in a democracy (Dobbin, 1981). Understanding the foundation of education in the Metis Settlements of Alberta will clarify critical concepts of this research, assist in identifying issues, and provide background for understanding the need for this study (Cohen et al., 2018). Given the limited amount of available scholarly literature on Metis Settlements beyond the political, this section includes archived material from the Glenbow Museum, archival material on the creation of the Settlements in the 1930s, reports from local and Provincial government, and books written by individuals who had direct influence or strong interest in forming the Metis Settlements. These ancestral voices will

be presented in Times New Roman, italicized. Themes that emerged during this section of the literature review include historical information on education in Alberta, an introduction to the Alberta Metis and scrip, the early years leading up to the Ewing Commission, the Ewing Commission, Metis Colonies' educational positioning, and the Metis Population Betterment Act. Subthemes include Metis self-identity, school food services, policy transition, and Resolution 18, a commitment from the province to the Metis Settlements to transfer title to the lands to the Metis people and to provide constitutional protection of the lands through an amendment to the Alberta Act. Knowing that many non-Metis people hold a limited understanding of the unique place in Canada that the Metis Settlements of Alberta hold due to limited learning opportunities in school, this section intends to build the understanding of the reader about the Metis, and how and why this research came about. I have retained the use of historical terminology such as pioneer, settler, and colony throughout this dissertation to reiterate the assimilationist and paternalistic intent the government held toward the Metis people, including the hostile system of authority that justified its jurisdictional neglect.

### *The Road Allowance People*

Amidst the governance survival crisis of the Metis people, which led to Metis organizing as early as the late 1920's, there has always been a need for a place to call home (Horstman & May, 1982; Miller, 1984). Historical records beginning in the 1800s up to the late 1930s, indicate repeated displacement of the Metis people across Canada (Ens & Sawchuk, 2016; Teillet, 2019). A key but little-known element of Metis history is the dispersal of Metis to forested regions and crown lands as immigrant farmers took up land in Alberta. For over sixty years, the Metis have squatted on Crown land intended for roads in rural areas and have been called the road allowance people (Teillet, 2019). Displacement of the Alberta Metis people can be traced through

documented histories, including the fur trade, the Red River struggles, the Battle of Batoche, and the impacts of the failed St. Paul-des-Metis. Ongoing legislative complexities have resulted in a loss of trust, along with the loss of allocated lands and ever-changing laws, such as the 1941 Alberta government order in council that made it illegal for any person to live on a public road allowance (Dobbin, 1981). The Alberta Metis people were desperate to protect the land they advocated for and allocated to them following the Metis Population Betterment Act of 1938.

### *The Ewing Commission & The Metis Population Betterment Act*

Advocacy by early leaders such as Joe Dion, an enfranchised Indian (ie., an individual whose legal Indian status was removed in exchange for Canadian citizenship), and several prominent Metis organizers, often referred to in Metis historical records as “The Big Five,” including Malcolm Norris, Jim Brady, Felix Calihoo, and Pete Tomkins along with Adrian Hope and Maurice L’Hirondelle, prompted the province of Alberta to establish the Ewing Commission in 1934 (Teillet, 2019). The commission was mandated to investigate the health, education, and general welfare of the Metis population in Alberta. Murray Dobbins was an activist, intellectual, and author of a book on early Metis leaders Jim Brady and Malcolm Norris and chronicled the Commission’s hearings throughout 1935 that resulted in the submission of a 1936 report. The Ewing Commission recommended the establishment of Metis Colonies - lands to be held by the Crown but set aside for the exclusive use of associations of Metis (Hawkes, 1989). Focusing on results rather than rights, needs rather than claims, the assumptions in Alberta were clear and the leaders of the day did not insist otherwise; they had achieved what they set out for - securing a land base. Struggling to define the term Metis, the Commission noted Metis was a person of mixed blood, white and Indian, who lived the life of the ordinary Indian and did not include those of mixed blood who had settled down as farmers and were making a good life for

themselves, as they did not desire nor need public assistance. The Commission had concluded its work, and the submission went to the government.

The provincial government responded to the Ewing Commission Report in 1938 with the Metis Population Betterment Act on November 22. A joint Metis/government committee was established to identify suitable Metis Settlement area sites, and this was followed by Orders-in-Council in late 1938. In the following year, settlement associations were set up and held organizational meetings in eight of the identified areas. The act's skeletal legislative framework made possible the setting aside of lands and the establishment of a means for the Metis to govern them, but it was entirely subject to the provincial government's ultimate authority. The Commission referred to its recommendations as schemes and was careful to maintain focus on betterment and settlement of the Metis, and they were never intended to be more than a departmental program. Every aspect stemming from the Metis Population Betterment Act had to be submitted by a Settlement supervisor to the Minister responsible, who would then forward it to the Lieutenant Governor in Council for approval, and upon that level of approval, had to be laid upon the table of the Legislative Assembly for final approval (Hawkes, 1989). In 1938 the Metis were assigned to the Bureau of Public Welfare Metis Population Betterment. Followed by 1943 - Department of Public Welfare on Rehabilitation and Re-establishment Metis Settlement Areas; 1948: Department of Public Welfare: on the rehabilitation and re-establishment Metis Settlement Colonies; 1959-60 - Department of Welfare on Metis Rehabilitation; 1961 - Department of Public Welfare by Metis Rehabilitation Branch; 1969 - Department of Social Development on Metis Area Rehabilitation; 1971 - Alberta Health and Social Development on Metis Rehabilitation; and 1977 - Alberta Social Services and Community Health: Metis Development Branch. In 1980, the Metis Settlements of Alberta came under the Improvement

Districts Operations Division of Alberta Municipal Affairs for Metis Development, and in 1987, the Improvement Districts and Native Services Division of Municipal Affairs (Annual Report, 1987, as cited in Ross, 2020). Generations of lives have been affected by the dichotomy between the Metis peoples' and the government's responsibility perspectives regarding land, which has affected the educational outcomes of Metis people.

### *Metis Land Settlements*

The Metis scrip system was implemented by the Canadian Government following the 1869-70 Red River Resistance (Rupertsland Centre for Metis Research, 2018). Metis author, popular historian, and retired lawyer, Jean Teillet (2019), describes the creation of Manitoba and the Manitoba Act, which set aside 1.4 million acres of land for the children of Metis families. Following the Dominion Lands Act of 1870, it was acknowledged that the Metis had outstanding claims in the Northwest Territories, now known as Manitoba, Alberta, and Saskatchewan. Scrip became an ineffectual attempt to extinguish the land rights of the Metis due to flawed practices that resulted in the Metis retaining only 1% of the 138 320 acres of land scrip issued in northwest Saskatchewan (Teillet, 2019; Tough et al., 2018). Metis writer Maria Campbell documents how scrip and dispossession shaped family and community life, preserving oral memories of loss and resistance (Campbell, 1973). Memories of failed land scrip outcomes were fresh on Metis minds through the 1940's. As families chose the Metis colony they wanted to settle on, every man, woman, and child was required to carve out existing communities, including schools.

*In September we moved to East Prairie. That following spring in 1944, our dad and my brothers helped me build a log home of our own. Come fall we worked on the road. The next year we logged; the first sawmill in East Prairie was operated by George Hopkins. Then the first school and teacherage were built. (East Prairie Metis, p. 61).*

This memory by John Bellerose in *East Prairie 1939-1979: 40 Years of Determination* highlights the struggle and determination the Metis colony peoples had to mark their place in Canada and obtain the education required to support their independence. As the Metis people settled in the colonies, assured that they would not be displaced for the time being, their attention turned from securing a land base for their homes to health and education matters, knowing that the education of their children would impact their futures and sustainability. Maria Campbell's memoir, *Halfbreed*, similarly records the intergenerational impacts of dispossession and the struggle to secure homes, work, and education (Campbell, 1973).

### *Early Years Education*

The establishment of the Metis Settlements in 1938 has a vastly unknown or misunderstood history, including the chronicling of the educational experiences of children and families of the Metis Settlements of Alberta. While municipal Alberta had already begun establishing school boards, electing trustees, and growing under the full support of the Department of Education, the people of the Metis Settlements were not included within the Department of Education (Annual Report, 1938-1987, as cited in Ross, 2020). Struggling to survive initially under the Bureau of Public Welfare Metis Population Betterment followed by the Department of Public Welfare on Rehabilitation and Re-establishment Metis Settlement areas, the province of Alberta neglected its jurisdictional responsibilities for education by not providing adequate education. Along with fundamental health rights for survival, the Metis maintained a desire for quality education while continuing to survive in what could only be described as harsh pioneer conditions into the 1980's (Annual Report, 1987, as cited in Ross, 2020).

Early leaders of the Metis were active in advancing insights on health and education. Ongoing advocacy by past Metis leaders foreshadowed the trajectory of education for the Metis Settlements of Alberta and focused leaders' efforts today. A review of the Alberta Education website demonstrates recognition of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit education as a priority area for improving overall results for some time (Alberta Learning, 2002). Similar findings appear on the Metis Settlements General Council website, where the governing body identifies the need for satisfactory educational outcomes to achieve positive long-term results in areas such as justice, health, and employment.

Metis people settling in the early colonies considered education a priority (Horstman & May, 1982; May, 1984; Miller, 1984; Verbicky, 1984). Community members and leaders recognized and voiced support for the role of education in enabling opportunities to secure employment and advance the political position needed to improve living conditions, as evidenced in the following reports: *1975 Swift Report*; *1981 McNeil Report*; *1990 Metis Education Conference*; and the *2010 Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report*. The travesty of educational foundations for the Metis continued and is undeniable evidence of the racist and negative attitudes that pervaded society, as evidenced in the title of the following report: *Educational Programming as a Solution to the Imminent and Crucial Problem of the Metis, Lac La Biche School Division 51, 1966*. Eventually, it was the Metis men and women of the colony who cut down the trees, sawed the timber, and erected the first Metis colony community schoolhouses with little more than axes, nails, and saws. The following excerpts were taken from Federation of Metis Settlements publications and depict the Metis commitment to ensure their children had access to schooling.

*The first school in the Elizabeth Settlement was built in 1949 by all of the community members. Some of the men cut down the logs with cross-saws. After the schoolhouse was completed, all the settlers arrived to help plaster the walls with mud. Every family had something to do. (Elizabeth Metis Settlement, 1979. p.11)*

*The first school of Kikino was built in 1941. The school was constructed by members of the community using logs and spruce shingles. (Miller, 1984, p.30)*

*Caslan, 1951 ...we called a meeting, got the men together, so we'd know who was willing to cut logs for the school. We let the logs sit one year to dry. Mr. Felix Laroque hewed the logs on two sides so that they would fit together better. We put moss between the logs and used drop siding. (Verbicky, 1984, p.21-22)*

In other cases, the tasks were performed for the well-being of children. These same hardworking and industrious men, women, and children, also cut wood to fuel the cookstoves in the schools for warmth (see Francis Dufresne digital story, 2011). As evidenced in *Our Home: A History of Kikino Metis Settlement*, the men built the playground for the children. In some cases, their labour was exchanged for trapping licenses (Buffalo Lake Metis Settlement archives room, ca. 1950).

The Metis Settlements of Alberta did not have the right of community educational support that surrounding settler communities were receiving from the Northwest Territories or the Department of Education of Alberta (Wall, 2008). Education is a provincial responsibility, and the Department of Education established the regulations for support following Alberta's entry into Canadian Confederation in 1905. Records indicate that "the erection of buildings will be held in abeyance until such time as there is definite assurance that the number of children in

the area of school age will justify the erections of the buildings” (Alberta Bureau of Public Welfare, 1940, p. 28). A publication titled *Metis Land Rights in Alberta: A Political History* by the Metis Association of Alberta resulted from three years of research by their Land Claims Research Department. The findings outlined in the publication support the belief that the justification of the government of Alberta to refute Metis rights was to ensure and enforce assimilation policies outlining the legislative regime of the Metis as being deeply flawed, paternalistic, anachronistic, inconsistent, and inadequate (Hawkes, 1989; The Metis Association of Alberta et al., 1981). Immersed within this political quagmire, provincial responsibility for schooling in the Metis Settlements was frequently neglected or deflected. Despite the efforts of the Metis communities to advance educational development, the lack of consistent provincial commitment has slowed progress toward equitable educational outcomes, an issue that continues to affect the Settlements today.

It took more than 75 years after Alberta joined Confederation in 1905 for the Metis Settlements of Alberta to be recognized under a provincial Municipal department (Annual Report, 1987, as cited in Ross, 2020). Recognition within a Municipal Department followed four decades of the Metis people under the auspices of the Bureau of Public Welfare. Today, elected community leaders continue to exercise their right to ensure equitable educational opportunities for Metis children in their home communities. Representing the Metis colony story, the experiences, needs, and realities shared in this section are based on the facts of a people who faced so much adversity yet maintained an iron will to secure a place to call home and to educate their children. Additional experiences, needs, and realities of the Metis colony people include a fundamental human right to food, clothing, and shelter, and to have access to education that is respectful of who they are as a distinct and unique nation of people.

The Metis Settlements of Alberta require allies who go beyond mere well-intentionedness to demonstrate respect and commitment (Quinless, 2022). The Metis require accomplices who will support them to envision the revitalization and preservation of the history, culture, and languages of the Metis Settlements of Alberta in schools. As a concept, the term "accomplice" has emerged as an alternative framework in racial justice. Jones (2021) describes an accomplice as someone who is involved in and knowledgeable about the struggle for liberation and will work in solidarity to challenge oppressive systems. From 1938, the Metis have self-determined their identity grounded in the languages of Cree and Michif, cultural practices of beliefs, foods, arts, and entertainment, and the remembrance of their history. The Metis people have expressed a need for revitalization practices that identify the need for this research to break new ground in educational leadership, explain why the research is needed, who it impacts, and how it can advance education, including Metis people (Cohen et al., 2018). Much can be learned about revitalization practices by exploring what education looked like in the Metis Settlements from the early years.

#### *The Early Years: 1930-1940*

Education in the Metis colonies in the early years was directly intertwined with the political strife between the Metis people and the Government of Alberta; a strife that continues today. Historical records noted in Dennis Wall's (2008) book titled *The Alberta Metis Letters: 1930-1940 Policy Review and Annotations*, outline the factors influencing and impacting education outcomes in the colonies. These realities included withholding promised resources to assist with land clearing and road building, furthering already destitute, malnourished, and Metis people with multiple health concerns alongside an 80% illiteracy rate (Wall, 2008). On May 24, 1930, Metis leader and activist Charles Delorme called a meeting in the Fishing Lake area to

discuss land security. Soon after, Joe Dion, a local disenfranchised schoolteacher of First Nations ancestry, was asked to become the representative spokesperson for the fledgling Half-Breed Metis Association. Dion said in his note to civil service contact J. F. Buck on September 10, 1930, “this was the first he heard about the issues and the need for action from the Metis in the area” (Wall, 2008, p. 97). Dion further commented in his note to Buck that issues of health, land security, and general welfare including education, had been discussed among the Metis for at least ten years in meetings that ended with few concrete proposals for action (Wall, 2008). Events, actions, and people were lining up for the Metis people. The timeline of events would soon lead the Metis to re-unite as a nation. This unification had been missing since Louis Riel and the Battle of Batoche forty-five years prior (Ens & Sawchuk, 2018).

Dr. Dennis Wall was asked to videotape a Metis Elders’ conference at the Overlander Lodge near Hinton in June 1979. Seemingly just another job, Dennis Wall found himself amid political action by Metis whose land, interests, and self-sufficiency were perceived to be threatened by government and bureaucratic interference. Since that time, Dennis Wall has worked on Aboriginal and educational projects in Alberta. Wall’s manuscript, titled *The Alberta Metis Letters: 1930-1940 Policy Review and Annotations*, used sources from the Glenbow Archive, including letters, proposals, and reports written by Metis leaders and bureaucrats. In doing so, he created a view into early Alberta history by annotating those documents and by analyzing their content for political themes, events, and relationships, thereby making the lives of Metis leaders, politicians, and government officials real.

Wall’s (2008) documentation showed that on April 5, 1932, Dion wrote Acting Alberta Premier Reid, a three-page letter requesting assistance through the provision of land. Dion wrote that there were few schools, if any, built on settlement lands, and where Metis children were sent

off settlement for schooling, they suffered much racism and discrimination. He asks, “Could we persuade the government into reserving a piece of land for the settlement of the HB [halfbreed] only, a land they could call their own, a home to replace the camp along the road” (Wall, 2008, p. 102). He continues by stating, “We are tired of rambling. We want to settle down. Could we get provisions whereby our little children can receive an education, our sick to get proper medical treatment?” (Wall, 2008, p. 102).

Dr. Campbell Ross was commissioned by the Metis Settlements General Council in 2020 to assemble a record of annual reports on the socio-economic status of the Metis Settlements since their inception in 1938. The supporting documentation contained within the Settlement supervisor reports to the Government documented realities of children receiving little to no education and government lack of commitment to ensuring that the necessary trained personnel and supports to deliver quality education (Annual Report, 1938-1987, as cited in Ross, 2020). Issues of government responsibilities towards a desperate situation would result in the Metis organizing in ways they found necessary to improve their well-being and security. The appointed Metis leaders would wait over three months for a reply from the government to Dion’s letter, and when they did receive a reply, it would be with a page taken from the Canadian government and their preferential history of residential schools.

A reply to Dion and the Metis people arrived on July 28, 1932. The response provided detailed information in a memo from T.C. Rankine and F.W. Neilson to J. Harvie, the Alberta Deputy Minister Department of Lands and Mines. The message noted that nothing was decided regarding education, although Dion mentioned that the Archbishop had suggested a school and church might be built, although there was no mention as to where (Wall, 2008). On November 14, 1932, Dion and the councilors of the Half-Breed Association met. The purpose of the

meeting was to arrive at a final decision regarding what the Association wanted from the government. This meeting detailed three priority areas of the Association: i) identify the object and aims of the Association; ii) decide on the most suitable location or locations of the reserves or settlements; and iii) raise the question of education for the Half-Breed children (Wall, 2008). In this way, the Metis people, on a provincial front, prioritized and were prepared to make a stand to improve the educational attainment levels of the Metis people.

Months later, in January 1933, the Half-Breed Association of Alberta and the Northwest Territories leaders again wrote to Reid, the Minister of Lands and Mines. As President of the Association, a six-page report signed by J.F. Dion noted the priority of education taken by the Association. A resolution of the December Half-Breed Association meeting outlined what the people wanted for education. They called for “segregated, Metis-only, rudimentary, and vocational schools and recommends that the teachers be Metis or non-status people of appropriate qualifications and intelligence when they are available, that the schools be under the control of boards of trustees elected from this association” (Wall, 2008, p. 69). Wall’s writing further details that the delegates were willing to have the schools come under the supervision of the Department of Education or some other department, although there is no other indication of what other department is meant. Further notes indicated that the schools should be on the reserved lands set aside for the Metis. Additional suggestions included establishing a system of schools like those run by the Department of Indian Affairs. The early activities of the 1930’s built as each year passed as initiatives by both the Metis and government contributing to strengthening relations. A critical understanding regarding the power of collective voices, garnered through regular gatherings and meetings, was growing amongst the Metis people in the colonies despite little money for the Association’s work. As the Metis executive focused on

internal organization, they met with frustration as their lobbying efforts were hampering by cabinet dragging. Perseverance by the early leaders kept Metis organizational meetings going resulting in ongoing submissions to the Executive Council of the Alberta government (Wall, 2008).

Residents and members were speaking up and vocal about their need for education. In more than a few cases, local Metis community members took matters into their own hands. As Miller (1984) summarizes a collection of stories written about education in Kikino we learn,

*“The first school of Kikino was built in 1941. The school was constructed by members of the community using logs and spruce shingles. A wood-burning heater was made from a 45-gallon oil drum by one of the settlers. Wood for heating the school was provided by people in the Settlement. The one-room school held more than thirty children in grades one to seven. In fact, crowding eventually got so bad that some of the older children were forced to drop out to make room for younger children. The quality of education available to the Settlement was further hampered by the lack of qualified teachers”* (p. 30).

In Fishing Lake, the same story has been told by local Elders. In fact, people living in Fishing Lake began building their schoolhouse mid-1930s, before the community became officially established as evidenced by a newspaper clipping (Y. Poitras Pratt, personal communication, December 17, 2025). Stories told indicate that often schooling in the colony areas went up to grade nine, and students wanting to continue would have to be boarded in nearby communities, often being subjected to racist experiences. The building of Metis Colony schoolhouse stories demonstrates the will and determination of the Metis people to not only belong to Canada but to gain access to the same educational rights and privileges as settlers in the West. The attributes of will and determination, expressed through voice and action, would

remain consistent throughout the evolution of the Metis Settlements of Alberta within a Canadian context.

Throughout Canada's history, Metis people have consistently identified as Canadian. T.C. Pocklington taught in the Political Science Department of the University of Alberta from 1961 to 1998. His interest in Aboriginal politics has resulted in numerous publications, including his 1991 book, *The Government and Politics of the Alberta Metis Settlements*. Pocklington (1991) cites the 1982-1984 MacEwan Joint Metis-Government Committee report, which was charged with reviewing the Metis Betterment Act, “the Metis represent a unique cultural group in Canada, an aboriginal people recognized in the Canadian Constitution, and a group that has played a major role in the development of Western Canada” (p. 141). Canadian Metis will state that they were born in this country and, therefore, are an integral part of this country with rights associated with that belonging (Ens & Sawchuk, 2016; Teillet, 2019).

Glenbow archives document this sense of belonging in Joe Dion’s letters as early as the 1930s, “At the present time, we still have regard for the laws of the country; we still have our pride and ambition” (Wall, 2008, p. 102). Despite these affirmations, the Alberta Metis were afforded no support for education and on November 17, 1933, Dion wrote to Minister Reid to inform him that the Metis of Fishing Lake had “arranged to construct a school and to hire a teacher for about 100 students who now receive no education” (p 71). All the Metis people at Fishing Lake had was a rough stick-built, lumber school room which provided to grade 9 after which, students would have to be boarded out to attend nearby schools, only adding to racist experiences of the young people. Despite having no resources to support reading and writing education, the Metis colony people had the will for their children to be educated. It would be this

same will and determination that would carry the people of the colonies through the struggles to survive and for a place to call home that was to come as the decade of the 1930's marched on.

The Half-Breed Association members continued their advocacy for education, and on January 29, 1934, Association leaders Malcolm Norris and Jim Brady submitted an education request to the executive council of the government of Alberta. The Association leaders requested elementary schools as an introductory education system (Wall, 2008). By March 19, 1934, Norris wrote to Brady about the number of schools and Metis students in northern Alberta (Norris, 1962). Records documented that twenty schools were in place and were either United Church-run or operated by the Catholic church, with 1769 students in attendance. Norris' notes do not provide details as to where these schools are located. By the Autumn of 1934, government of Alberta records indicate that Reid presented a sessional paper on this issue in the legislature. In that presentation, Reid presented the House with the letter advocating for the Half-Breed Association to establish a commission to examine the conditions of the Alberta Metis regarding reserved lands, natural resources, health, general welfare, and education (Wall, 2008). The Metis people were hopeful that their conditions would be investigated and that the findings would lead to actions to address their concerns.

The Alberta government acknowledged that four departments were directly implicated in the proposed commission: lands and mines, education, public health, and agriculture (Wall, 2008). As the spokes-group for the Metis people, the Half-Breed Association achieved a significant milestone because the government appointed a federal representative to a provincial commission to investigate the feasibility of Metis reserves. Brady's presentation to the legislature, entitled, *A Memorandum on the Government Report re: the Half-Breed Question*, outlined the Association's priority areas. Priority one addressed whether land reserves should be

close to existing historical settlements. The next concern addressed the form of management the reserves should have. Questions were asked about what other policy conditions would need to be addressed. The final priority area would ask whether the Half-Breed question is directly associated with the extinguishment of Indian title, and whether there would be further obligations on the province and the federal government arising from the Natural Resources Transfer Agreement (Wall, 2008).

As road allowance people through the 1930s and 1940s, the Metis people had limited access to schools. The establishment of the Metis colonies as a relief measure put the responsibility of building schools on the colony members. As the provincial government slowly began to provide educational services to Metis Settlements, Metis children would have to live in boarding residences or residential schools, resulting in Alberta Government documents revealing limited involvement from Alberta Education with the schools built by the Metis people living in the Metis Association areas during the early years (Sinclair, 2015; Wall, 2008). The Ewing Commission brought the plight of the early Metis to the forefront of the political arena, and the Metis Population Betterment Act provided the land so desperately needed; education would remain a priority concern for the Metis.

Parents of Metis children had to choose whether to send their children to nearby residential schools or build their own school with the limited resources they had. Maurice L'Hirondelle recalls moving to East Prairie in 1941. Maurice L'Hirondelle would eventually become one of the Fathers of the Federation of Metis Settlements, playing an instrumental role in activism to have the Metis Betterment Act become the Metis Settlements Act by 1990. Maurice recalls the East Prairie people's determination to have a school.

*I think it was in '45. The Metis Branch then again wouldn't pay us for building the school. We had to fight the supervisor in Edmonton, who was A.C. McCully at that time, to furnish food, just food, never mind the wages, for the settlers here to build the school and teacherage (East Prairie 40 Years of Determination, 1979, p. 40).*

The Metis had and continue to have many concerns regarding land, natural resources, health, education, and general welfare. While the Commission reported on those concerns, its approach was framed more by notions of government responsibility than by recognition of Metis rights. This policy orientation shaped subsequent decision-making and produced lasting impacts on Metis health, education, and general welfare, the very issues that early leaders of the Metis Association sought to address through their political engagement with the provincial government.

### *The Ewing Commission*

Wall (2008) describes a significant step forward for the Metis people living in northern Alberta that came on December 11, 1934. On this date, the Alberta legislature approved an order in council #1095/34, which issued the implementation of the Ewing Commission to study the education, health, and welfare needs of Alberta Metis. Two years passed and the Metis people relentlessly kept asking for commission details. Commissioners were finally appointed in 1936, and it would take two more years for the Ewing Commission report to be submitted back to the government in 1938. The commissioners were Alfred Ewing, James Douglas, and Edward Braithewaite. There were no Metis people appointed to this commission. When the report was submitted, it focused on identifying the most financially prudent way to implement the plan and, as such, recommended establishing something akin to farm colonies (Wall, 2008). The Ewing

Commission report would serve as a catalyst for the Alberta cabinet to address the concerns of the Metis people by establishing northern-based colonies.

The Ewing Report proved to the Metis people the importance of supporting an association that could bring their collective concerns to the government. Alongside land issues, the Metis people continued to rally for quality educational opportunities to support a vision for their children's future (Wall, 2008). Fred Martin was the first employee of the Federation of Metis Settlements. Mr. Martin served as counsel to the Metis Settlements governing leaders for decades in the development of land ownership, self-governance, and cultural insight into Metis affairs. His comments, depicted below and quoted in Poitras-Snyder's publication, reflect recognition of provincial responsibility for education that fell short of support, belonging, and for school completion.

*Martin says education is also very important. The children must feel like winners. They must come and go through the school system and come out with a solid feeling of pride. In the settlements early days, there were only one or two Settlements that had schools. Today, Kikino has a beautiful school. Fishing Lake's is fantastic. It's right up overlooking the lake. It's got a beautiful view. [Now], all of the Settlements have schools from K to 6 and some have through to grade 9. Now some of them are talking about providing education through to grade 12 in the near future. All of them have at least one teacher from the Settlement (Poitras-Snyder, 1997).*

Positioning education at the forefront of the Commission hearings would become critical as the Metis people prioritized having their children home and not being lost in the ongoing residential school reality of Indigenous people.

## **Metis Colonies and their Positions on Education to the Commission**

Records in books, articles, community memoirs, and government of Alberta reports clearly articulate what the Metis people of the colonies were asking for regarding education. Needs included school buildings, teachers, resources, language, non-denominational schooling, unity, and governance (Dobbin, 1981; Ross, 2020; Wall, 2008). Jim Brady stated it best in his notes describing the critical state of education of the Metis living in the colonies,

*“...has deprived the Native of the knowledge and understanding whereby he can reach out and bring into being that better life. It will only be realized when the common people of Canada reach out and enforce our right to knowledge and happiness. We emphasize particularly that educational facilities have been notably inferior in terms of necessary equipment, teachers, salaries and scholarships. The special condition of the Indians and Metis has been characterized by poorer conditions in almost every respect and particularly, with respect to compulsory education.”* (Wall, 2008, p. 48).

The conversation around education and concerns about buildings, teachers, supplies, and ongoing direction became a common topic during the Ewing Commission hearings as Metis Association leaders and government officials began to work out the future direction of education in the colonies.

Metis unity has consistently been grounded in common aspects of history, culture, and language. This Metis way of being is evident in the dialogue between W.W. Cross, Minister of Health, and Peter G. Tompkins in a letter regarding a proposal for the Metis, indicating the subject of language use. The letter noted, “We did not mention what language should be taught in your schools” (Wall, 2008, p. 39). There was much talking going on but little action to support the desire of the Metis colonies to have access to equitable educational opportunities for their

children including the teaching of their original ancestral languages, Michif that emerged out of the Red River and Cree that was widely spoken in the north.

From the 1930's, Wall (2008) notes that the Metis Colony Association gatherings maintained ongoing discussion and advocacy for secular schools. This advocacy led to an Association policy that identified the importance of administering non-denominational elementary and vocational schools. The Metis had reasons for this, including concerns about residential schools, but another reason may have been the betrayal the Metis felt when the Catholic Church appropriated lands at St. Paul des Metis and Metis families were disbanded (Anacker et al., 2020). What was clear from early on was the request from the Metis that included a form of co-management regarding schooling that is not that different from what exists today in the Northland School Division (Alberta Education, 2012; Wall, 2008). A preference was indicated by Metis for schools under the direction of local boards of trustees with local or provincial administration through the Department of Education. Insight into the Metis colony's position is gleaned from their belief that non-denominational schools would help right the exceedingly poor results of denominational schools. Jim Brady was a primary activist and political leader of the Metis. His notes on the history of the Metis Association of Alberta describe the state of clerical education for the Metis and the need to right, what he called, the exceedingly poor results of the schools.

*I, Jim Brady, state that sixty years of clerical tutelage has induced ignorance and passivity which has deprived the native of the knowledge and understanding whereby he can reach out and bring into being that better life for which the clergy so unctuously intone. The special condition of the Indians and Metis has been characterized by poorer conditions in almost every respect and particularly, with respect to compulsory*

*education, this is attributable to their poorer economic condition. The higher schools are beyond their means and no scholarships are provided for Metis* (Wall, 2008, p.48).

The Ewing Commission finalized its investigation in 1936, and by 1938, the recommendations had been implemented in the Metis Population Betterment Act. Along with land for farming and agriculture, it was suggested a small hospital be built on each colony, schools would also be built where, “boys would be taught farming, girls sanitation, sewing, and knitting, and all children reading, writing, and elementary arithmetic” (Pocklington, 1991, p. 19). As a final act of control, the Act determined that the government of the colonies would rest with a government department. The intertwining of the governance history of the Metis colonies and education for children had a lasting impact on the progress and development of the Metis Settlements of Alberta. The leaders of the Half-Breed Association understood the role of education in their quest for independence, self-sufficiency, and the implementation of a self-organized, sustainable economy and self-government. These would be the areas where lasting impacts would be most profound. The Metis people would remain under the control of the Bureau of Public Welfare, and the lack of regard held by the Alberta Government towards the Metis colonies and the people living there would remain evident in the bureau assigned responsibility for them, in the decades to come, as the Metis Population Betterment Act controlled their lives.

### **The Metis Population Betterment Act**

For many Metis, roles in the fur trade often involved serving as middlemen in negotiations, and they understood the importance of all voices being heard. Notes from Jim Brady demonstrate the priority placed on education, as reflected in the voices of attendees at Association meetings throughout these early years. With the completion of the Ewing

Commission and its recommendations, the determination of the Metis colonies was apparent in a handwritten report dated September 10, 1940, from Joe Dion to Alberta Chief Administrator Frank Buck. Dion outlined the Association's main goals, which were to address the reinstatement of the Metis race and to properly educate Metis children. The supporting statements following Joe Dion's outline of the goals of the Association outlined his dissatisfaction with The Metis Population Betterment Act, as the Act was not considered a victory by the Association; it was viewed as a divisive piece of legislation and a government barrier to Metis unity to address causes of concern, including education. As the Metis Population Betterment Act was being implemented, each proposed settlement area was required to form an association, and the government would interact only with that association. The government layered further bureaucracy onto their "relief-based land scheme for landless and destitute Metis" (Wall, 2008, p. 50).

In 1938, the government instituted regulations and governance structures that appeared to be those requested by the Metis as part of the Ewing Commission. One of the agencies was the Metis Committee, which was under the authority of the Department of Health's Bureau of Relief and Public Welfare. The Committee was comprised of one of the Ewing commissioners, Dr. Edward Braithwaite, along with Frank Buck, Joe Dion, and Pete Tomkins. While the Metis Committee maintained control through government regulations, the Metis, including Dion and Tomkins, had little input into the collective interests of the Metis in the colonies, even among those who did not go to the colonies. Metis colony people felt that this test for participatory democracy was a failure, and critical issues continued to be ignored, including Metis lands being used by non-Metis for grazing, perceived corruption in the fish pool system, lack of supplies for farming, timber cutting, and relief for urban and southern Metis (Wall, 2008). The following

month, on October 4, 1940, Pete Tomkins followed up with another letter to Frank Buck. Tomkins included Metis Association by-laws that prioritized upholding Aboriginal beliefs, educating, and providing a meeting place, equipment, land, and property for the Association (Wall, 2008). The letter was in response to the formation of the Metis Committee, which had effectively replaced the Half-Breed Association and dashed hopes of participatory democracy. With this deliberate separation of the Metis people, members who were also part of the Metis Association of Alberta, including Association leaders Dion and Tomkins, were excluded from decision-making and planning to support the very priorities outlined in the Metis Association by-laws.

Ewing Commission recommendations held the government's assertion that assistance was not owed to the Metis as a matter of legal right; the assistance was a matter of humanity and justice (Wall, 2008). The Commission worked to avoid any hint of special treatment for the Metis as a matter of right. In seeming contradiction, when it came to settling land commitments, the province had passed an order-in-council, O.C. 706-35 titled, Regulations Respecting the Locating of Half-Breed Land Scrip in the Province in 1935 thereby setting into motion a mechanism that did take into consideration the recognition of protecting the Metis as a people by setting aside communal lands (Martin, 1988; Wall, 2008). Between the fall of 1938 and the end of 1939, the Social Credit party introduced orders-in-council that defined eleven tracts of reserved land. Supervisors were appointed in each established area and required to submit detailed annual reports to the government. These supervisor reports detailed the socio-economic status of the Metis colonies from 1938 through to the 1980s, after which time they became known as the Metis Settlements of Alberta. From 1940 through to 1952, the legislation governing the political life of the Metis Settlements did not change. Almost all legal powers

rested with the cabinet, or with the Minister alone, including the construction of buildings, the demolition of buildings, or the making of regulations as to any matter. Ultimately, these reports provide truths about Metis colony life, to be assimilated or dismissed as the provincial government administered the Settlements as it chose. Gilbert Auger was an early member of the East Prairie Metis Settlements. His memories reveal the lack of priority the government was giving to education.

*East Prairie settlers were expected to contribute a levy towards the building of the school. Gilbert Auger brought up the rarely mentioned subject of a levy, introduced at some point after a supervisor began living on the settlement. People used to take two wagon loads of wood to the school to pay their levy. Later on, they had to work for the supervisor for two days doing fencing, or work on parts for fences to pay their levy. Teaching in East Prairie meant first finding the children to register them. The school house needed desks and tables to be built. A few children spoke English but many spoke Cree. Some had gone to mission schools but for many it was their first school experience even though they were 14 or 15 years old and they could not read or write their own names. (Brissenden, 2018, p. 59-60).*

At the request of the Metis Settlements General Council, Dr. Campbell Ross was asked to compile the annual reports that settlement supervisors were required to submit to the Government of Alberta beginning in 1939 and continuing to 1989, ending due to the signing of the Metis Settlements Accord Legislation in 1990, effectively bringing to an end the control of the Metis Development Branch. It appears that the leadership understood that knowledge of their history could potentially provide insight into political next steps towards self-government. An overview of these supervisor reports reveals a series of patterns that corroborate the stories told

by colony members and are documented in the writings of Dion, Brady, and Norris, and again in the Federation of Metis Settlements records. These patterns depict a history of paternalism and racist attitudes towards the Metis colony peoples. The Metis were portrayed as paupers through language such as “indigent” and “destitute,” used to describe them, as segregation was presented as being in the public’s best interest (Wall, 2008). Despite the government's deficit-based approach, the people held to their collective identity as Metis. The cultural identity of the Metis in the colonies would persist and contribute to self-determination as the legislative history surrounding them evolved. Forced into a stigmatized role, the Metis colony people held great hope for education despite the government's perpetual focus on “educational programming as a solution to the imminent and crucial problem of the Metis” (Lac La Biche School Division Perspective Study, 1966).

### **Record of Annual Reports on the Socio-Economic Status of the Metis Settlements**

There is an ambiguity within the government’s treatment of its relationship with the Metis that has permeated society. A central tenet of that ambiguity is the recognition of the Metis uniqueness. The depression in the early 30’s, followed by World War II, resulted in poverty, poor health, and lack of education for other people in the province, as well as the Metis. In this case, relief for the Metis, as it was offered to other citizens, would have addressed that problem. The Commission and the Metis Population Betterment Act did not recommend treating the Metis in the ordinary way of the people ravaged by depression and war. What did happen was an implicit recognition that the Metis had something else in common that became explicit: their propensity to pursue a common style of life. Only this commonality could justify establishing the colonies for the exclusive use of the Metis. The ambiguity here is the Metis being characterized as both ordinary and special. Finally, the ambiguity becomes clearest in the Commission's

recommendation that no Metis would be compelled to join a colony, but if they chose not to, they would have no other claim to public assistance (Martin, 1988). The legislative framework of the Metis Population Betterment Act made possible the setting aside of lands and a means for the Metis to govern them, yet the entire Act was subject to the ultimate authority of the provincial government. How the provincial government was going to ensure this was by keeping the colonies under one department and putting a supervisor position in each settlement area. It would be the responsibility of those supervisors to act as government watchdogs and report on every move and request from the Metis people. From 1939 to 1980, the Supervisors of the Settlement areas were required to submit data for compilation into an Annual report to the Alberta legislature. These annual reports provided detailed insight into the very ambiguity presented at the beginning of this paragraph. Of interest to this dissertation is the issue of education. By covering the years through the details provided in the annual reports, the following section builds knowledge and context on education for the Metis.

The initial priority was identifying lands suitable for the Metis colonies. The Ewing Commission recommended only two colonies to serve as experiments for the scheme. A joint committee of Metis leaders and government officials identified twelve areas. Pigeon Lake and Siebert Lake would be rejected on the grounds of being unsuitable (Pocklington, 1991). Marlboro, Wolf Lake, Touchwood, and Cold Lake areas would all be rescinded by 1960. The remaining areas would be identified as Keg River, Big Prairie, Utikuma Lake, East Prairie, Goodfish Lake, and Fishing Lake (Wall, 2008). Subsequent orders-in-council added to and subtracted from the lands, amalgamated, and split some of them. Today, eight Metis Settlements exist, four in the east: Fishing Lake, Elizabeth, Kikino, and Buffalo Lake. Four in the west include Paddle Prairie, Peavine, Gift Lake, and East Prairie Metis Settlements. The security of

their land base would continue to be a principal political concern of the Metis as the provincial government fought to maintain control over the Metis leaders' authority. Day-to-day life concerns of the Metis people in the colony areas focused on survival, and the government continued its responsibility approach to the management of the colonies.

The years from 1939-1942 saw the Metis colonies administered by the Bureau of Public Welfare: Metis Population Betterment. Activities in connection with the settlement of the Metis included education, and the first school district was established when the Department of Education formed School District #10 in the Fishing Lake area. The school was built with a \$150.00 grant. Elizabeth Area #9A and Goodfish Area #7 were organized into school districts. Forming the districts was a government action only on paper. The logs required to build the schools had to be gathered by the Metis colony residents. The Metis struggled through the depression more so than many others in Alberta, and the struggles had no end as the beginning of World War II shifted focus to protecting nationhood. Records note that, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1942, the colony supervisors reported schools in three settlements, and a “Good report from [the] school inspector” (Annual Report, 1942, as cited in Ross, 2020, n.p.) on general education was noted.

The fiscal year ending March 31, 1943, noted a slight change in wording regarding the Department of Public Welfare, which was still responsible for the Metis colonies. The descriptor now stated, ‘on Rehabilitation and Re-establishment of Metis Settlement Areas.’ The only report on education was a short phrase: “Repeat of ’42.” The following year, the three areas with schools were visited by school inspectors for the first time. Supervisor notes recorded similar attendance rates as those seen in white settlements and satisfactory academic progress. Once

again, the year ending March 31, 1945, the report only noted a short phrase, ‘Repeat of ’44.’ (Annual Report, 1945, as cited in Ross, 2020).

By the end of 1946, in contrast to the colony schools, the province of Alberta had a well-established Department of Education. This department had its beginnings in 1905, and by 1910, Alberta had 1501 school districts operating 1195 schools (<https://albertahistoricplaces.com/2017/08/30/one-room-schoolhouses-in-alberta-where-early-public-education-began/>). Forty-one years had passed since Alberta joined Confederation, yet the Metis colonies remained under the Department of Public Welfare, responsible for the Rehabilitation and Re-establishment of Metis Settlement Areas. Rural and urban education systems in other areas had greatly advanced since the 1881 building of Alberta’s first one-room schoolhouse in Edmonton (May 29, 2023, [edmontoncommonwealthwalkway.com](http://edmontoncommonwealthwalkway.com)). In the same time span, the Metis colony settlers were still focused on land breaking, building homes, and ensuring some semblance of schooling.

The East Prairie supervisor’s contribution to the 1946 Annual Report of the Department of Public Welfare on Rehabilitation and Re-establishment of Metis Settlement Areas noted, “East Prairie settlers seem progressive and have built a new schoolhouse and teacherage. Utikuma shows a schoolhouse and teacherage” (Annual Report, 1946, as cited in Ross, 2020, n.p.). In total, five of the colonies now had schools. The supervisor’s 1946 report outlined new arrangements reflecting the Department’s emphasis on schooling to improve conditions for Metis living in the colonies.

New arrangements provided details on the Metis Rehabilitation Branch supervisor becoming the official trustee for all Metis colony schools, rather than the government education department. Prior to this 1946 decision, the school’s supervisor came from the division in which

the Metis colony lay. It was the Metis Rehabilitation Branch that determined that the divisional inspector would still carry out classroom inspections. However, buildings and hiring of teachers would be the responsibility of the Metis Rehabilitation Branch. In 1946, five Metis colony schools were in operation, and three new schools and teacherages had been built. The supervisor's report shows that textbooks and library resources now equal those of an average rural school for the period, and that attendance and progress were reported as 'very satisfactory.' Other than the mention of East Prairie seeming progressive in building their school with their own labour, there was no additional reporting in 1946 about the people of the colonies and their determination for education. The supervisor's contribution to the annual department report states, "The new schools and teacherages are a credit to the District" (Annual Report, 1946, as cited in Ross, 2020). While the supervisors felt the education system was a credit to the government, the Metis people felt that progress was slow compared to the rest of the province.

As the fiscal year came to an end on March 31, 1947, the third annual report for the Department of Public Welfare had a new description regarding the Metis colonies. The department was renamed, Operations of the Program for the Rehabilitation and Re-establishment of Metis (Annual Report, 1947, as cited in Ross, 2020, n.p.). A new schoolhouse was built in Fishing Lake while Metis leaders grappled with political challenges to gain recognition as the government pushed to convert the settlement areas into Improvement Districts. Leaders were desperately fighting for rights to self-government (Martin, 1988). On the education front that year, the report stated that little had changed since the last report. Where there were existing schools, there were now seven classrooms in operation and two new schoolhouses. Reports show two log schools had been entirely remodeled. The Alberta government issued an Order in Council to establish scholarships with funds from the Metis Trust Fund, to encourage teacher

training for students ‘of type we wish to have in our Metis schools’ (Annual Report, 1947, as cited in Ross, 2020, n.p.). The voices of the Metis colony leaders were still vocal in their request for Metis teachers for Metis students. For the next two years, there would be no documented change regarding education in the Metis colonies. The following excerpt from *Life and Times of the Metis: A History of Caslan Metis Settlement* offers insight into the nature of the Metis living in the settlement areas as they sought to retain the common lifestyle, they held dear.

*Though the Metis people originated and at one time flourished in western Canada, for more than a century, they had been struggling to maintain themselves within a world of rapid change and modernization. The people who moved to Caslan Settlement did so with the hope that they would be able to retain their unique culture and enjoy an independent, self-supporting lifestyle, as their Metis forebearers had done during the previous century”* (Verbicky, 1984, p. 23).

The need to retain our unique culture has consistently been expressed by the Metis people.

Over the next few years, the Metis colonies worked to build eight new classrooms, put them into operation, and built one new schoolhouse. By 1951, reports noted considerable advancement, with 10 classrooms reported and 1 new schoolhouse. The supply of textbooks and teaching materials was equal to that of a rural school in a pioneer settlement. Remarks were noted regarding attendance, progress, students' cleanliness, the provision of clean water, and concern about the reluctance of some Metis to improve basic home sanitation. Over the next two years, thirteen classrooms were in operation, and one more new schoolhouse was built. A notable comment about a moving picture projector being installed in the new school at Keg River, to be used for education and entertainment, was heralded as a triumph for the Metis Rehabilitation Branch. Besides the thirteen classrooms in operation and the Metis people building one more

schoolhouse, the annual report from the settlement areas' supervisors provides no further details and states that very little changed in education (Annual Report, 1951, as cited in Ross, 2020, n.p.).

Notable changes in the tone of the 1954-1955 supervisor's annual reports on Rehabilitation and Re-settlement of Metis Settlement Colonies clearly outlined the Government of Alberta's paternalistic and results-oriented attitude towards the Metis people living in the colonies. The tone comes through as the report mostly contains numbers regarding improvements, including 6125 acres of total land cleared, broken and cultivated; 118 standard houses; 262 temporary shacks; 1495 cows. There is mention of "hope to have power in all classrooms" (Annual Report, 1955, as cited in Ross, 2020, n.p.), but no plans or timelines in place to support it. The Metis people continue to be reduced to groups requiring the responsibility approach taken by legislation within the Metis Betterment Act.

The 54-55 Annual report provides further insight into the survival priorities of the Metis people. While education is reported each year, the education reports are documented below development and improvements, housing, livestock and equipment sections. By the end of 1955, 13 classrooms were operating in the colonies. Records noted that a woodworking shop and home economics classroom had been built in one colony where senior high is taught. Moving picture projectors now exist in schools located in five colonies. Another clear paternalistic comment written in the report stated, "Due to the natural instincts of this race of people, it has been found that pupils respond more readily to teaching by observation than by oral dictation or textbook study." (Annual Report, 1955, as cited in Ross, 2020, n.p.). The challenges in these years for establishing the Metis communities and their quest for quality and equitable education in less than fair conditions are made clear in this comment, documented in the annual report 1954-1955.

The statement is as follows: “For this reason, we are placing a great deal of emphasis on this phase of our education work and hope in the immediate future to have power in all classrooms and make use of all educational films available” (Annual Report, 1955, as cited in Ross, 2020, n.p.). Some schools did not even have power! Concluding remarks in the report referenced standard comments regarding good attendance, supplies equal to pioneer settler schools, achievement, and cleanliness in step with standards in the home. There would be little change over the next few years. An excerpt from *Elizabeth Metis Settlement: A local history* brings a community perspective to cumulating impacts on lives when discrepancy exists between government priorities and Metis people.

*Although parents in Elizabeth Settlement have never had to pay for the children’s schooling, we have had a great difficulty in giving our children a full education. Nobody really understands why 90 percent of the students drop out from grade 8 up. Northlands School Division took over the operation of the schools in the Settlements in 1961. Prior to this the Metis Settlement schools were operated by the Department of Public Works (Elizabeth Metis Settlement A Local History, 1979.).*

In 1956-57, the Department of Welfare appointed a new supervisor, Henry F. Irwin. The tone of the reports remains unchanged, continuing to portray the Metis colony people as lacking foresight, living from day to day, and politically naïve (Pocklington, 1991). It is also the first time that an annual report mentions the Metis Population Betterment Act, although no other details are provided. Highlights within the 56-57 Annual report for education emphasize that Metis schools are focusing on “fundamental reading, writing, arithmetic, and health education,” with no mention of schoolteacher or school leader training. There is no mention of languages, culture, or history. Notes indicate that higher education is being provided to

“deserving young people” (Annual Report, 1957, as cited in Ross, 2020, n.p.). The deserving young people appear to be girls being assisted to take Nurses Aid training and Home Economics at a School of Agriculture. Some training is made available to boys, but no details are included. The annual report notes additional new schoolhouses built at Keg River and Big Prairie/Gift Lake. Further detail within the report outlines seven school districts associated with the Metis colony areas, a total of seventeen school rooms representing all areas, and 425 pupils in grades 1-9. The annual report includes a brief detail about able pupils being assisted past grade nine through correspondence courses or financial assistance to attend other schools. Success is noted with one boy and one girl streamed to Fairview School of Agriculture. In 1956, it was pointed out that the boy had completed the first year of a two-year course. The girl graduated 5<sup>th</sup> out of 14 and was later employed by the Department of Public Welfare. Two girls went on to be fully trained as Nurses’ Aides (Annual Report, 1956, as cited in Ross, 2020, n.p.). The Metis colonies were determined to build on these successes. Jack Kachuk was the third supervisor and first teacher in East Prairie. His memories are chronicled in *Memories of a Metis Settlement: Eighty Years of East Prairie Metis Settlement* (Brissenden, 2018). He highlights the challenges of teaching in the area and the realities of education for the Metis areas, while Metis leader Maurice L’Hirondelle shares how the settlement got its first school.

*We started fighting for a school and teachers in 1944. The public welfare decided to let us build a school. We decided to build a log school for ourselves. I remember our first teacher named Jack Kachuk. Teaching in East Prairie was not a standard teaching assignment. In the settlement, the first job was to find the children and register them. The children sat at tables. A few children spoke English, many did not, having Cree as their first language. Some had gone to Mission schools, but for many it was their first school*

*experience. Many were 14 or 15 years old, and still could not read or even write their names* (Brissenden, 2018, p. 60).

For the Metis people simply building the schools in the colonies was not enough. There was limited access to the resources needed to deliver quality education comparable to the rest of Alberta. The problem is most likely attributable to the fact that all Metis-area schools were administered by the Rehabilitation Branch, a department responsible for public welfare rather than education. Despite this challenge, building schools and teacherages and finding qualified teachers continued to be priority areas for Metis leaders, hampered by political bureaucracy.

With a focus on upgrading old school rooms and building schoolhouses in every colony, the 1957-58 Fourteenth Annual Report Department of Welfare on the Rehabilitation and Resettlement of Metis Settlement Colonies demonstrated the perseverance of the Metis people. Advances were made at Keg River, as there were now two schools, each comprising a classroom hall with four classrooms. Big Prairie/Gift Lake had three schools and two teacherages. East Prairie had a school. Beaver River had two schools and two teacherages. Wolf Lake had a school and teacherage. Fishing Lake/Elizabeth had three schools and two teacherages. The Rehabilitation Branch continues to administer all schools serviced in Metis areas. Annual report highlights that Paddle Prairie has four classrooms along with several students taking correspondence courses for education above grade nine. Woodwork was also being offered to boys and typing to girls (Annual Report, 1958, as cited in Ross, 2020, n.p.). There had been much improvement since the early years of education, when students walked or rode horses to school and carried their lunches in lard pails, yet the standards remained below provincial averages and expectations set by other provincial schools. The schools remained in makeshift

frame or log buildings, were inadequately equipped, were poorly staffed, and many still had instructors without any professional preparation as teachers (Alberta Education, 1975).

A report commissioned by the Alberta Government in 1975, known as the Swift Report, contains a historical chapter regarding the state of education at the end of the 1950's that would result in the eventual formation of the Northlands School Division No. 61. The history section details the results of a survey of the Metis school population in Northern Alberta. Details indicate that the Metis school population had very low school achievement. Additionally, all grade levels had 2-3 times, compared to white children, the number of Metis children who were over-age for their grade, which was described as educationally retarded. Other concerning data indicated that 0.3 percent of the total number of children attending school in the North were Metis in grades 10 and 11. Louise Cardinal, an Elder from the Kikino Metis Settlement, contributed her memories to *Our Home: A History of the Kikino Metis Settlement*. Her story highlights the devastating reality of education in Metis areas under the Metis Rehabilitation Branch, which operated through the indirect mechanism of a subsidized school district encompassing each Metis colony (Alberta Education, 1975).

*I went to school in Adrian Hope's old house. I started in grade one. It was only part-time schooling because there was no regular teacher available. Classes were held only when they could get someone to come and teach" (Miller, 1984, p. 30).*

Seeing the impact of poor schooling on overall health, in 1958-59 the Department of Welfare partnered with the Department of Education. This partnership resulted in a new health course to address problems in schools attended by Métis children. Milk and vitamin biscuits were provided by the Metis Branch and were seen as a strategy to help lower absenteeism. There was no consideration for inclusive education, only that of basic needs, which is noted in the

supervisor's report regarding two children. Records in the 58-59 Annual Report indicate two crippled children brought into Edmonton by the Branch for treatment and education. One boy was blinded by illness and eventually recovered his sight. The colonies ended the year with eighteen classrooms, with all but three staffed with qualified teachers. There were 475 children attending school, with two boys assisted at Vermilion School of Agriculture and one girl in the Nurse's Aide training course. Supervisors noted that academic standards were aligned with provincial standards, although no supporting documentation was provided beyond the reporting supervisor's word. Reading test results in one school met the local divisional standard, but again, there was no indication of which school, which local division standard, or details of student numbers.

Overall, the school population increased by 19% between 1951-1958. The growing population put a strain on existing classrooms, necessitating expansion. The number of schoolhouse buildings was increasing in the colonies. Keg River now had three schools, a classroom hall, and two teacherages. Big Prairie/Gift Lake had four schools with three improved teacherages. East Prairie had an improved school. Beaver River had two schools, one on the Caslan side, one hall/classroom and two teacherages. Wolf Lake had a school and a teacherage. As school populations continued to rise in the Metis colonies, progress was hampered by a battle of wills between Metis autonomy and government control policies. The issue was the unworkable sections of the *Metis Betterment Act*. An example of an unworkable section of the Act was a regulation stating that an association's affairs and business would be governed by a board of three members. This provision contradicted the Act, which required a five-member board. This contradiction led to problems, as oil companies negotiating with settlement councils for access to settlement lands questioned the legitimacy of the elected councils, arguing that the

five-member elected council contradicted the regulations. Both the government and the Metis ignored those sections; however, the more the system was ignored, the more the uncertainty of Metis authority grew, resulting in increasing friction between government officials and the settlement people.

The relationship between the Half-Breed Association, the Metis Committee, the Alberta Government, and the people of the colonies was marked by disparate views and values regarding the Metis people. Metis people had not forgotten why and how they had become road allowance people and had continued their quest for rights and responsibility-based governance to gain more say in political autonomy. In contrast, the Alberta government maintained detailed administration as defined by government regulations, resulting in increased government control and greater Metis dependence on bureaucratic processes. The Metis understood the Act was intended to maintain the assumption of limited government power, and that authorization for settlement constitutions would lie with the Metis associations. The Metis viewed this government intrusion as an ongoing, political, assimilative quest to deal with the Metis problem by hampering their ability to control their day-to-day lives. Memories of members like Sam Shott from the Buffalo Lake Metis Settlement in *A History of Caslan Metis Settlement* provide insight into the stark reality of the Metis people in their dealings with bureaucracy.

*We called a meeting, got the men together, so we'd know who was willing to cut logs for the school. We cut the logs and let them sit for a year and in the fall of 1951, we built the school. We put moss between the logs and used drop siding. There was pressure to finish the school and the Supervisor had harsh words. He told us that under the terms of the Family Allowance Act, if your children do not go to school, the Allowance may be cut off. It is your fault that there is no school and unless you immediately turn out and finish the*

*school and supply the teacher with plenty of fuel, I will be forced to take the matter up with the Superintendent of Family Allowance and have your payments discontinued. I will also cancel your privileges on the colony and will not allow you to cut or sell any pulpwood or lumber or issue a permit to hunt and trap* (Verbicky, 1984, p. 22).

The paternalistic tone of government would continue as the Government of Alberta implemented its own vision of power and control over the Metis Settlements. This control would extend to the removal of settlement lands, fueling feelings of insecurity amongst the Metis people.

As news spread throughout the settlement areas in 1959 of Cold Lake, followed by Wolf Lake, being disestablished, considerable concern about land security heightened amongst Metis leaders regarding their own settlement areas. The Annual Report Department of Welfare on Metis Rehabilitation 1959-60 noted that Wolf Lake 8a had been disestablished for economic reasons. Additionally, the Cold Lake 9 area had also been disestablished as the government claimed it had never been settled. Annual report notes under the heading of agriculture, states, "The primary purpose of the Metis areas has been to develop Metis farmers" (Annual Report, 1959, as cited in Ross, 2020, n.p.), appearing to excuse the decisions for the two areas being rescinded due to being unsuitable for farming. Wolf Lake was a fully established area with an association, farms, and a school and teacherage set up. The colonies were people in Alberta where the government had predetermined their place in the province, as evidenced in the Ewing Commission report, referring to, "the admitted fact that the half-breed is constitutionally unable to compete with the white man in the race of modern life" (Ewing Commission Report, 1936) and unilaterally decided the quality and quantity of life, including education, they would receive.

Government policy direction for the Metis colony areas was set out in the Commission Report with a clearly stated goal, "The logic of the situation would seem to be that he must either

change his mode of life to conform with that of the white inhabitants or he must gradually disappear. A long process of education and training is necessary” (Ewing Commission Report, 1936). The Metis people had lost four colonies with a stroke of the pen with no input from colony area leaders. As colony area leaders lobbied back and forth with government regarding governance powers and authority the leaders scrambled once again to keep the colonies together and to hold on to the land that now meant so much to the people residing there.

Despite the political turmoil and the constant threat of having their lands taken away, education remained a priority for the Metis people. For the Metis people the purpose of education had been clear, to maintain their culture and autonomy and to be able to be self-supporting, and that view had not changed. By the end of 1960, the Metis colonies had seven schoolhouses and nineteen classrooms serving 439 pupils in grades 1-9. Progress with education attainment was even more important to ensure a future for the Metis colony areas.

Health, education, and general welfare were key identified issues as early as the late 1920's. These same issues were of concern in the 1960's, and the Annual Reports indicated health conditions of the Metis colony people were a concern and a barrier to learning. Access was identified as a barrier and is noted in the Annual Reports alongside education reporting. Eye and dental care were provided to schoolchildren, with the cost of glasses covered by parents unless they were deemed indigent. Indigent was the government term used in place of "charity," "needy," or "suffering from extreme poverty." The government made some efforts to address health concerns, as indicated in reports that milk and vitamin biscuits were provided in schools but were indifferently received by the children, most likely due to the bland taste of the biscuit.

Inclusive education was another area that was still not identified as a priority, yet it began to appear within the Annual Reports. An example of this is found in the detail of the 1960 report,

indicating a supervisor took it upon himself to have two crippled children made wards of the province. One of the children, who was a thirteen-year-old child with cerebral palsy, was maintained in the city for treatment and schooling. The virtues and deficiencies of the schooling in the Metis areas are well documented within the Annual Reports of the Department of Public Welfare of the Province of Alberta by the Metis Rehabilitation Branch.

Northland School Division No. 61 came into existence in December 1960. Decisions setting forward the reasoning for its establishment focused on recognition by government that something better was needed in the way of provision of school services in northern communities. Additionally, a desire to bring the schools concerned into the mainstream of the Alberta education department by establishing an administrative system for financial arrangements and including a superintendent of schools to ensure a direct, rather than marginal interest in the schools involved (Swift Report, 1975). The schools involved were schools operated by the Metis Rehabilitation Branch, independent rural school districts, Anglican and Roman Catholic churches, and those operated by the Department of Indian Affairs under different arrangements, which accepted Metis children. Annual Report records for 1960-61 note that administration of Metis area schools were reorganized pending inclusion of all except Paddle Prairie into Northland Division No. 16, this number appears to be a typing mistake and is in fact 61. Paddle Prairie would be included in Ft. Vermillion Division No. 52 while Fishing Lake and Utikuma being left with the Branch until current building is completed. By February 1, 1961, Kikino, East Prairie, and Elizabeth were with Northland School Division. By January 1, 1962, Northland took over Utikuma East and West schools. Educational opportunities in the colony areas were limited to grade 9 and the report indicates that students taking grade 10-12 would go to schools off Settlement areas. The amalgamation of northern schools under Northland School Division

centralized educational governance in northern Alberta, placing many First Nations and Metis community schools under provincial administration and limiting local authority over educational decision making.

An education note in the 1962-1963 Annual Report of the Department of Public Welfare of the Province of Alberta by the Metis Rehabilitation Branch indicated that East Prairie is part of the High Prairie School Division and Kikino East is part of the Lac La Biche School Division while the remainder of the Metis areas are with Northland School Division No. 61. There is no reason provided for why East Prairie and Kikino have moved. With over seven hundred children attending grades 1-12 in 1964-1965, Northlands School Division increased road access and school building in the colonies. No other report was filed this year. The following year, ten more students than the previous year advanced to higher education, along with sixteen at Fort McMurray Adult Vocational School, and ten were on the waiting list for training. With the appointment of a Metis Colony Coordinator, it was hoped that the duties, such as assisting with programs and field trips, providing guidance to the Colony Manager, and delivering educational lectures, would help improve educational outcomes. Regarding the lectures to people, a quote from the Annual Report in 1966 offers insights to what may have been covered as it states, "It is realized that the total Metis problem is not one of economics alone, but also the lack of education, the need for social adjustment, a change of attitudes of both white and Metis societies, prejudices etc." (n.p.). Stories told by settlement people support this sentiment but include another layer of priorities as the Metis people were still being herded into farming and that meant a need for machinery, but they lacked capital, feed, but land was still being brushed and broke, timber, housing needs, but this meant cutting own lumber which is challenging in the east where lumber was not always available, and fishing, but money had to be borrowed for nets and

outboard motors. These sentiments are captured in the memories of Metis who shared their stories in *Life and Times of the Metis: A History of Caslan Metis Settlement*.

*As well as having to supply shelter for their families and a school for each settlement, settlers had to attend to cultivation of their land. Each settler was allotted one quarter-section and was required to clear a minimum of ten acres. This was slow and arduous work with only horsepower and their own strength to clear and plow the land. Images of men falling trees with a simple axe or hand saw clearing their land with horse-pulled plows, and building log cabins seems more characteristic of western Canadian life at the turn of the century than during the 1950's. While most Albertans at that time were enjoying modern conveniences such as electricity and automobiles, a number of Metis people were undertaking the difficult task of 'settling' under pioneer conditions"*  
(Verbicky, 1984, p. 22).

In the fall of 1967, a total of seventy-five students from all Metis areas would attend high school and vocational school during this 1967-1968 school year. Further, ten high school students had successfully obtained work throughout the province; another completed nursing aide, and two completed hair dressing school. Adult education is now mentioned more, and it was noted that fifteen men passed courses at adult vocational schools. Other highlights included plans for a HeadStart program at Kikino with the active cooperation of parents in the colony. Self-determination for the Metis people regarding education advanced despite disruptions caused by colonial government policy. From their humble beginnings as evidenced in *Our Home: A History of Kikino Metis Settlement*, the area leaders would soon find their efforts quashed as all children were to be bussed to Lac La Biche as schools in Kikino and Caslan, now known as

Buffalo Lake Metis Settlement, are shut down due to colonial education policies by the end of the 65-66 Annual Report year.

*The first school in Kikino was built in '41. A second, wood framed school was built in the late forties and was used until portable classrooms were brought in a decade later. The temporary high school was Gairdner Hall that came in '52. Leona Rose Thompson would become Kikino's first high school graduate and then the first University graduate (Miller, 1984, p. 32).*

A final education note in 66-67 Annual Report simply states that children from East Prairie would attend school at High Prairie in September 1967. It can be surmised that the High Prairie School Division would not support a school on the Settlement, as happened with Kikino and Caslan. Children in the Metis area were gradually removed from their homes to attend schools where Metis people had even less influence than they had previously.

Continuing under the Department of Public Welfare, the 1967-1968 Annual Report indicated the implementation of a preventive social service at Lac La Biche, where a preschool trial project was initiated at Kikino Colony, attended by 24 children. Supervisors reported that, due to this preschool exposure, the students experienced an easier adjustment to school life at Lac La Biche, underscoring the value of such programs. In total, the settlements had 1,483 children, of whom 889 attended school. Additionally, 107 students were assisted in obtaining more education through schools outside the colonies than was available in the colonies. As of March 1968, 91 of the 107 were still attending outside schools. Post-secondary was a reality with one person in 2<sup>nd</sup> year of education at the University of Alberta; one 2<sup>nd</sup> year engineering student at the University of Alberta; one first-year chemical technology at Northern Alberta Institute of Technology; eight students billeted to attend Edmonton high schools; twenty-two students at Lac

La Biche High School; five at Cold Lake; seven at Bonnyville; five at St Paul; twenty-six at high school and vocational school at Grouard; eleven at High Prairie; one at Peace river; and three in Home Economics at Vermilion Agricultural and Vocational College. Advances in education were slow and continued to be overshadowed by other priorities as Metis colony leaders grappled with self-representation and advocacy to care for themselves. Examples of other priorities included a graded road completed to Gift Lake, two bridges built to cross the East Prairie River in 66-67. The following year brought buried telephone wires in Kikino and 68-69 brought ten miles of road across all colony areas for bus routes for school children.

Despite gains, government paternalism continued, as evidenced in the supervisor's 1968-1969 Annual Report, which stated, "yet skills training programs alone do not seem to be the answer to many of the problems the Native faces. Education on family planning, information on coping in urban centers, and a list of other needs would appear to be essential to educational and training projects. To be able to do a job does not in itself provide the answer to living successfully in the present societal structure" (Annual Report, 1969, as cited in Ross, 2020, n.p.). The polarity between the lived experiences of the Metis people and the assimilation practices of the Alberta Government centered around survival, values, and relationships. Metis people in the colony continued to hold fast to their cultural values, languages, and history to maintain their identity despite the pressures of the government and a rapidly changing province.

In 1969, responsibility for Metis Area Rehabilitation was transferred to the Department of Social Development, and T.M. Johnston remained the Supervisor of the Metis Areas. Details in the Annual Reports show that families continued to move into the colonies in the preceding years, and the number of school-aged children through grade nine totalled 954. Total Metis areas high school student enrolment reached 116, with two postsecondary students, demonstrating a

continued increase. One student is at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, and one is at the University of Alberta. Preschool children were recorded for the first time, and the records indicated that there were 660 children. These numbers were obtained because Gift Lake, Big Prairie, East Prairie, and Kikino were included in the Headstart Preventive Social Services program. Additionally, it was noted that Alberta Newstart began at Kikino, and in its first year of operation, it included three families who successfully completed courses and moved to Fort McMurray for further training. Alberta Newstart was established in 1968 in Lac La Biche as part of a federal government initiative to research basic adult education.

In 1969 insight was provided into individual colonies and their corresponding education data. We can better understand students' barriers to achieving Alberta Education's expected results through the sharing of seldom heard colony member stories.

*“[In] 1967 we got some money for settlers to have standard housing. This was on a priority basis as everyone badly needed proper housing. There were many big families living in log houses or small shacks. From 1969-1970, power was brought in. This was a fantastic change from dim, coal oil lamps which barely lit the house. Of course, after this, everyone had a television set. Due to changes of the late 60's and beyond the living conditions and lifestyles of the settlers changed considerably” (Brissenden, 2018, p. 78).*

Over the next few years, students wishing to attend high school or vocational school had to leave the colonies. Over 100 students made that decision. The year after, the number of high school students increased from 125 to 185. In 1971, the Headstart programmes continued at Kikino and Caslan and were started at Paddle Prairie and Elizabeth.

The provincial Metis Task Force began its review of Metis legislation in 1969. Completed in 1972, the Task Force recommended that the settlements be turned into Improvement Districts. Settlement leaders again perceived a very real threat behind the intent of the government to remove their land holdings. Jim Brady had realized the need for an organized common body, and with early leaders such as Joe Dion, Malcolm Norris, Pete Tompkins, and Adrian Hope had brought that vision right up to the Ewing Commission hearings. Following the Ewing Commission, the province of Alberta effectively informed Brady that the government would only work with the individual colony associations. Thirty years later, in 1971, Adrian Hope, who had been with the early leaders, joined Maurice L'Hirondelle, Lawrence Desjarlais, Sam Johnston, and Richard Poitras to form the Alberta Federation of Metis Settlements (AFMS). The Federation would be formally registered as a society in 1975 (Bell, 1994). Catherine E. Bell is a professor of Law at the University of Alberta and specializes in Canadian Aboriginal Law. As one of Canada's recognized leading experts on Metis constitutional rights she has written several books and articles on Metis rights including, *Contemporary Metis Justice: The Settlement Way* (1999), and *Alberta Metis Settlements Legislation: An Overview of Ownership and Management of Settlement Lands* (1994). The identified purpose of the Federation of Metis Settlements would be to continue making recommended changes in the Metis Betterment Act and the Regulations governing the operation of the Metis settlement areas but just as important the Federation's mandate was to provide the local settlement councils with a mechanism for sharing information, coordinating efforts and developing policies on matters that required co-operation, and securing their land base while managing the Metis Trust Fund (Bell, 199, 1999; Martin, 1988). In essence, the goals of the settlements had not changed from those identified in 1939, land security, local legislative authority, and adequate finances. Despite concerns about the

Task Force recommendations, those concerns had helped create the Federation and development of local self-government focused on setting up settlement offices in some settlements that had none, setting settlement bank accounts, and building real local governments with administrative capability.

A significant amount of quantitative data shows up in the 1972-1973 Annual Report. At this time, the Metis Colonies were under the Alberta Health and Social Development on Metis Rehabilitation. The total population of all colonies had increased by 6.5 % to 3222 persons. High school and postsecondary students grew in number from 185 to 193. Much of this increase took place at the postsecondary level. The value of Head Start programs was recognized, and all colony areas now had early childhood programs in operation. Additionally, the reports now mention educational upgrading specifically with adult upgrading classes conducted at Paddle Prairie and Big Prairie. These upgrading classes were being implemented under the guidance of a qualified local settler that. There is no indication within the report if the term qualified references a certified teacher.

In 1973-1974 the Annual Report began with comment describing a relational change between the Branch and the eight legislatively defined settlement associations in the province. The government department responsible for the Metis areas has gone through a name change and is now called the Alberta Health and Social Development, Metis Development Branch. The prime goal of the Branch has been set out to undertake meaningful dialogue and reinforce the concept of local municipal government, and to transfer formerly held and controlled government programs to local people. As a change, this direction set by government is substantial as the Metis Settlements are now recognized under departments such as the Department of

Environment where a program was immediately established to provide safer and more adequate water supplies to the areas.

The 1972-73 Annual Report makes a first-time use of the words, early childhood services, in a statement that early childhood services were established by this time in most colonies under the Department of Education. It can be surmised that early childhood services are in reference to preschool or kindergarten. Up to 1969, the Annual Reports only referenced grades starting from grade one. There is no mention of early childhood education until 1969 when some settlements had summer Federally funded Headstart programming such as East Prairie, Kikino, and Caslan. Headstart programs were started in 1971-1972 in Paddle Prairie and Elizabeth. There is no other mention of early childhood services until 1978-1979 where the Annual Report indicates the total population of Metis Settlements preschool children is 414. The Annual Reports mention that adult education and upgrading in vocational programs were available in all settlements, with approximately 90 adult settlers taking advantage. It would appear that the transfer of education responsibilities that began with the inception of the Northland School Division brought positive changes to the education of children earlier than grade one and it brought new schools as well. The memories of Elders are important as the following memory demonstrates the importance of relationships between the Metis, local leaders, and government in education support for children.

*In 1975 the residents of Elizabeth requested a new school to replace the one that had been destroyed. We were refused because the tenders were too high. The following year tenders were again sent out and this time there was a reasonable bid. The Minister approved the construction of a new school, which will be called Elizabeth School. The*

*actual construction began on July 25, 1977 (Elizabeth Metis Settlement A Local History, 1979, p. 33).*

Continuing the political party pretense of responsible government, the Alberta government maintained an approach to education that was founded on assimilation and betterment while limiting or withholding the funding and services that would allow for the betterment of the Metis people (Wall, 2020). Basic survival was still a necessary priority and sadly general living conditions included the need for food for the Metis colony children attending school.

### **School Food Services**

*The request for a school lunch program was made by the people early in the 70s. The reason for the request was that the people had low incomes and the children would get sick due to the lack of vital nutrients. A committee was picked consisting of Dorothy Bellerose, Sharon Emard, Mary Auger, and Elma Desjarlais. By the third of May, lunches were being served. In September 1975, lunches were provided by each community's own School Lunch Program, which is funded by the Social Services Department. This service has been a great help to the community, especially to those who were unable to meet the nutritional needs of their families (East Prairie 40 Years of Determination, n.d., pp. 93-94).*

The Metis School Lunch Program was incorporated into the Metis Development Branch in September 1973. The 1973-1974 Annual Report from Alberta Health and Social Development, Metis Development Branch contains detail regarding how each school lunch program is operated. Operations include a branch funded, local five-member committee

responsible for hiring kitchen staff and a bookkeeper and paying for wages, food, utilities and other operating costs. School divisions reported that the lunch programs have improved school attendance and students' work habits. Daily lunch consisted of soup, crackers, a sandwich, fruit, and milk. The only exception existed in communities with inadequate facilities to prepare the meal, and in these cases, the children were bussed to a larger center. Where students were bused outside of their communities to a nearby town school, a lunch bag was provided by a caterer and supplied to the children.

The annual report for 1974-1975 once again reflected a name change of the Department responsible for the Metis Colonies. Now under the auspice of Alberta Social Services and Community Health department, the Metis Development Branch focused on early childhood services and adult upgrading. Early Childhood services continued operation, and several colonies reported approximately 50 children attending these vital learning centers. Adult education classes, with both upgrading and vocational programs offered, were attended by a total of approximately 95 settlers.

The Metis School Food Services had expanded the number of programs in operation from 10 in 1973 to 16 in 1974-75. Lunch services involved feeding an average of 1000 students each day. Five additional programs started early in the 1975-76 fiscal year. The five-member school lunch committees continued to operate locally and are registered under the Societies Act. The primary aim of the school lunch program is to provide one-third to one-half of the daily nutrient requirement recommended for school children. A lunch program for children attending school proved to be a vital need as Metis people in the colonies were addressing wells being dug for drinking water, homes being wired for electricity, and building homes.

### **From Bureau of Public Welfare to Municipal Affairs**

From 1938 to 1980, the Metis colony people would be shuffled from the Bureau of Public Welfare to the Department of Welfare, to the Department of Social Development, and then onto Alberta Social Services. The tagline for each Department included Metis Population Betterment, Re-establishment of Metis Settlement Areas, Rehabilitation and Reestablishment of Metis Settlement Colonies, Metis Rehabilitation, Metis Rehabilitation Branch, Metis area Rehabilitation, and Metis Development Branch. Each department title revealed an assumed goal that the Alberta government had for the Metis people. Government policy perpetuated and controlled the relationship the Metis colonies would have with the rest of Alberta and its residents. Negative rhetoric was achieved by presenting the Metis colony peoples to Albertans as paupers who needed welfare, social development, population betterment. Essentially, they had to be re-established and rehabilitated. The effort to assimilate was apparent. By allocating Metis people land and mandating them to become farmers on land that were not suitable for farming, the government had set the people up to fail. They had no choice but to remain in survival mode.

The Government of Alberta neglected to provide the promised tools for farming, and the government neglected to provide even a basic education. This reality lies in stark contrast to education that had been freely provided to Albertans for the past seventy-five years since Alberta joined Confederation (Ross, 2020; Wall, 2008). While the rest of Alberta flourished, developed, and grew, the Metis colony areas struggled under basic survival conditions, confined to the land they fought so hard for and restricted by government policy. The government continued to claim they were helping, and some support was provided in limited ways, but implementation was inconsistent, underfunded, and often paternalistic. A strong representative Metis Settlement body

was urgently needed to shift the damaging stigma surrounding their living conditions, opportunities, health, and education.

### **Towards Self-Government**

There is a marked shift in tone with the Annual Reports near the end of the 1970's and the beginning of the 1980's that relate to the purpose of the Branch which is to assist the councils to continue their assumption for a greater role in the daily operations of their settlements and to move towards self-government. The total Metis population in the Metis areas is listed at 3117 people. The reports no longer contain details of agriculture, health, or education. The report headings concern policy, reorganization, and development.

As early as the late 1920s, Metis political leadership was established through the Metis Association and men known as the Big Five: Jim Brady, Felix Callihoo, Joe Dion, Malcolm Norris, and Pete Tomkins (Dobbins, 1981). The political work with the Metis colony peoples eventually made way for the Federation of Metis Settlements in the mid-1970s. Priorities had been laid out and were clear: to continue to fight for land, a right to Metis identity, and a right to be a valued and recognized people in the Alberta-Canadian fabric (The Metis Association et al., 1981). In September 1980, the Metis Development Branch of the Ministry of Social Services and Community Health was transferred to the Department of Municipal Affairs by an Order in Council dated September 4, 1980. This Order in Council established a new branch of the Improvement District Operations Division (Annual Report, 1980, as cited in Ross, 2020). At last, the Metis Settlements of Alberta had succeeded in utilizing their collective voice to be recognized as a culture of people who could speak for themselves, act for themselves, and represent themselves.

The 1980's proved to be a promising decade of political growth for the Metis colonies, now known as the Metis Settlements of Alberta, where housing, jobs, roads, water and sewer systems, and infrastructure in each of the eight Metis Settlement areas steadily improved. The priority remained securing their land base. The Annual Reports from the settlement supervisors from 1981 through 1984 bear no mention of schooling. Instead, the Metis Development Branch continued to develop local autonomy at the Metis Settlement level, emphasizing the development of the settlement councils. The report of the MacEwan Committee, (1984) reviewing the Metis Betterment Act and regulations, was submitted to the Minister of Municipal Affairs in July 1984. Premier Lougheed indicated that implementing many of the MacEwan report's recommendations and adopting the new act to replace the Metis Betterment Act were priorities for the Alberta government (Pocklington, 1991). The transformation of the Metis Development Branch from serving as the administrator of the Metis Settlements to becoming a support group for the Settlements is supported by the efforts of Government representatives and Metis Settlement leadership. Commencement of a new school building on the Kikino Metis Settlement began in 1986 (Kikino School, n.d.). Land-use plans for the communities were developed, and reports document the recommendation that the schools in the settlement be operated as community schools, with no further detail on what those entail. Local leadership was focused on oil and gas, resource-commercial possibilities with sand, gravel, and peat moss, water resources, agricultural development, forestry, wildlife, employment, housing, infrastructure, and population trends. The importance of these focuses is summarized in the words of a long-serving community leader from the Kikino Metis Settlement.

*As settlement community leaders, we have always known our number one asset is our people. Our people never needed a handout but we did need a hand up and that is exactly*

*what education would provide- a hand up. The stats were very bad. We hardly had any graduates and even less were even trying to get to university. Our communities will only thrive if our people thrive and that means they need to keep learning and learning in good spaces. Nothing is better than a home and a home that has a school is what we wanted back.* (Floyd Thompson, personal communication, September 1, 2022).

To better understand life in the Metis Settlements, the extreme life conditions and slow rate of development need to be understood as barriers the Metis struggled against. Evidence to support this state of being is found in the year 1986. It was that year when members of the Metis Settlements were provided access to the rural electrification program administered by Alberta Transportation and Utilities. Settlement members were now eligible to receive a 50% grant toward the portion of the funding usually required of individuals seeking to extend electrical power to their land. As the Metis people in the settlements celebrated affordable access to power, the Settlement leaders were about to celebrate a critical point in Settlement history.

Most of the following year was spent in detailed negotiations with Government of Alberta representatives. By the end of the 1988-1989 fiscal year, Metis Settlement leadership had worked out the development and introduction of legislation that would provide a new and unique form of local government in Alberta's eight Metis Settlements. This new form of local government would combine traditional municipal law with aspects of Metis culture. This victory would lead to widespread celebration on November 1, 1990. Amidst this significant political gain, the Settlement members were aware of the need for quality education and employment to support future leadership within the Settlements.

*Kikino operated a school at its inception in 1939. But in 1963 there was a move towards centralization and the school was closed. Students from the settlement were bussed into*

*nearby Lac La Biche to attend classes. Chair Floyd Thompson says that between 1964 and 1970, only two Kikino students graduated from high school. The majority dropped out in Grade 9 citing the lengthy commute and classroom bullying as factors. So in 1989, Kikino completed successfully negotiations with the province and their school would open that fall. A few years later the Federal Aboriginal Headstart program came back to the community, enhancing social, cultural, and educational development for preschool children. And graduation rates started to improve (MacIsaac, 2014).*

The 1989 Alberta Metis Settlements Accord victory was a barebones package of draft legislation and agreements that provided a framework, not a finished structure (Floyd Thompson, personal communications, June 2022). The Accord provided tools for developing Metis Settlement law; both legislated and judicial. Legislated law would flow from Ministerial regulations made at the General Council's request, General Council policies, and Settlement by-laws. Judicial law would develop from decisions made by the Metis Settlements Appeal Tribunal. By early to mid-1990s, the Settlements and the Alberta Government transformed the Accord into a more precise legal document and legislation. The result was a package of charters, agreements, and legislation, effective November 1, 1990, comprising four pieces of legislation. First was the Metis Settlements Land Protection Act, a revised Bill 65 that protected the settlement area and lands granted by charter from unauthorized access, seizure, or expropriation. Next was the Constitution of Alberta Amendment Act, implementing an alternative approach to the Resolution to Amend the Alberta Act by amending the Constitution of Alberta to prevent changes to the land protection legislation.

The *Metis Settlements Accord Implementation Act* was a multipurpose finance and transition agreement. The agreement would ensure funding for Settlement development, create a

mechanism for smoothing the transition to self-government, and, from a government perspective, work to quiet the settlement claims for oil and gas revenue. The package further included the *Metis Settlements Act* which was a revised Bill 64 and provided a framework for self-government consistent with provincial jurisdiction. Then there is the *Co-Management Agreement*. This agreement focused on oil and gas development in the settlements. It was attached as a schedule of the MSA 1990, fleshing out the principles of the 'subsurface resource management agreement. The details in the co-management agreement ensured that General Council policies replaced existing Alberta regulations on matters such as timber cutting, hunting, fishing, and trapping. In the early 1980s, the Alberta Federation of Metis Settlement Associations (1982) issued a Statement on Aboriginal Rights in the Constitution of Canada, entitled *Metisism: A Canadian Identity*.

From this statement on Aboriginal Rights, we learn about the Metis Settlement's political challenges in the previous decades. We also learn how the Metis leaders remained active in education, with their eyes on the future of the Metis Settlements. In addition to elected political leaders, the Settlements sought community-based leaders to ensure social and educational needs would not be left behind. Sixty-eight years had passed since the Alberta confederation, and thirty-five years had passed since the inception of the Metis Betterment Act; a Metis Colony board member was finally appointed to the Northlands School Board. Not one Metis Settlements of Alberta member has sat on the Lac La Biche School Division board, now called Northern Lights Public Schools. As evidenced in the following excerpt from the *Elizabeth Metis Settlement: A Local History*, we see the ongoing advocacy for, and the importance of, the Metis people controlling their own affairs, and the lack of a form of government to support that need.

*One of the first Native Trustees was Albina Jacknife of Elizabeth. She was appointed by the Minister of Education in November 1973. Albina didn't even receive an official letter of appointment. She heard about the appointment by accident from someone who was running a workshop in the community. Then she received a telephone call asking her to attend a board meeting in Peace River the end of November. Albina was appointed for three years and she was reappointed for another three years (Elizabeth Metis Settlement A Local History, 1979, p. 33).*

Settlement archived documents described the priorities of individuals who had stepped forward as school trustees for Northlands School Division. Priorities addressed Aboriginal content infusion, orientation for new hires with an emphasis on community and cultural components, seeking advice and input from the community, and ensuring Metis representation on school boards (Report of the Northland School Division Community Engagement Team, 2012). Statistics in the supervisor's annual reports revealed simmering concerns around long bus rides, dropout issues, students having to leave home to attain an education, and high school completion concerns (Ross, 2020). From 1982-1985 detail in the supervisor's annual reports provided insight into enrollment numbers. In 1985 Fishing Lake JF Dion School had 70 students enrolled in K-7. The grade 8 and older aged students are sent 45 kilometers away to Heinsburg to complete their high school years. Elizabeth Metis Settlement has Elizabeth School, which was K-6 and had 105 students. Supervisor reports show secondary students from Elizabeth being transported 29 kilometers to Grand Center. Gift Lake Metis Settlement reports a population of 607 from the 1981 census. The Gift Lake area showed that school-aged students had dropped from 78% to 38% in the past ten years. Big Prairie Metis Settlement had no school report in 1982. East Prairie data shows that in 1970, 59% of the population was made up of preschool and

school-aged children versus 41.5% in 1981. Paddle Prairie reports indicate a need for a recreation complex, and the school should be set up as a community school. Paddle Prairie also shows an aging population with a drop in preschool and school-aged children.

Despite the education gains in the Supervisor's annual reports from 1938-1990, the Metis Settlements of Alberta would be plagued with low student achievement and high school graduation rates throughout the indicated time span (Report of the Northland School Division Community Engagement Team, 2012). Recommended next steps indicated in the Northlands report continue to be what the Metis people repeatedly have requested: that education partners work together. The Metis Settlement people have wanted to establish measures of success that weave Indigenous worldviews and local perspectives. The following comment reflects the Metis desire for educational measures grounded in self-determination, family support, community empowerment, and cultural ways of knowing.

*The time our kids are in school is brief. For our students it is even shorter. The time is frustrating for them. The education is not culturally relevant, has little involvement from the communities, and fails to address students' complex needs. This deprives them of an education that opens the doors to a chosen career and a healthy, happy, culturally rich life (Alberta Education, 2012, p. 38).*

Sadly, the common theme of schools failing to meet the needs of the Metis people has persisted since 1938. The Transition Commission requested a comparative socio-demographic analysis of Alberta Metis settlements in May 1996. Overall, the results identified what many had known: fewer high school graduates, 35% of residents have no high school, versus 14% for rural Alberta, and fewer university graduates, with 1% Metis Settlement graduates versus 6% in all rural Alberta (Ross, 2020). When the data is examined at the community level, the projections

become more concerning regarding potential educational impacts on the broader scope of health, justice, economics, and living standards.

The Alberta Metis Settlements Socio-demographics Comparative Analysis, Transition Commission, 1996, provided details that deepened understanding of educational impacts for the Metis Settlements of Alberta. At the Settlement community level in December 1996 for the Kikino Metis Settlement, results showed that 37% of people had no high school diploma, compared with 9% of all Albertans. At the postsecondary level, 1% of people held a university degree, compared with 6% of all Albertans. Similarly, in the Elizabeth Metis Settlement, fewer residents had high school diplomas, with 30% having no diploma, compared with 14% in rural Alberta. Among postsecondary students, 1% had a university degree, compared with 6% of rural Albertans. In Fishing Lake, 32% of settlement residents lacked a high school diploma, compared with 14% in rural Alberta. The total number of people with a university degree was 1%, compared with 6% of Albertans. Paddle Prairie also showed a similar pattern of lower high school graduation rates, with 44% of residents lacking a high school diploma, compared with 9% among all Albertans. At the Peavine Settlement, 28% of adults had no high school diploma, compared with 14% of rural Albertans. As in other settlements with low rates of university graduates, the stats showed that 2% had a university degree, compared with 6% of Albertans. Overall averages in the December 1996 report showed that 27% of residents had no high school diploma, compared with 14% in the rest of rural Alberta. The total Settlement average was 35% of the adults had completed high school, and 1% of residents had a postsecondary degree. With a constant population living a consistent way of life, the Metis Settlements of Alberta looked to completion of a *2000 Future of the Metis Settlements of Alberta Demographic and Economic*

*Forecasting Study.* The study was prepared for the Metis Settlements General Council by the Aboriginal Economic Research Lendsay and Associates Saskatoon (n.d. context implies 2000).

The facts of settlement life and their correlation to education were astounding. There was a notable population increase, with indicators that employment would grow slowly by 0.9% per year. There was further indication that employment income would also grow slowly. The report stated that Settlement residents would have to become better educated to compete; even if their educational levels only gradually improve, they will increasingly be unable to find employment, and employment rates in the settlements will decline. When asked what must happen to improve things, the forecasting study had only one response: education. According to the 1996 census of Canada, fewer than 5% of settlement residents have a university degree, compared with 23% across Alberta. Also, settlement residents have disproportionately less than grade 9, with 22% versus 7.5% of total Albertans. Members and leaders of the Metis Settlements had an invested interest in education, educational attainment, and educational outcomes. As part of their intent to hold onto their lands, the people were equally determined to maintain their Metis Settlement cultural integrity, Metis Settlement history, and the languages that bound them to their First Nations families, as demonstrated in the following statement.

*The highest priority in 1997 is the children. The children must feel like winners. They must come and go through the school system and come out of the school system with a solid feeling of pride. Morris L'Hirondelle used to put it very beautifully, he would say, I feel good being Metis. If the children had the values that Morris, Richard, and Adrian had, Fred says that he wouldn't worry about anything. Everything else you can learn. Skills can be obtained, character you can't (Poitras-Snyder, 1997).*

Poor educational outcomes would continue to undermine economic, income, and employment opportunities, and community economic potential plans would rely on improving those educational outcomes. With limited voice on school boards and local leaders plagued by challenges to self-governance, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, they continued working to get basic services in place: water and sewer services in the settlements, extending water lines, setting up water reservoirs, and building water treatment plants in communities. Leaders were immersed in developing policies on membership, land, housing, and democratic governance. Training and education for counsellors, administrators, and water and sewer operators were underway as local leaders sought development and planning operations to bring funding into the communities.

### **Economic, Income, and Gender Employment Gaps**

EcoPlan International (2000) reviewed the Metis Settlements *Economic Viability Strategy (EVS) Final Report 2000*, summarizing fourteen studies that examined Settlement life and potentially compatible industries. Notes from a June 18-21, 2000 EVS conference revealed insights into Metis people being connected to distinct worldviews, traditions, and land as fundamental to identity and well-being. The notes indicated that 81.3% of surveyed settlement members agreed that it is essential to maintain traditional beliefs and way of life. Further notes indicated that participants were disheartened to see that, between 1995 and 1998, the number of Cree speakers declined from 14% to 10.6%. Additionally, the report identified cultural components indicating that 30% of members were active hunters, further supporting connections to the importance of traditions to Metis people. When youth were asked, this same report indicated that 70-80% held a desire to learn traditional values but lacked access, information, and opportunities. Further, participants were invited to share thoughts on future direction and how that would fit with education.

Participants outlined strategies that indicated the creation of traditional land use maps to support hunting, wildlife and berry gathering areas. It was also shared that 30% of females in the settlement were involved with traditional handicrafts with a noted desire to expand handicrafts and increase opportunities for all people. The following story is supported by the community voices who added to the *Life and Times of the Metis: A History of Caslan Metis Settlement*. It is shared here to bring understanding of Euro-western education policy that disrupted continuity of Metis cultural identity and the Metis people who held the value of education as an important right.

*As the families in the Settlement expanded and new settlers arrived in Caslan, the number of school-age children increased. Consequently, early in the decade a frame addition was attached to the original log school. A few years later, a portable classroom was also added to the school. In 1964, however the Settlement school was closed permanently. At that time the Metis branch was beginning to transfer some of its responsibilities to other government departments. The education of children in the Metis Settlements became the responsibility of the Department of Education. In 1964 the Caslan area was included in the Northland School Division: however, a year later it became part of the Lac La Biche School Division. Since 1964, children in the Buffalo Lake Metis Settlement have been bussed to the nearby school in the hamlet of Caslan, while junior and high school students have been commuting to Lac La Biche. To this day, Buffalo Lake Metis Settlement is the only Settlement with no school (Verbicky, 1984).*

Advocacy for education remained a priority by residents and leadership of the Metis areas.

Elmer Ghostkeeper, originally of Paddle Prairie, now living in Buffalo Lake Metis Settlement, has been a political activist for the Metis Settlements and served his time leading the

Federation of Metis Settlements. He was instrumental in the development of the Metis people's Statement on Aboriginal Rights in the Constitution of Canada title, *Metisism: A Canadian Identity*. The words on education within the document ring as true today as they did in 1982. Ghostkeeper, along with his team, wrote how the education system plays a major role in socializing children and shaping their identity. They believed the purpose of education should be to maximize the development of Metis children's individual aptitudes and skills to enable them to participate in Metis communities aiming at self-reliance. Ghostkeeper felt that the programs available in schools contribute to dropout rates and alienation no longer tolerable to Metis Settlements. It was felt the Metis communities in Alberta are entitled, at minimum, to an educational system which is supportive of their distinct history and culture. The leadership advocated for a school system that upgrades Metis traditions and would be consistent with the Metis right to cultural survival. Finally, it was felt by Ghostkeeper that if a culturally supportive educational system could not be obtained within the general public school system of the Province of Alberta, the Metis would have the right to establish autonomous schools for their children and obtain proper level of provincial financial support for that school system.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this section, I have brought forward authentic Metis Settlements of Alberta Indigenous knowledge I have learned through Metis colony people as relayed in stories, pictures, and memories. The experiences, initiatives, needs, and realities as they relate to education, are presented in a timeline, and are included as additional sources of information outside of peer-reviewed academic literature. Acknowledging the diversity of the early experiences is important to have as representation to understand and appreciate the Metis Settlement culture, history, and humanity of Metis peoples more fully. The timeline of events represents the cultural uniqueness

of the communities and supports their own literary practices for knowledge storage and retrieval through storytelling (Murray & Rice, 2013).

Chapter Three employs a traditional literature review format including a historical context of education in Canada, residential schools, school leader training, technology, and multimedia, and introduces the Indigenous Wholistic Theoretical Framework from which my research stems.

## CHAPTER 3: WEAVING THE LITERATURE VOICES

### Introduction

Despite historical challenges to equitable educational opportunities, the Metis Settlements of Alberta maintain the right to access, safeguard, revitalize, and promote the unique culture, language, and history of the Metis Settlements of Alberta as part of their identity, which the Alberta government tried so hard to dissolve. Education is key to realizing this right. Many determinants have impacted the will and determination of the Metis colony people. Section two of this chapter reviews the literature on the determinants of education in Canada's history and the impacts of residential schools and school leader practices, and outlines promising practices emerging from the literature. Additionally, findings within the literature that support understanding of Indigenous Knowledge systems, Indigenous research paradigm, Indigenous Wholistic Theoretical Frameworks, and storytelling methodology that inform this research will be discussed to support the research question that asks how storytelling and Metis Settlements Indigenous Knowledge can inform the development of an online module designed for K-12 school leaders who work in northern Alberta schools.

### Historical Context

Understanding the Canadian historical context of education is necessary to understand how knowledge and learning are connected to schooling. Schooling generally begins at around age five in Canada, a time when children are beginning to build concepts that define self and purpose in society (Alberta Education, 2008). For Indigenous children, the natural progression of self and purpose is disrupted because of differing purposes for education. This study required an understanding of the historical and current educational foundations of Indigenous peoples in

Canada and the holistic impacts of assimilation-oriented schooling systems, which include political, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects. Additionally, this research acknowledges the school leader as central to Indigenous communities today and that school leaders can have tremendous impacts on learning and how learning is carried out in schools. Marie Battiste is a Mi'kmaw educator whose scholarly work focuses on quality Indigenous education. She states that nourishing the learning spirit is what school leaders can do when they establish a sense of belonging within the school system (Battiste, 2013). Battiste's voice complements the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2013-2015 Final Report and the 94 Calls to Action on improving Indigenous education in Canada, as outlined in the following section.

The specific TRC call states, "Indigenous children and youth will search for their identities and places of belonging. They will take pride in their Indigenous roots and know why things are how they are today" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015a, p. 239). This vision for Canadian Indigenous education is documented in the Calls to Action outlined in the 2015 report. The vision outlines a way forward from the devastating history of Indigenous education manifested within colonialism and its series of assimilation policies. A quote by Eber Hampton, cited in Battiste (1995), summarized Canadian education policy as beginning with "the education of Indians by non-Indians using non-Indian methods" (p. 6). Scholars like Battiste and Hampton have since documented the need for Indigenous ownership and participation in learning, which motivates and underpins my research study.

Early Indigenous education scholars such as Verna Kirkness and Marie Battiste, provide foundational and historical context to Indigenous perspectives of education and knowledge. Kirkness (1999) explained how the land on which Indigenous children are raised is considered a classroom. Through this lens, Verna Kirkness (1999) has argued that learning is not

decontextualized; it is connected to all aspects of life through values such as respect, kindness, and humility. Hailing from the Fisher River Cree Nation in Manitoba, Kirkness advocates for policy change in education that includes the voices of the community in education decision-making. Kirkness further acknowledges the lack of cooperation among government systems in supporting land-based concepts, such as relatedness and interconnectedness, to support Indigenous learners and school-based outcomes.

Battiste (2013) explains that land-based concepts are critical to learning in Indigenous communities. She adds that land-based learning includes teaching all individuals how things fit together in their world through stories, songs, and dance. Battiste continues to outline foundational perspectives on Indigenous education and posits that knowledge teaching is inherent in our past and exists today through inherent and spiritual knowledge acquisition. She shares an example of the teachings of the moose hunt. Concepts of preparing moose for food, medicine, and clothing are interwoven with hunting, prepping, and storage skills and are learned in tandem with the value and meaning of the experience, expressed in the Indigenous language. Battiste (2013) advocates using stories to help Indigenous students learn effectively, and educators are responsible for sharing the value of interconnectedness with their students. Indigenous student learning and the value of interconnectedness are examples of essential learning outcomes training for all learning leaders. Indigenous pedagogy acknowledges the inherent presence of all concepts and objects. This reflects the principle of interconnectedness, an ontological state where being is defined by our relationship to all existence. Finally, Battiste and Kirkness hold that Indigenous people can and should value and maintain Indigenous education systems. In the following section, I will share the literature findings that entwine school leader development as an essential aspect of this work.

## **Historical Context of School Leadership Impacts**

It is challenging to convey to non-Indigenous learning leaders how Indigenous ways of knowing are the basis of leading. One reason for this is grounded in the social values and principles of implementation that defined the beginnings of education in Canada, as they are very different from those of the Indigenous peoples of Canada. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015b) outlines the trajectory of change in Europe from private and religious education toward public institutions to cultivate an industrious and orderly population. British colonial expansion into Canada mirrored European shifts, as settlers imported and enforced their own social values, specifically regarding private land ownership and the requirement for productive land use. Essentially, to bring a sense of certainty to the settler populace of Canada, education and education policy became the vehicle for assimilation under the guise of developing moral direction through the modernization of society which meant that all members of society were to add to the economy of Canada.

From the beginning of confederation, Canadian policy moved to educate Indigenous children by separating them from their families with the goal of assimilation (TRC, 2015b). Leaders within Indigenous communities were not informed of this decision and had no input into what the government was doing to their children. Eventually, leaders had to turn to the courts to regain at least some control over education. Dr. Linda Tuhiwai Smith is a scholar and researcher who has worked in and influenced Maori education. Her published works are foundational resources for critiquing relationships between dominant institutions and Indigenous Knowledge systems. In her work, Smith (1999) identified and demonstrated that Western paradigms of knowledge placed the individual at the center of the unit. Smith contrasts this with an Indigenous belief system in which the community is more important than individual placement in life. James

Youngblood Henderson (2000) is an Indigenous lawyer, advocate, and educator who reflected on Smith's Western paradigm representation of Indigenous knowledge. He added that Indigenous knowledge was viewed by colonizers and settlers as a commodity to be stolen and appropriated, thereby leading to suppressed Indigenous heritage and culture (Henderson, 2000). Examples of appropriation include contributions from traditional medicines, canoes, snowshoes, foods such as corn and wild rice, and health practices marketed for economic gain.

The concept of universal education, whereby dominant mainstream ideas are presented as methods to assimilate all who enter the system, further attempted to eliminate Indigeneity and thus became the focus of educational leadership and colonial governments. Eve Tuck, a member of the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island in Alaska, is a writer and scholar in the field of Indigenous studies and educational research. She is currently the James Weldon Johnson Professor of Indigenous Studies at New York University and researches with Wayne Yang, who identifies as an Asian American scholar of immigrant origin. Dr. Wayne Yang was a public-school teacher in the United States and now writes about decolonization, with an interest in urban settings as sites of settler colonialism. Tuck and Yang (2012) write that the dominance of mainstream ideology in education, aimed at assimilation, is an identifier of settler colonialism that manifests in successive education policies in Canada. Together, they argue that the suppression of cultural diversity has resulted in contention and challenges among educators regarding their current practices of embedding Indigenous perspectives in education.

Tuck and Yang (2012) assert that modern educational outcomes remain compartmentalized rather than interrelated. They argue that public education continues to uphold a universalist goal rooted in the social and moral values of early colonists, values that prioritize economically self-serving interests and assumed superiority of British culture. The subsequent

education of all children through this totalizing system has resulted in a class system among Canadians, with Indigenous peoples being relegated to the subordinate class (TRC, 2015b). The evidence of this class system was a deliberate strategy on the part of the government and did not represent the worldview held by Indigenous people. Modern school leadership training is often built upon an assimilationist ideology that socializes all candidates, whether of European, immigrant, or Indigenous descent, into a standardized, Eurocentric model of administration. Consequently, Indigenous researchers must continue to develop school leadership models that actively dismantle ideologies of British superiority and economic self-interest. These new systems must prioritize the core values of Indigenous communities, specifically by centering Indigenous Knowledge and relational ways of being.

Micheal Fullan is a former dean of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. His academic interests include field-based comprehensive system change and coping and thriving in complex societies. Fullan's (2023) published work focuses on school principals and that to be an effective and successful school leader, you need to connect teams, share leadership roles, and not be afraid to take risks. Battiste (1998) prefaced these leadership skills when she wrote about program development for school leaders to support knowledge and understanding and leaders being sensitive to social and equity issues, culture, history, and economic challenges of Indigenous schools and communities where they are located. Both scholars noted the need for professional development to support leadership development and discussed the role of leadership conferences for school leaders in building leadership knowledge and skills. A significant gap remains in the literature regarding the collaborative design of school leadership training between academic institutions and specific local Indigenous communities.

### **Present historical context**

Linda Tuhiwai Smith is a Maori scholar of education and critic of persistent colonialism in teaching and research. Her contributions to the literature regarding decolonizing methodologies are extensive (Smith, 1999; Smith, 2021; Smith et al., 2019). Throughout her work, Smith (1999) argues that analyzing the colonial experience is a vital starting point for Indigenous resistance. This analysis allows individuals to understand how imperialism systematically rearranged, represented, and redistributed Indigenous Knowledge to serve Western interests. In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Report released 94 Calls to Action, representing a significant opportunity for Canadian education systems to address colonization in Canada and its devastating impacts on Indigenous peoples. Within the Calls to Action are opportunities to implement Tuhiwai Smith's recommendations for individuals to seek understanding, specifically regarding the devastating impacts of the erasure of history, culture, and language. Also included is an ongoing history of negative relationships between Indigenous peoples and other Canadians. The Truth and Reconciliation report set out the need for "an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships" (TRC, 2015a, p.16). Ultimately, Tuhiwai Smith's framework for decolonization provides the theoretical foundation necessary for Canadian educators to move beyond the mere acknowledgement of history toward the active, respectful, relationship-building mandated by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

### **Residential schools**

The Truth and Reconciliation Report resulted from a five-year-long and Canada-wide inquiry into the Residential school system. It would be impossible to write about Indigenous learning in Canada and not address the lasting and damaging effects of residential schools; the

last one closed in 1996 (TRC, 2015). Lasting and damaging effects are directly linked to health and include poorer general health of Indigenous peoples, increased rates of chronic and infectious disease, negative impacts on mental and emotional well-being including mental distress, depression, addictions, and suicide.

Damage from residential schools systematically undermined Indigenous cultures, including the Metis, across Canada and destroyed generations of families by severing the relationships through which culture is taught and sustained, the culture and language of the local Indigenous families (Metis Nation of Alberta, 2004). Dr. Pamela Rose Toulouse is Ojibwe/Odawa and is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at Laurentian University. Dr. Toulouse has published over fifty resources and is well known for her contributions in Indigenous education. Representing her Nation and profession in a respectful and meaningful way is important for Dr. Toulouse as she maintains that residential schools upheld Canadian government policies for the gradual "civilization" of the Indian tribes in Canada and were relentless in their pursuit to convert Indigenous children to Christianity, strip them of their culture, values, and social behaviours, and to westernize them with no care or thought to value Indigenous needs and ways of knowing (Toulouse, 2018). Her words ring true in my own community.

Raised on the former St. Peter's Indian Reserve north of Winnipeg, Manitoba, the late former Senator, Calvin Murray Sinclair would go on to become a member of the Canadian Senate, a First Nations lawyer, and the chairman of the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission from 2009-2015. His publication titled, *Canada's Residential Schools: the Metis Experience* makes clear the intent of the Government of Canada to prioritize cultural assimilation of all Indigenous people into Euro-Canadian society (Sinclair, 2015).

Sinclair goes on to state that residential school education assumed superior Western civilization by ensuring that Indigenous children would be converted and uplifted in Canadian society by stripping them of their primitive culture, values, language, and social behaviours. Parental resistance to the compulsory attendance of residential schools led parents to hide their children from government officials. The children in residential schools did not receive the same education as the general population in the public system and continued up to 1996 when the last school was closed. Chronically underfunding, government officials recognized that the residential school system was financially unsustainable and failed to meet the intended goal of training and assimilating Indigenous children into European Canadian society. Subsequent extensive research into the residential school history has resulted in changed education policy directives despite Government claims that the residential schools were efforts to improve the educational attainment of Indigenous children for better health, better employment, and better livelihood. The government of Canada's reports and papers display a paternalistic tone and a continued stratified perspective on education and society despite the conflicting evidence gathered as part of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Sinclair, 2015).

Dr. Marie Battiste is Mi'kmaq and a member of the Potlotek First Nation. Her passion, research, and scholarly work focus on decolonizing education, knowledge systems and languages, and protecting Indigenous Knowledges. Dr. Battiste's work includes a review of the *Government of Canada's Statement on Indian policy* (Battiste, 1995). The Government statement outlined a vision for revising learning materials to address native stereotypes, including incorporating native studies into the regular curriculum, training Indigenous educators, and requiring native representation on school boards with high native student enrolment. Battiste (1995) noted that "the government of Canada had failed to implement the policy of 1973 as

intended" (p. xi). Battiste is referring to the Canadian government's policy on Indian education 1973 that emphasized the need to improve the quality of Indian education and the desirability of putting control of education into the hands of Indian society. Battiste (1995) recognizes the ongoing failure of educational institutions in not preparing school leaders to support the inclusion of Indigenous worldviews in school systems, thereby impacting generations of Indigenous people.

While the devastating impacts of residential schooling on Indigenous peoples have been widely documented, the specific experiences of Metis children within this system have often been less visible in both historical records and scholarly literature. The inconsistent policy framework governing Metis education meant that Metis children fell between federal and provincial jurisdictions, resulting in uneven access to schooling and limited documentation of their experiences with residential institutions. Recognizing this gap, Chartrand (2006) conducted a comprehensive review of the available literature examining Metis participation in residential schools. His analysis highlights how Metis children attended residential schools across Canada under a variety of circumstances, yet their experiences were frequently overlooked within broader discussions of the residential school system. Printing's work provides an important foundation for understanding how Metis children navigated an education system that simultaneously marginalized their identity and rendered their experiences largely invisible within official policy and historical narratives.

My research study aimed to contribute to the growing body of scholarship that supports school leaders in integrating Indigenous worldviews into school systems in ways that reflect local community contexts. Specifically, this research explored how Metis-specific Indigenous

Knowledge can inform the design of an online module for K-12 school leaders serving schools in northern Alberta.

### **Indigenous Knowledge Systems Inform and Shape Indigenous Theory**

#### *Indigenous Knowledge Systems Explained*

Indigenous Knowledge systems are integrated epistemological systems taught through Indigenous pedagogies that support an understanding of an interconnected world and our places and relationships within it (Battiste, 2013; Cajete, 2015; Kovach, 2021). Across the globe, there is no uniformity among Indigenous peoples, although there are some shared principles. Therefore, one cannot expect uniformity in how Indigenous Knowledges are conceptualized. Indigenous knowledge systems are as many and diverse as there are Indigenous communities. Understanding Indigenous knowledge systems begins to take shape in the ontology and epistemology of these diverse belief systems.

Jo-Ann Archibald is a former Associate Dean for Indigenous Education in Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia. A member of the Sowahlie First Nation, Dr. Archibald focuses her research on what she calls Indigenous storywork. Dr. Archibald worked closely with Elders and storytellers and established the importance of Indigenous oral narratives as sources. She shares how the Elders outlined the use of storytelling as a component of Indigenous Knowledge systems and as a tool for teaching. Archibald (2008) begins her description of Indigenous knowledge by grounding it in what she calls blood memory and heart knowledge. Archibald explains the importance of core knowledge that begins within oneself and extends outward into the community. Known as blood memory, stories are passed not just verbally but through connections of language, songs, spirituality, and teachings. The Elders are

the repositories of knowledge. Dr. Archibald compares the Elders' memories to a community library. Like a library, knowledge is stored in songs, chants, dances, ceremonies, and day-to-day and season-to-season activities, including hunting and gathering.

Indigenous Knowledge is maintained through lived experience rather than static storage. When this Knowledge is transmitted through Indigenous languages, whether sourced from traditional, empirical, or revealed origins, its vitality is ultimately dependent on the strength of shared relationships (Battiste, 2013). Battiste builds upon this definition of Indigenous Knowledge to include that knowledge is not secular; it is sacred, inherent, connected to all of nature, and is a lifelong responsibility. The study of knowledge is known as ontology in western research practice while epistemology discusses how the process of acquiring knowledge takes place. In turn, axiology discusses the values associated with the usefulness of the knowledge gained. In her conclusion of her foundational book, *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit*, Battiste (2013) asserts that Indigenous Knowledge teaches people to be responsible for their own lives, develop their sense of relationship, and model competent and respectful behaviour.

Values such as respect, responsiveness, and relevance are integral to personal integrity and collective responsibility. These align with the foundational framework of Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991), which identifies respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility as essential pillars for Indigenous education success. Tuhiwai Smith (2012) writes of the term respect to underscore the significance of reciprocal relationships.

Current scholarship in Indigenous education underscores the importance of leadership that values responsiveness, spiritual harmony, and collective knowledge. By integrating the work of Kovach (2009), Fiola (2015), and Wilson (2008), it becomes clear that Indigenous Theory

must be understood as a diverse and evolving framework centered on local community needs. Dr. Kovach's interests include Indigenous higher education and social justice approaches to education that can be achieved by cultivating educational leadership to respect an understanding of Indigenous Knowledge systems by valuing responsiveness, relevance, and service to others (2009).

Adding to the importance of Indigenous scholarship in Indigenous education, Dr. Chantal Fiola believes that Indigenous Knowledge systems are not static and have been adapting to the contemporary world since contact began and will continue to change. She further adds that spiritual connection brings harmony by aligning the inner being with the life flow of energy thus allowing one to let go of resistance and accept what is (Fiola, 2015). A commonality of Indigenous knowledge systems is the belief that knowledge is seen as belonging to the greater cosmos of which we are a part. Dr. Shawn Wilson's application of Indigenist philosophy within the context of Indigenous education has led him to describe Indigenous Knowledge system values as different from dominant paradigms that define Knowledge as individual in nature (Wilson, 2008). Together, the study of Indigenous Knowledges and the values that guide the knowledge come together to form Indigenous theory. In its many forms, Indigenous theory is as diverse as Indigenous people themselves and must consider local community. The following section describes Indigenous theory within my personal unique context.

### *Indigenous Wholistic Theory*

Indigenous peoples have worldviews and relational means of connecting to the world around them. This worldview understands that individuals are related and learn from all that surrounds them, including the land, water, air, fire, and all of creation. Dr. Kathy Absolon is from the Flying Post First Nations, with research interests that include Indigenous history,

decolonization and Indigenization, Indigenous holistic teaching, and Indigenous holistic professional development. Dr. Absolon advocates for Indigenous theory rooted within Indigenous epistemologies, worldviews, cultures, traditions, and ceremonies. She describes Indigenous Wholistic Theory as being multi-layered and encompassing spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical aspects of being. Surrounding these layers are the past, present, and future acknowledging generations that came before and those generations to come (Absolon, 2020).

Indigenous Wholistic Theory primarily provides a holistic, culturally appropriate transmission of information rooted in oral traditions. From a researcher's perspective, this approach offers an opportunity to be an active participant in the oral storytelling tradition. Wilson (2008) noted that Indigenous people in Canada recognize the importance of storytellers in sharing their lives and experiences through collective storytelling. Stories, as Wilson sees it, are filtered through the storyteller's experiences, thereby making the information relevant and specific to their lives. Others have written that Indigenous knowledge is personal, oral, experiential, and holistic, and can be conveyed through multiple communication modes, including narrative or metaphorical language (Battiste, 2013; Smith, 2021). Indigenous methodologists (Archibald, 2008; Battiste, 2000; Dion, 2022; Kimmerer, 2013; Kovach, 2009; Poitras Pratt & Bodnaresko, 2023; Quinless, 2022; Windchief & San Pedro, 2019; Wilson, 2008) have been articulating and honouring Indigenous Theory by centering Indigenous Knowledge in their research practices and mentorship. The work of Indigenous scholars has resulted in Indigenous Theory grounded in Indigenous epistemology, ontology, and axiology whereby scholarly knowledge has resulted in theoretical frameworks that substantiate, empower, and privilege Indigenous ways of knowing.

Indigenous Wholistic Theory is whole, cyclical, and relational. A variety of holistic representations of Indigenous knowledge, visually conceptualized to incorporate interrelationships of the individual, family, and community, are key components of the theory. Often the models depicted are circular, depicting relationships and continual processes. Models visually add elements of mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical dimensions that show how the family and land are interconnected and interrelated. Dr. Robin Wall Kimmerer, a citizen of the Potawatomi Nation, is a scientist and writer with interests that include restoration of relationships to land, and she echoes this Indigenous Wholistic Theory components by stating, “our relationship with land cannot heal until we hear its stories” (Kimmerer, 2013, p 9).

Taking theory to action requires understanding that colonialism continues to have profound impacts on Indigenous people today. Ensuring Indigenous epistemologies, worldviews, cultures, and traditions through respectful practice is instrumental to Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s (1999) holistic model with four storytelling directions: decolonizing, healing, transforming, and mobilizing. Each direction contains specific processes that Tuhiwai Smith (1999) named the 25 projects. These can be incorporated into research and leadership practices to promote balance and harmony, concepts reflected in the Cree principles of *kwayask kikway & miyo-wîcêhtowin*, as demonstrated in the work of Louie et al. (2017). Another Indigenous orienting example, as shared by Kovach (2021), presents four core foundations of an Indigenous theoretical framework. Like the four directions put forward by Absolon and Tuhiwai Smith, Kovach presents four directions that she names: Indigenous epistemology, Indigenous ethics, Indigenous community, including land and place, and the self. These core foundations are embedded in Cree *mamitoneyihcikan*, experience, and context thereby making Kovach’s model distinctive from other Euro-Western qualitative approaches and in line with Indigenous wholistic theoretical

values of being whole, cyclical, and relational. The models of Absolon, Tuhiwai Smith and Kovach, highlight reconciliation actions Indigenous researchers are valuing to create space for Indigenous research paradigms.

Increasing calls to decolonize research (Archibald et al., 2019; Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Smith et. al., 2019; Quinless, 2022) require continual reflective attention and action to implement Indigenous methods alone or in conjunction with appropriate Western methods when conducting research in Indigenous communities. Indigenous Research Theory applies an ethical framework and a way of knowing in research (Chilisa, 2020) that ensures research is not simply embedding Indigenous perspectives into non-Indigenous research paradigms. Topics on voice, representation, rights, and ownership in the knowledge production process are built into an Indigenous Theoretical Framework recognizing that there are as many Indigenous theoretical approaches as there are distinct Indigenous communities. As an Indigenous approach, a focus on relational voice and representation of those involved in the research extends from planning to stages of representation in the writing. Centering relational voice and representation is an essential Indigenous approach that spans the entire research process, from initial planning to the final stages of writing. As Chilisa (2020) articulates, this process requires aligning Indigenous Knowledge with research practice that explicitly and continually support the lives of Indigenous peoples.

International Indigenous scholars such as Chilisa are joining the Canadian First Peoples' voices of Battiste, Fiola, and Kovach to ensure that Knowledge itself is not the goal of research. Rather, Indigenous epistemology, ontology, and axiology ensure that the research is seen as worthy and ethical for the Indigenous people involved. Any research recommendations resulting from Indigenous Knowledge gained through formal research has to assist in positive social

change for the research participants. Storytelling is a foundational inquiry strategy in Indigenous research, frequently employed to cultivate authentic relationships and uphold relational accountability within the community.

Indigenous research methods emphasize the significance of being accountable through relationships and emphasize the need to anchor research within the local community context while upholding principles of respect, reciprocity, and responsibility. Fiola (2015), Kimmerer (2013), Kovach (2021), Poitras Pratt (2020), and Wilson (2008), are Indigenous scholars who write about the inherent relationship-building and relational accountability of story methods employed in the Indigenous research paradigm that are culturally resonant and welcoming to Indigenous people. Wilson (2008) explains how methodology is part of the Indigenous paradigm that guides the research and is based on the assumptions of ontology and epistemology; he calls this relational accountability the final destination in the research journey. Building on the methodology is what Wilson calls strategies of inquiry. A strategy of inquiry is a roadmap of how one will arrive at the research destination. Wilson (2008) claims that adding the strategy step to the research plan allows for changing methods to suit the situation best, referencing again, the importance of local context to guide the research process. Finally, methods are the techniques used to gather data. The beauty of story as method within the scope of Indigenous methodology is the way that the story honours the people themselves. As a Metis Settlement researcher, joining a growing dynamic of Indigenous researchers that are First Nations, Metis, and Inuit, I do not interpret the knowledge. My role is to listen and relay the story, allowing the listener to interpret it within their context. Poitras Pratt (2020) sums up this responsibility in her writing, "...stories belonged to the storytellers and, as such, should be viewed as their own interpretation of life events. The so-called truth of the matter was not up for debate as each person holds a

unique perspective around their own stories” (p. 72). Further details of the research methods will be provided in the upcoming methodology chapter.

Articulating an Indigenous theory that is culturally and methodologically appropriate carries much responsibility. Respect for Indigenous Knowledge shared by community Elders, Indigenous Knowledge Holders whether they are activists, artists, leaders, or academics, and Indigenous Knowledge Keepers, ones who hold and are taught to care for traditional knowledge and teachings, set the boundaries of what can be discussed publicly and shared in a public realm (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). Relationships are the social glue between self as a researcher, researcher and community, and researcher and individual. Within these relationships, the responsibility of the storyteller is to determine the Knowledge the community deems appropriate to share. In turn, it is the responsibility of the researcher to communicate, in their writing, these forms of Indigenous Knowledges both carefully and respectfully (Kovach, 2021).

There is a paradox between discussing Indigenous research theory and writing about it on a page. As scholars seek to identify the middle ground between the extremes of personal storytelling and published story writing, the only certainty is that there will be no identical understanding of the story and the spirit in which it was told (Kovach, 2021; Poitras Pratt, 2020). Many Indigenous people fear the loss of control that comes with someone else reproducing their words. This paradox exists because Indigenous Knowledge is inherently relational and oral, while academic research is traditionally extractive and text-based. Writing about a story on a page strips it of the spirit and context found in its oral telling, leading to a clash between Indigenous worldviews and Western academic standards. Challenges to Indigenous scholars include how to use the dominant discourse of print traditions while maintaining respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility for Indigenous knowledge (Kirkness & Barnhardt,

1991; Murray & Rice, 1999; Vowel, 2016). Scholars such as Murray and Rice wrote *Talking on the Page: Editing Aboriginal Oral Texts* (1999) to help support strategies for writers to address the challenges of respect and balance, in writing, within an Indigenous research paradigm.

Murray and Rice (1999) recommend the following strategies to support translation of oral narrative to text including using framing material to help the reader recreate the actual storytelling experience, provide more information about the writer's relation to the words and narratives, and provide more detail of the experiences listening and transcribing the story. Increasingly, writers are relying on the inclusion of original language text to feel more confident and supportive of upholding the spirit of the Knowledge and language in a literary way. Lessons learned from Murray and Rice additionally include the importance of self-identification and commitments to honouring the relationship between the Indigenous participants and the researcher. Learning from Indigenous scholars has led me to begin crafting my own statement that reflects my responsibilities as a Metis researcher. My statement identifies that it is my responsibility to be critically aware of how the language in research represents Metis Settlement perspectives on history, culture, and language revitalization. My responsibility extends to maintaining diligence in my writing and actions to avoid adding to Indigenous people's fear of losing control of their words in any medium. Murray and Rice (1999) emphasize the severe consequences of failing to follow ethical guidelines when editing Indigenous oral texts. They argue that this loss of narrative control has led to dire legal ramifications in government and court documents, ultimately resulting in the systemic erosion of Indigenous history, culture, and language (Murray & Rice, 1999).

The following section explores some of the available literature relative to Indigenous theoretical understandings on leadership and Indigenous Knowledge in terms of technology and

online knowledge. The section begins with a review of a Western paradigm of educational leadership development and leads into Indigenous perspectives on leadership development. Exploration of literature linking Indigenous Knowledge and technology use to engage communities is also examined. Ultimately, this review positions educational leadership as a catalyst for digital sovereignty, illustrating how leaders can harness online tools to amplify Indigenous voices while remaining deeply rooted in the relational protocols of their local communities.

### **Western paradigms of educational leadership**

A review of education literature revealed insights into Indigenous school leader practice. Learning from the experiences and practices of school leaders serving Indigenous learners may offer insight into educator practices that may be harmful to Indigenous children and their learning. The literature I reviewed demonstrated that Western training approaches for educational leadership preparation used constructs derived primarily from a Western paradigm (Henderson, Carjuzaa, & Ruff, 2015). Eurocentric paradigms impose thinking processes that result in students and wider society thinking and living categorically rather than relationally (Ormiston, 2012). Categorical thinking encourages the exaggeration of differences across category boundaries, which often leads to stereotyping of others. In turn, this mindset creates arbitrary thresholds for decision-making and results in inaccurate conclusions. Ormiston further writes that imposing Eurocentric paradigms on children has resulted in misplaced societal views where the purpose of education for all is a trajectory toward individual economic gain and self-empowerment. In other words, public education does not serve Indigenous learner needs. Battiste (2013) responds to this Eurocentric purpose of education and states that self-gain and self-empowerment oppose the community well-being priorities held by Indigenous people. In their

research into nation-building, Abu-Saad and Champagne (2006) wrote that nation-building is accomplished partly through educational institutions that prepare students to obtain common cultural ground and values that support the technical, social, cultural, and political goals of the nation-state. This nation-state view of education has been perpetuated in Canada since 1846 when Egerton Ryerson drafted a bill that became the Common School Act (Robson, 2019). Categorical thinking has resulted in the education system suppressing and compressing Indigenous people in Canadian society. In contrast, Indigenous researchers advocate for relational thinking to preserve and protect communal knowledge. This shift ensures that educational purposes are meaningfully aligned with Indigenous epistemologies and ways of being.

### **Indigenous Paradigms and Educational Leadership**

In practice, Indigenous paradigms are as diverse as the nations themselves, requiring school leaders to move beyond standardized models and adopt place-based leadership that responds to the specific cultural protocols of the local community. In an Indigenous context, Knowledge is not merely a collection of data; it must be authentically lived and communalized through actions that demonstrate personal integrity and service to the collective.

“The ways of Indigenous research are as old as the hills and the valleys, the mountains and the seas, and the deserts and the lakes that Indigenous people bind themselves to as their places of belonging. It is not that Indigenous people are anti-research. They have always conducted research” (Mertens, Cram, Chilisa, 2013, p. 11).

The following section of the literature review highlights lessons learned from Indigenous researchers from across the world. Written in published books and articles, themes of values,

community, and culture portray the importance of collaborative approaches and relationship-building to reveal the interrelationships between Indigenous paradigms and educational leadership.

### *Values-Based Leadership in Indigenous Education*

Indigeneity and ontology can be understood by critically examining values. Dennis Foley is an Australian professor whose area of expertise includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies, and he writes that colonization and assimilation policies have negatively influenced leadership value structures that support Indigenous learning. Foley (2010) asserted that in addition to being linked to values and beliefs, Indigenous leadership has an established code of conduct, acceptable and invisible norms, and allows communication of expectations. Foley further states that approaches embedded in leadership relationships form the foundation of Indigenous educational leadership. These leadership relationship approaches are reflected in the ideas presented by other scholars such as Margie Hohepa, who is a New Zealand education academic, and Marie Battiste who is a Mi'kmaq professor who began her career with a teaching degree. Both have expressed the view that Indigenous educational leaders should work within leadership systems guided by Indigenous knowledge, values, and practices (Hohepa, 2013; Battiste, 2013). This position is well-supported by contemporary Indigenous scholarship, which increasingly argues that successful educational outcomes are contingent upon leadership frameworks that are culturally congruent and community led.

### *Community Affiliation and the Development of Metis School Leaders*

The community context of education, affiliation, and affection has influenced the development of leadership skills of Indigenous leaders (Cajete, 2015). According to Gregory Cajete, affection for family, community affiliation, and Indigenous culture informed Indigenous

forms of education proving to be foundational for dynamic and multi-contextual processes of the development of community leaders. By valuing the communal traditions and historical insights of Metis leadership, we can create a collaborative path forward for the development of future educational leaders that remain rooted in community identity. Cajete (2015) explores the role of culture and community from a perspective of what he calls transformational teaching and learning in the context of community. Indigenous researchers, Rosemary Morin and Pam Toulouse focus on school culture, instructional leadership, and policy development. Their studies have expressed the need for school leaders to understand their communities, commit to ongoing conversations within their communities, and be ready to respond to community needs (Morin, 2016; Toulouse, 2018). It is further argued that educational leadership must play a critical role in Indigenous student learning outcomes (Hohepa, 2013).

### *The Cultural Interface*

Indigenous school leadership is defined not by a formal position, but by a dynamic cultural and personal process. This journey elevates individuals who demonstrate cultural fluency, integrity, and fairness, prioritizing the needs of families and communities above their own. Community Indigenous school leadership is something that must be earned in the eyes of the people and evolves over years of demonstrated work and service to the community (Cajete, 2015; Hohepa, 2013). Māori researcher, Margie Hohepa writes that educational leaders must be knowledgeable in implementing cultural preferences in appropriate spaces (Hohepa, 2013). Focusing her research on how Indigenous leadership exists alongside educational leadership, Hohepa's studies explored the tensions between generic aspects of leadership and distinctive features of Maori leadership. Tuhiwai Smith provided the broad methodological and political foundation for Indigenous research, which in turn, allowed Hohepa to develop the Indigeneity

rights paradigm in education, emphasizing that leadership must span beyond administrative duties to involve deep community engagement (Hohepa, 2013).

Relational spaces and identity are important considerations when examining leadership within Indigenous educational contexts (Wilson, 2008; Donald, 2009). School leaders may be Indigenous or non-Indigenous and may work within Indigenous or non-Indigenous communities and schools. Because Indigenous education is grounded in relationships among people, land, Knowledge systems, and community responsibilities, a relational framework is more appropriate than multicultural or intercultural models that primarily emphasize cultural diversity rather than relational accountability. In many public education settings, school leaders operate within multicultural environments that are not necessarily Indigenous community-based spaces and may serve relatively small Indigenous populations. As a result, leadership approaches must be responsive to the relational dynamics of the communities they serve.

Research on Indigenous leadership in other contexts further illustrates the importance of relational approaches. For example, the community resilience model developed by d'Arbon et al. (2009) in Australia highlights how Indigenous leaders can successfully navigate mainstream education systems while maintaining their cultural identity. Their work emphasizes that resilience-based leadership involves strengthening local capacity and community capability through cooperative relationships. Central to this approach is the recognition that leadership must be grounded in local contexts. Similarly, in Canada, Indigenous scholars emphasize that there is no pan-Indigenous model for leadership or education. Each Indigenous community holds distinct cultural Knowledge, governance structures, and relational responsibilities that shape educational leadership practices (Archibald, 2008).

This emphasis on relational accountability and locally grounded leadership frameworks highlights the importance of values, community, and culture in shaping Indigenous approaches to educational leadership. Concepts of values, community, and culture grounded in community are associated with Indigenous leadership. Dr. Simon Blakesley is a retired educator who spent over thirty-one years in public education. He is an educational researcher who conducted educational leadership studies in Canada's Yukon Territory and stated that Indigenous school leadership is rooted in the values of a school leader's community and addressing tensions outright within relational contexts supports navigating policy driven complexity (Blakesley, 2008). Blakesley writes about the importance of understand the policy contexts in which educational leadership is embedded and how those policy contexts are shaped by Indigenous/Western history. Educational policy also shapes the structures of schools and what is taught, the languages of instruction, who can be hired as teachers, how and when teaching can occur, treatment of students, and a myriad of facets of school operations (Blakesley, 2010). Rethinking, in partnerships with families, supports balance and, to this end, micro-level strategies include discussions about teaching and learning, what constitutes education, mediating tensions found at the intersection of policy and community and parental desires for their children Essential to a leadership style is balancing continuous learning between leaders and communities and how well an educational leader understands their community, engages in dialogue, and responds to community needs (d'Arbon et al., 2009). Indigenous leadership paradigms acknowledge values and beliefs rooted in culture as a necessary element underlying the valuing of Indigenous communities.

Leadership within an Indigenous education context is difficult to define. What is available in the current Indigenous education leadership literature focuses primarily on unequal power relationships over schools, communities, and individuals. A complex number of variables

impact understanding when resource allocation, recruitment of staff, professional development, community relations, and competing curriculum outcome goals, are involved. Anishinaabe scholar and current President of the First Nations University in Saskatchewan, Dr. Jacqueline Ottmann (2005) describes Indigenous educational leadership development as a lifelong process that begins with childhood encouragement and guidance from family and Elders. She believes that the shared values and beliefs of the community shape future leaders. Ottman identifies a wise practice approach to successful school leader evolution as being both personal and professional. She explains that successful school leaders recognize how physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual well-being drive motivation. This holistic awareness fosters a commitment to a common cause and a shared desire for collective flourishing and systemic change.

This clear distinction between a deficit-based Western approach, which focuses on institutional challenges, and an Indigenous leadership paradigm, which prioritizes identifying strengths and charting a path forward, sets the tone for the following section.

### **Promising practices for Indigenous education and Indigenous knowledge**

The urgent need for improved practices in Indigenous education stems from entrenched teacher education programs, inadequate school leadership training, and the persistence of rigid colonial institutional policies. Sanford et al. (2012) examined teacher education programs globally, noting that despite minor adjustments, the underlying philosophies have not shifted significantly. These programs continue to reflect hegemonic Euro-American values built over hierarchical models that privilege Eurocentric expert knowledge over other ways of knowing. Growing gaps in education outcomes between Indigenous and their non-Indigenous peers have resulted in an identified need to support school leader efficacy in implementing Indigenous

perspectives into the curriculum (Barnhardt, 2007; Deer, 2013; Kanu, 2011). Battiste (2011) added that disconnected curricula, lack of good quality teaching resources, and misuse of resources were identifiable areas to begin working to effect positive educational change for Indigenous learners (Battiste, 2011). Battiste further challenged non-Indigenous school leaders to take responsibility and unlearn and relearn what it means to embed Indigenous perspectives with meaningful and constructive partner relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Kanu (2011) stated that the benefits of the co-existence of perspectives would include increased school leader understanding of intercultural connectedness, respect and appreciation for Indigenous cultures, and awareness of Indigenous injustice in education. Further research is required to support how this unlearning and relearning could be contextualized with local Indigenous communities. A closer look at the literature reveals some promising practices for meaningful and constructive education relationships that focus on integrating Indigenous perspectives utilizing new school leadership research approaches.

Higher education Indigenous practitioners, Louie et al. (2017) published a case study advocating for the 25 Indigenous Projects, presented by Smith (1999) in her book *Decolonizing Methodologies*, to be translated into Indigenizing pedagogy. These University faculty members and teacher educators were seeking strategies to deepen Indigenizing pedagogy in Alberta classrooms. The 25 projects in Figure 3 below serve as more than just a list; they provide a methodological and pedagogical framework for moving from colonial critique to decolonial action. The authors proposed that the 25 projects could influence university student instruction, evaluation, instructional design, and research at the university level, but could also be brought into the K-12 environment. Additionally, the research conducted by the authors demonstrated impacts on practice, including reflection to develop identity and leadership, negotiation of

collaboratively assigned grades, and use of storytelling to create space where individual perspectives are honoured. Each of these examples is potentially enabling for practicing school leaders.

Other researchers, such as Susan Dion, specialize in Indigenous issues in education. Identifying as a Lenape-Potawatomi scholar with Irish-Quebecois ancestry, Dion noted the attitudes and perceptions of school leaders and advocated for schools to be the sites for producing and reproducing Indigenous ways of knowing. Dion (2007) presented a quantitative case study of her ten years of practice. Dion asserts that neglecting school leader efficacy in Indigenous education allows non-Indigenous people to maintain a colonial resistance. This resistance is often masked by the ‘imaginary Indian’, a stereotypical construction that replaces real Indigenous people, and the ‘perfect stranger’ identity. This stance allows settler educators to claim they simply do not know enough to engage, thereby excusing themselves from the responsibility of social and educational change. Dion defines the imaginary Indian as a fictionalized identity constructed by the non-Indigenous gaze. This trope is frequently reinforced through art, movies, advertising, and in the press, serving to replace contemporary Indigenous realities with stereotypical caricatures.

There is an urgent need to improve and promote Indigenous education in public schools, and perpetuating capacity for resistance will impede the progress of culturally responsive practice. Verna St. Denis, of Cree and Metis descent, has an extensive background as a teacher, researcher, and scholar working to combat anti-Indigenous racism. Her promising practices aim to push back on the totalizing resistance of mainstream education using collaborative inquiry and other pedagogical practices as shared in this section. The reflective practice in research yields practical applications toward decolonizing and indigenizing methods.

**Figure 3***Tuhiwai Smith's 25 Indigenous Projects*

Claiming	Testimonies	Story Telling	Celebrating Survival	Remembering
Indigenizing	Revitalizing	Connecting	Reading	Writing
Representing	Intervening	Gendering	Envisioning	Reframing
Restoring	Returning	Democratizing	Networking	Naming
Protecting	Creating	Negotiating	Discovering	Sharing

As Indigenous scholars like Battiste, Ottmann, and St. Denis focus on developing and implementing Indigenous approaches in education, the scholarly conversation is truly moving away from deficit thinking in regard to Indigenous education towards exploratory, relational, and collaborative approaches for Indigenous education opportunities. Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) wrote that it is time to move beyond Indigenous education discussions about graduation rates and retention and as a promising practice, recommend an approach embedded in culturally appropriate principles would be more respectful and results-oriented in regard to Indigenous languages and cultures. Kirkness and Barnhardt further identified respect, responsibility, relevance, and reciprocity as ethical principles that when used together, show how the diversity of Indigenous understandings of place, language, and cultures relates to the individual, the school leader, and the community.

Developing conscious cultural awareness allows leadership to move toward a pro-race culture, one that actively recognizes and values racial identity rather than ignoring it (O'Dowd, 2010). A Wiradjuri scholar, she conducted an experiential analysis using action-based research for two different preservice teacher cohort groups over two years. At the conclusion of the

research, it was found that culturally appropriate principles were to be ethically situated as a learning strategy that would foster greater learner engagement and an expressed awareness to be agents of social justice. O'Dowd found that the criticalness of non-Indigenous educators to appreciate and engage with the issues of Indigenous colonial history and be aware of colonial implications is promising transformative practice for educators. The promising practice resulting from O'Dowd's research focuses on theoretical and reflective analysis of life experiences through conversations as a strategy to influence understanding of what constitutes racism toward Indigenous people and shapes views of what it means to be racist (O'Dowd, 2010). O'Dowd's pro-race culture is the direct antidote to the perfect stranger as it provides a 'how to' for leaders to step out of their silence and into collaborative relationships with the Metis Settlements.

### **Experiential Learning and Agency**

Indigenous Knowledge and thought are inherently tied to experiential learning, which fosters a sense of personal agency and the capacity to direct one's own thoughts and behaviours (Battiste, 2013). In this context, experiential learning and agency are essential to the delivery of Indigenous Knowledges, as they allow learners to embody the wisdom they acquire through active engagement. The delivery of Knowledge is primarily oral, symbolic and transmitted through generations within channels of history, culture, and language. Modeling, practice, and actions rather than written practices are examples of experiential learning and agency in action (Battiste, 2013). Indigenous scholars (Patel, 2021; Poitras Pratt, 2020; Wemigwans, 2018) identify that an experiential approach to learning is an effective method for Indigenous learners. A deeper awareness and understanding of the learner's cultural backgrounds, life experiences, and connections to the community are foundational for appropriate pedagogical approaches that will increase the potential to connect learners, their community, and the learning process. In their

2017 study, Ridgeway and Guntarik established a co-creative archival framework, transferring editorial and structural control to Indigenous participants through mobile technology and digital storytelling. This approach facilitated cultural sovereignty by enabling participants to curate their own narratives, reclaim significant sites, and act as primary authors in the digital archive. Results from Ridgeway and Guntarik's (2017) work noted that while technology cannot replace the physical experience of being on the land, it serves as a powerful medium for cultural respect, intergenerational knowledge transmission, and thoughtful reflection. By sharing narrative authority, their study demonstrated how digital tools can empower Indigenous participants to reclaim their place-based histories and assert their own truths. As a communicative tool, there are promising practices of Indigenous socio-technological self-determination (Funk & Guthadjaka, 2020; Ridgeway & Guntarik, 2017,).

### **Technology and Online Indigenous Knowledge**

Digital technologies are being used to document and preserve Indigenous knowledge (Loewen et al., 2018; Poitras Pratt, 2020; Robin, 2021; Thumbadoo and Taylor, 2022). The educational history of the Metis Settlements of Alberta presented in the previous chapter shows the lack of equality in educational opportunities for Metis living in the settlements. Community members resident in Metis Settlements across Alberta community are often limited or excluded from online environments as both consumers and producers of knowledge. This is known as a digital divide. This exclusion is partly due to a lack of consistent access to the tools to process knowledge transmission and resource support offered by the internet and technology. Further, Indigenous communities are suspicious that Indigenous knowledge represented through digital practices and online spaces risks misrepresentation and appropriation by those who seek to extract, commodify, or academize cultural data without communal consent (Murray & Rice,

2013; Wemigwans, 2018). These potential misrepresentations and appropriations perpetuate negative Indigenous stereotypes and deficit thinking about Indigenous history, culture, and language. There is, therefore, a need to explore and resolve this digital divide to identify critical areas, including history, culture, and language revitalization, in which technology could play a vital role in aiding the Metis Settlements of Alberta communities in these efforts. More research needs to be carried out by or with Indigenous peoples on how Indigenous people view and use technology, identify purpose, and impacts on Indigenous revitalization efforts including digital access, experiential learning, agency, storytelling, and mobile technologies.

### *Access*

Technology is much more than devices and machines; it is the result of practical applied knowledge, skills, and networks that are continually evolving, fluid, and context-dependent (Meighan, 2021). This is evidenced by the E-Index Readiness project (2010), which presented technology not as a static tool but as a dynamic framework for assessing and enhancing the settlement's digital capacity and community readiness. Alignment with Meighan's (2021) research supports an understanding of technology as a network of skills rather than just a collection of hardware. Meighan (2021) describes the initial types and stages of technology beginning with facilitation technologies that include guns, agriculture machinery and tools. Following this initial stage is communication technologies which include writing systems, telephone, typewriter, computer, and television. The relationship aspect of these two levels includes local environment with an individual or group, followed by a mass audience with the communications technology stage. She goes on to describe the evolution aspects as facilitation and communication respectively. These stages are evident in the memories of Kikino Elder, Ray Bellerose. "In 1967, Mr. Ray Bellerose purchased the first television in the settlement of Kikino

and willingly opened his home to others who wanted to watch it” (Miller, 1984, p.40). In stark contrast, television was introduced to the general Alberta population in 1954 (Zdeb, 2015).

From the introduction of the first television in the Settlement to foundational initiatives like the E-Index Readiness Project (2010), research into digital capacity within the Metis Settlements has continued to evolve. This study expands on those early findings by integrating data from the Northern Alberta Broadband Preparedness Project (2017), which documented a persistent digital divide in northern regions. The resulting online module is specifically designed to bridge this gap, equipping leaders with the cultural and technical efficacy required to support Metis-led educational leadership in a modern infrastructure context.

Meighan’s (2021) framework outlines the evolution from stage one and two representing pre-digital foundations of technology such as guns and hand tools to writing implements, and television. The third stage is defined by Web 1.0 digital and online technologies. Characterized by devices such as cell phones, this stage focuses on the transmission of digital information to a mass audience (Meighan, 2021). Taylor Warwick Consulting Limited was contracted in the mid-2000s to develop strategic plans to increase broadband. The consulting company identified the four Eastern Metis Settlements of Buffalo Lake, Elizabeth, Fishing Lake, and Kikino as contained in the Northern Alberta Information HUB Ltd. Three of the western settlements, East Prairie, Gift Lake, and Peavine are in the Lesser Slave Lake Economic Alliance. These three eastern settlements were also identified to be contained in the Peace River Economic Development alliance area. Paddle Prairie Metis Settlement is contained within the Regional Economic Development Initiative for Northwest Alberta. The communities needed to understand their connectivity to identify and bridge the digital gap that was rapidly expanding between the Metis Settlements and urban centers. By establishing a baseline of connectivity, the community

leadership could better advocate for the infrastructure necessary to support educational equity and cultural preservation. The data contained within the report was used to present a baseline of connectivity for the Metis Settlements of Alberta to better understand the rapidly evolving landscape and the influence of digital and online technologies for the Metis people in the North.

A brief synopsis of the Provincial broadband preparedness report where the Metis Settlements are located, within the scope of their identified group area, held standard components of planning to increase broadband to address quality of life, and economic growth beyond 2017. Details were scant regarding specific community detail regarding individual Settlement plans for technology and training. Plans were at an early stage and addressed topics of networking fibre-optic cables and wireless connections to improve access in urban downtown centers and in rural communities in that order. The report noted that all provincial areas indicate grant funding as the financial source for their growth plans inciting a competition for grant dollars. The individual Metis Settlements did not have the capacity to write competitive grants at that time. Noted within the report was that all Settlements had access to the SuperNet and the existing fiber routes pass close to several fixed wireless towers. The Alberta provincial report highlighted the continued need for strong community collaboration to strengthen access to grant funding. Internet access is a provincial responsibility and ongoing jurisdictional access to funding dollars for the Metis Settlements and First Nations areas raised concerns for Indigenous leaders (Northern Alberta Development Council, 2017). With increased access to the internet, Metis Settlement members had a new medium to tell stories. Multimedia and storytelling opened a new genre for individuals to explore its potential uses to support Indigenous knowledge (Poitras Pratt, 2020).

### *Multimedia and Storytelling*

Literature indicates that while digital platforms can include Indigenous content, they often perpetuate Euro-Western framing of knowledge as property. This includes the use of materials that follow Western pedagogies, the ownership of digital sites, and issues regarding data sharing and storage, all of which reinforce the myth that Indigenous Knowledge is inferior to Euro-Western knowledge (Funk & Guthadjaka, 2020; Meighan, 2021). Additional early media studies such as, *Cultural Nerve Gas*, (Barclay, 1990) describe the entry of television into Indigenous homes as a bomb because it destroyed their culture by imposing Western values and narratives. As digital platforms aggregate knowledge based on data collection models not immersed in culturally responsive practices, a highlighted need emerges for Indigenous people to contribute to the ongoing decolonization of digital landscapes (Meighan, 2021; Sam et al., 2021). How digital designs manage information as content can also conflict with how information is used in Indigenous contexts and embedded in ancestral and spiritual relations. Some scholars describe how, through their design, open platforms digitally colonize information by creating illusions of inclusion such as Moodle, Blackboard, and Canvas. The reality is that designs are conditions of exclusion due to digital platforms being structured with Western knowledge and reliant on English language proficiency (Funk & Guthadjaka, 2020; Kwet, 2019; Open University, 2019).

Despite the above-noted challenges, digital devices and platforms are promoted to help support the revitalization and restoration of Indigenous history, culture, and languages by ensuring a long-term digital memory of them. However, the virtue of the Western notion of possession based on individual property rights and content housed in an unknown 'cloud' is in opposition to collective rights and embodied knowledge based on ancestral connections, within

Indigenous communities. In this dissertation, knowledge refers to the authority and role of local Indigenous Knowledge Holders and Keepers to maintain and transmit knowledge to others and the exclusive rights a person may have to talk about specific knowledge (Kovach, 2021; Poitras Pratt, 2020; Wilson, 2008).

Following facilitation, communication, and Web 1.0 technologies eras is Web 2.0. Web 2.0 references digital and online technologies that include social media, smartphones, video games, broadband, and Cloud. The shift from the early eras to Web 2.0 included a move away from top-down, one-way communication directed at passive audiences toward interactive, user-driven environments. In this context, digital negotiations signify that meaning and content are now co-created, allowing users to actively shape digital spaces. A short five years following inception of Web 2.0 came Web 3.0 which includes next generation digital and online technologies including augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and blockchain. Relationships within this era include peer-to-peer and mass audiences with an evolution focused on digital creation (Meighan, 2021).

To better understand the relationships involved in technology today we can learn from Paulo Freire (1970), an educator and philosopher who outlined education as the “organized, systematized, and developed re-presentation to individuals of the things they want to know more about” (p. 93). Freire states that when there is no respect for a particular view of the world, this narrowed view becomes what he calls cultural invasion. Freire proposed an approach to learning where the student becomes an active agent in their own education. In the context of Indigenous media and knowledge systems, when Indigenous communities reclaim the authority to determine how their Knowledge is shared, they can prevent the external exploitation and cultural invasion often imposed by Western systems. The knowledge authority characterizes the responsible

dissemination at the right time, to the right audience, for the right reason, determined by Indigenous peoples themselves (Funk & Guthadjaka, 2020; UNDRIP, 2007). In the digital era, this means that Indigenous people themselves should author Indigenous content. A local context will ensure that processes and protocols locally established will be adhered to and valued. Engagement and collaboration are welcome, but the vested authority over the production of those resources lies in Indigenous hands, embedded in specific social contexts (Poitras Pratt, 2020). Storytelling now becomes an effective and accepted method for knowledge authority and is inclusive of digital storytelling.

Founded in 1994 by Joe Lambert, Dana Atchley, and Nina Mullen, the Center for Digital Storytelling, was the first to formalize a model of digital storytelling (Lambert & Hessler, 2018). Digital storytelling combines text, images, voice-over narration, and audio (Barrett et al., 2017). Sam et al. (2021) assert that digital storytelling allows learners to work with others, share, and listen to stories through a tapestry of local voices to create localized narratives and community experiences. Robin (2021) writes of digital storytelling elements that include emotional content, the gift of the teller's voice, and economy, which is meant to raise awareness of a topic, personalize context, and consider how much content is required to tell the story effectively. There is a need for teaching and learning approaches that allow for expression and agency for Indigenous people to tell their own stories and set right the historical record. For the Metis Settlements of Alberta, Indigenous digital storytelling is a potentially powerful tool for social impact as it sets out specific community priorities and viewpoints (Poitras Pratt, 2020; Sam et al., 2021).

The Metis Settlements of Alberta are rural and remote communities and lack consistent and adequate internet access. Information delivery using an inexpensive mobile device or app is

a good option (Loewen et al., 2018). Other researchers, such as Poitras Pratt (2020) and Wemigwans (2018), share how digital storytelling as a methodology works well with Indigenous people as it allows for teaching and learning to occur in an environment that is familiar and safe. Additionally, mobile devices may provide community members with access to these materials while remaining in their community (Loewen et al., 2018). Loewen et al. (2018) presented a framework with five phases: knowledge gathering, knowledge building, learning design, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) implementation, and tool creation. In their case study, the researchers prepared a prototype and gathered digital stories from various sources such as audio, video, and image files and entered the stories into a digital story repository with a curriculum. The digital stories were then converted to learning objects including music, plays, podcasts, and website development, allowing for reusability. During ICT implementation, the researchers looked closer at chosen tools, and mobile devices were identified as useful tools in gathering knowledge and increasing opportunities for place-based learning. Additionally, the same researchers noted that web-based and mobile interfaces were created in the tool creation phase to allow for knowledge input and access.

By harnessing digital practices, Indigenous people can rewrite dominant narratives, asserting their truths of the past, present, and future. Indigenous people recognize a responsibility to the global community to share collective truths and experiences. As Indigenous people join a surge around the globe to remember prayers, songs, languages, history, teachings, and the deepest wisdom and understanding, they are commanding respect as *wahkohtowin*, all our relations, come together. Dr. Brenda Manuelito is from the Towering House Clan with ancestral ties to the Navajo Nation. Her dissertation focused on creating space for an Indigenous approach to digital storytelling. Dr. Manuelito describes survivance as, in addition to critiquing colonial

encounters, Indigenous peoples' motivations for resurgence are oriented towards building and envisioning liberation and sovereignty for Indigenous people and communities (Manuelito, 2015). Describing liberation as collective means that the process of being free from another's control is dependent on all members of the group being freed. One person freed is not collective liberation. In speaking of sovereignty, Dr. Manuelito describes sovereignty arising from Indigenous Knowledge that is belonging to each Indigenous community.

More research is needed to understand how Indigenous promotion for language use in everyday social contexts such as education systems, how to center community needs rather than set goals, and identifying technology use that is responsive to the local Indigenous community in a manner that fosters relationships. In their conclusion, Loewen et al. (2018) clearly establish that the use of digital tools allows Indigenous communities to revitalize their history, culture, and languages by breaking habits of algorithmic, linguistic, and technological colonization. Examples of broken habits include using voice recognition software to bridge the English use base of the internet and using cellphones to record, film, and connect to the internet (Meighan, 2021).

Indigenous storytelling has provided opportunities to create relationships with self, others in the community, Elders, Knowledge Holders and Keepers, and youth. Metis scholar Yvonne Poitras Pratt (2020) documented how Metis youth and Elders in her home community of Fishing Lake Metis Settlement leveraged digital stories about their history and culture through a decolonizing ethnography. What is meaningful in this type of research is the demonstrated intergenerational exchange that is foundational to Indigenous Knowledge and, thereby, to Indigenous research.

In addition to social justice efforts and nurturing local community intergenerational relationships, digital storytelling is also an effective pedagogical tool for engaging Indigenous learners. As a pedagogical tool, digital storytelling creates a supportive environment and a culturally relevant approach to providing personal and cultural expression. In their study, Sam et al. (2021) described a project in which preservice teachers co-created an Open Educational Resource (OER) known as the *Grease Trail Digital Storytelling Project*. The purpose of this educational resource is to enhance the preservation and accessibility of Indigenous histories, stories, and memories embedded in local landscapes. Guided by the Four R's (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991), Sam et al. (2021) documented an Indigenous-led approach to digital storytelling that emphasizes the ethical relationality championed by Dion (2022), Fiola (2021), and Kovach (2021). Respect was enacted by prioritizing local Indigenous Knowledge systems, a process Kovach (2021) describes as anchoring research in Indigenous epistemology to honour the cultural integrity of the community. Relevance ensured that digital storytelling served as a meaningful instructional tool, aligning with Dion's (2022) focus on transforming education by moving beyond the 'perfect stranger' stance to active, participatory engagement. Responsibility was demonstrated through land-based learning, reflecting Fiola's (2021) emphasis on maintaining a sacred relationship with ceremony and landscape. Finally, reciprocity was achieved by creating an OER for local schools; this mirrors Kovach's (2021) 'giving back' ethic, which ensures research is not extractive but provides tangible benefits to the community. Ultimately, Sam et al. (2021) used this framework to curate digital practices deeply woven into Indigenous teaching and learning traditions.

Indigenous digital storytelling offers multiple benefits to the storytellers and the story receivers. Benefits include connecting with ancestors, sacred lands, diverse Indigenous

languages, and cultural and spiritual teachings, as well as encouraging balance. Digital storytelling is a way to envision the expansion, strengthening, reinforcing, and amplification of space for Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented peer-reviewed scholarly literature to support my research study, which focuses on the use of digital media and broadly describes the challenges associated with the introduction of Indigenous Knowledge in school leader training. The literature covered the history of education in Canada, residential schools, school leader training, technology, Indigenous Paradigm, Indigenous Wholistic Theoretical Frameworks, and storytelling methodology. The review of relevant literature indicates a lack of studies on how best to support ongoing school leader training programs that bring into focus Metis Settlements of Alberta Indigenous Knowledge and their perspectives on education.

## **Chapter 4: Methodology & Procedures**

### **Introduction**

This chapter provides a description of the theoretical framework for my chosen methodology, research design, storytelling methods for collection and analysis, and my role as researcher in the study. The chapter aims to demonstrate how the chosen research methodology brought to the forefront a series of Metis Settlements of Alberta members' responses to the main research question, as well as to address the sub-questions. The need for Metis-specific research ethics, as the primary basis of this study, will be discussed, along with the identification of limitations.

### **Methodology and Rationale**

An Indigenous storytelling methodology provided the conceptual framework for interpreting the narratives of Elders, Knowledge Holders, and Knowledge Keepers regarding school leadership. For this study, as described at the beginning of this dissertation, under Terms, Words, and Meanings, the term Elder, identified community members with Elder status as identified by community recognition. A Knowledge Holder was the term used to reference an individual over the age of 18 years who was identified or self-identified as holding Indigenous Knowledge that they were able to share. A Knowledge Keeper was an individual who was identified or self-identified as holding sacred knowledge or language, culture, or history Knowledge that was known by very few and is in critical danger of not being recovered. Storytelling is how Indigenous Knowledge is shared from one generation to the next as it expresses an Indigenous epistemology of connection to all that surrounds us. Archibald (2008) writes how interconnections within family, community, nation, culture, and land are what

comprised Indigenous stories and provide a respectful place for stories and storytelling in teaching and learning.

Historically, research has not been a positive experience for Metis Settlement communities due to Euro-Western practices that ignored Metis perspectives and Knowledge (Poitras Pratt, 2020). A storytelling methodology in this study ensured a more appropriate and positive experience, using principles of respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy to guide oral and written forms (Archibald, 2008). According to the Government of Canada's *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans 2022* researchers have a responsibility to core principles that include respect for persons, concerns for welfare, and justice. Storytelling was a means of engaging in collaborative research with Metis community members and offered a way to examine Indigenous worldviews and current perspectives consistent with Indigenous methodologies (Kovach, 2021). Ethical considerations in Indigenous research paradigms are more than one section of a chapter. Ethical considerations are what the entire research process was built on and provide the framework for every aspect of the process, including the period before the research began and the period following the formal completion of the research. For this research, I located myself by identifying my intentions, my own Metis Settlement identity, and my personal relationship to each community, to ensure my work was grounded in honesty rather than extraction. With a focus on relationship building, I utilized the time to ensure that the study's goals were co-constructed with the community, rather than imposed by me or the university.

Postras Pratt (2020) writes, “Within each person lies a story that has the power to change their lives and, if shared, the potential to transform the world of others” (p. 6). As a Metis scholar herself, Postras Pratt is claiming “ethical space” for Metis voices in stories that have been shared by Indigenous peoples for generations. She continues to describe storytelling and how Metis people share knowledge in oral forms that convey meaning through visual symbolism. When knowledge is told in stories, Indigenous voices illustrate their humanity, their ongoing presence, survival, and future visions (Dion, 2022).

Indigenous people maintain reverence for learning through the spoken word and life experiences. Storytelling, songs, and teachings are passed down from generation to generation as oral traditions to preserve, record, and recount each nation’s cultural history and identity (Absolon & Willett, 2004; Markides, 2024; Weber-Pillwax, 2021). The sacredness of these stories is that they reflect the names of places, people, and the spirit of the land that the people grew up in and learned from. Over time, this knowledge becomes etched into land markers and memories. This fundamental approach to storytelling is evident in the findings of this research.

Time, as a constant, moves forward, and colonization in Canada brought reverence for the written word as a Eurocentric representation of fact and ultimate truth. Indigenous stories were dismissed as just stories, nothing more than legends or myths. The advent of the printing press significantly accelerated the misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples by codifying colonial biases into authoritative historical records. By prioritizing Western textual literacy over Indigenous oral traditions, the press facilitated a cultural invasion where European settlers assumed the authority to define Indigenous identity. This technological shift did not merely share information; it established a Euro-Western property framework over knowledge, effectively

silencing Indigenous voices while mass-producing narratives that justified colonial expansion (Barclay, 1990; Kovach, 2021). The written words of non-Indigenous people against a backdrop of values, attitudes, and agendas of the colonists' belief in their superior intelligence and strength added to the misrepresentation of Indigenous people to the growing colonist populace. The colonization of knowledge and people to propagate, maintain, and justify control, domination, and genocide remains today (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015).

Dr. Blair Stonechild is a Cree-Saulteaux member of the Muscowpetung First Nation and professor of Indigenous Studies at First Nations University of Canada. He writes how colonization of knowledge attempts to disconnect Indigenous people from traditional teachings, spiritual connections, land, family, and community (Stonechild, 2023). Dr. Stonechild further explains how diminishing the value of Indigenous Knowledge has been an ongoing attempt to oppress and extinguish Indigenous cultures and the epistemologies, worldviews, values, and methods that have sustained their relationship with the earth.

Traditional university research practices have historically facilitated oppression because their underlying paradigms fail to critically challenge colonial ideologies (Stonechild, 2023). Western research paradigms actively marginalize non-Western knowledge systems by dismissing Traditional Knowledge as not fitting the mould of being quantitative, experimental, and repeatable. This dismissive barrier does not allow the application of Indigenous traditional knowledge of culture, colonial history, and racist structure as critical knowledge in the research process. Several interconnected mechanisms include the validation paradox of research being viewed as legitimate once it has been validated by Western institutions, by holding Western methods as the only true science and Indigenous ways of knowing being dismissed as folklore, and finally structural bias where a peer review process in mainstream journals become tools for

maintaining Western dominance by suppressing oppositional viewpoints or questioning the authenticity of Indigenous scholarship.

Exclusionary practices in research have contributed to research which does not use appropriate concepts as variables and defines a culture using the cultural beliefs of another. A further example is Western research that uses high school completion rates as the primary indicator of educational success. Scholars like Battiste (2013) argue this as exclusionary because it ignores Indigenous Knowledge and does not nourish the learning spirit. Anthropologists and ethnographers have significantly contributed to the misrepresentation of Indigenous people in written text (Stonechild, 2023). The revitalization of Indigenous Knowledge systems and practices has served as a foundational basis for the movement of Indigenous scholars to bring forward theories, strategies, and analysis and include and connect within the field of new technologies and internet studies (Wemigwans, 2018).

Jennifer Wemigwans is Anishnaabekwe from Wikwemikong First Nation. As a media producer, writer, and scholar, she specializes in the convergence between education, Indigenous Knowledge, and media technologies. In her book, *A Digital Bundle* (2018), Dr. Wemigwans distinguishes between sacred or ceremonial knowledge and personal knowledge. Understanding that ceremonial knowledge must be protected, Wemigwans focuses on personal knowledge that enables Indigenous people to enter the realm of information technology through computer systems and the internet. By going back to oral tradition, the oral visual presentation, with the storyteller's credibility, regarding legitimacy and cultural authority, the internet can be an effective medium for conveying audio and visual teachings of information. In this context, credibility, or the teller's protocol, refers to the storyteller's relational and cultural authority, including lived experience and ancestry, relational accountability, and spiritual and ethical

integrity (Archibald, 2008; Wemigwans, 2018). The internet becomes an effective medium because it allows the storyteller's embodied authority to remain intact, countering the loss of control and misrepresentation often found in written government or academic documents.

In her 2020 publication, Dr. Yvonne Poitras Pratt's seminal work on the Metis Settlements of Alberta employed digital storytelling to support a Metis community in reclaiming and revitalizing their storytelling tradition as a decolonizing strategy. After her research, Dr. Poitras Pratt published her findings, which included promising moves toward reconnecting youth and Elders, revitalizing community stories, and increasing community awareness to protect community culture. Dr. Poitras Pratt's concluding thought on her research focused on translating community-based stories through the education system to continue the reconciliation process into society at large. The Metis Voices website ([www.metisvoices.ca](http://www.metisvoices.ca)) contains a small selection of the 19 digital stories created in the Fishing Lake Metis Settlement, complete with teaching resources, and has received widespread global attention since its launch in 2022.

Storytelling and digital storytelling continue to grow as a recognized and valid research method (La Vallee & Gabel, 2024). As an arts-based research method, digital storytelling incorporates individuals, community strengths, and community concerns, and communicates ideas to researchers, policymakers, and institutions, including education systems. The power of the research now lies in the voices of the Indigenous community members and becomes collaborative, reflective, and purposeful to the community (La Vallee & Gabel, 2024).

Being purposeful for the community is a central tenet of Indigenous social research. The concepts of validity and transferability are understood through relational and contextual lenses rather than through the standards of objectivity and generalizability commonly associated with Western research paradigms. Indigenous scholars emphasize that Knowledge is inherently

relational and embedded within relationships among people, land, and spirit. As Shawn Wilson (2008) explains, research validity is grounded in relational accountability, meaning that researchers are responsible to the people, Knowledge, and communities involved in the research process. Similarly, Kathy Absolon (2011) notes that validity in Indigenous methodologies emerges through respectful engagement, cultural protocols, and the extent to which research authentically represents participants' experiences and teachings. Transferability in Indigenous research is also approached differently from Western notions of generalization. Rather than claiming universal applicability, Indigenous researchers provide rich contextual descriptions that enable readers to assess whether the insights resonate in other Indigenous contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1988). By situating this research within its specific cultural, historical, and relational context, the Knowledge generated may inform broader understanding while still respecting the distinct identities and experiences of the Metis Settlements of Alberta. In this way, validity and transferability are established through relational integrity, cultural respect, and contextual depth rather than through replication or broad generalization.

Relational integrity and cultural respect were foundational to my request for stories from the communities. Although not digital storytelling per se, my research employed a storytelling methodology to bridge Metis Settlement participants' Indigenous Knowledge and me as the researcher. In line with an Indigenous epistemology, honouring shared stories as a means of knowing lent to a non-structured method of gathering knowledge known as conversation (Kovach, 2021). Using storytelling to seek advice from settlement community members on the design of the online module was aligned with an Indigenous research paradigm (Chilisa, 2020). Finally, storytelling methodology offered an inclusive and respectful method of seeking

Indigenous Knowledge to the following research questions meant to bring greater understandings to others of the Settlement Metis people living in Alberta.

### **Research Questions**

The overall research question for this study asks: How can storytelling and Metis Settlements of Alberta Indigenous Knowledge inform the development of an online leadership training module designed for kindergarten to grade12 school leaders who work in northern Alberta schools? Research sub-questions were:

1. How do Metis Settlement people want to be recognized and understood by school leaders?
2. As shared by participants, what Indigenous Knowledge principles support these conceptual ideas and how?
3. How can storytelling support school leader development inclusive of Indigenous Knowledge, related to the Metis Settlements of Alberta?

In his influential work on Indigenous methodology, Wilson (2008) describes participants as collaborators. I initially planned on inviting eight to twelve Knowledge Holders and, through these questions, draw out the perspectives of the participants regarding sharing Metis Settlements of Alberta Knowledge in the context of school leadership to inform the online module. The questions were further designed to delve into an Indigenous worldview of education that has often been subsumed under the broader domain of progressive education (Windchief & Pedro, 2019) or sidelined by a focus on First Nations alone.

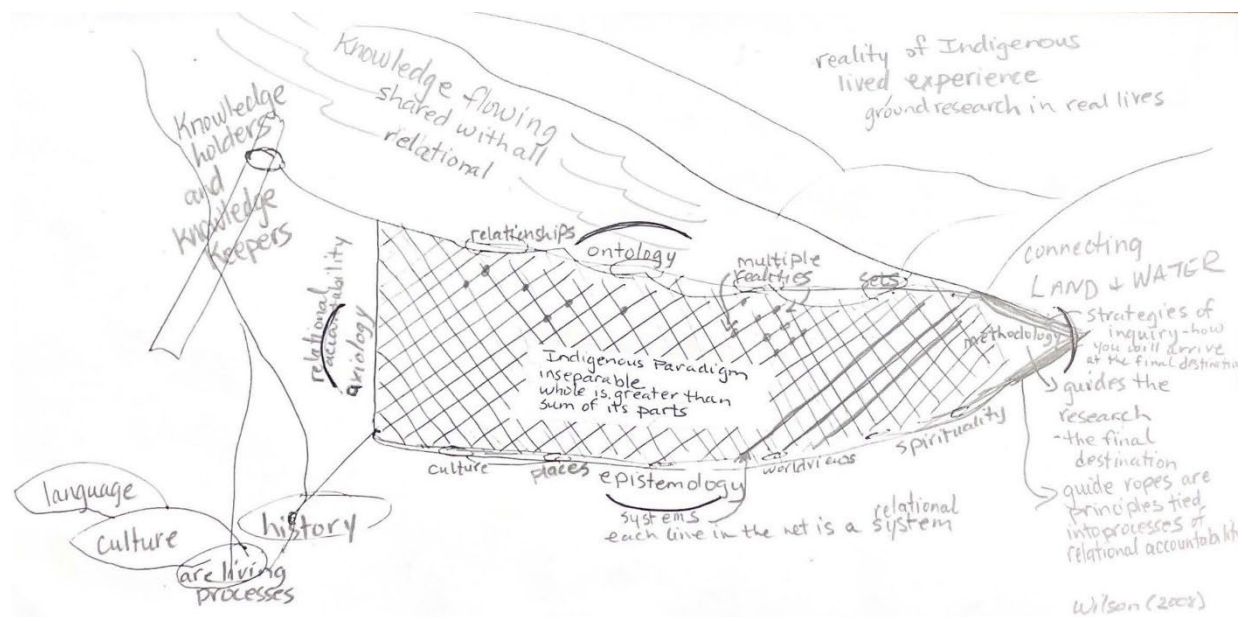
The research question and subsequent questions were designed for the

conversational method of meaning-making dialogue. Recognizing that conversations create discourse about the subject matter (Kovach, 2020), allowed for emergent input from the participants regarding advice on Metis Settlements' Indigenous Knowledge to inform the online module. Participants were not required to fully understand the educational context as that is Euro-Western. Instead, participants were invited to share what they believed school leaders needed to know and understand from an Indigenous, and in this case, specifically Metis, perspective.

### *Outline of the study*

### *Ethical Considerations*

The entirety of this research study depended on the recognition and involvement of the role of Elders, Knowledge Holders, and Knowledge Keepers in the communities. I ethically engaged individual communities to identify participants and collaborate on the design, execution, and analysis of this research. In respect of the Indigenous Research Paradigm, the Indigenous Wholistic Research Theoretical Framework, and the Conversation Method, shared below in Figure 4, is a model titled Metis Net Teachings. This model visually encompasses the ethics that guided this research exploration. The genesis of the Net Teachings Model evolved from my personal growth as a researcher and from conversations with Indigenous Knowledge Holder, Paul Courtoreille, who is from the Gift Lake Metis Settlement. The conceptual framework model emerged from a series of drawings I developed throughout the research.

**Figure 4***Metis Net Teachings***Metis Net Teachings**

Despite its apparent simplicity, the net serves as a framework for Metis-specific research that prioritizes kinship, interconnectedness, relational complexities, and research as a close-knit set of practices providing solutions to community-identified problems. The net has become a metaphor for what I have learned as an Indigenous educational leader and a Metis Settlement emerging scholar and researcher. I see the net as providing a way of life and, in doing so, it offers many lessons. The overall design and utility of the net symbolize the foundational components of Indigenous leadership and research: engaging with Indigenous people through their specific knowledge, epistemology, ontology, axiology, theory, methodologies, principles, and methods (Kirkness et al., 2016). I call this Metis model, Net Teachings. I will explain the teachings using words understood by the Metis Settlements people. Additionally, I will the

teachings by connecting back to the original story shared by Paul Courtoreille. The connections to Paul's story will appear in quotes.

The net, from its individual knots to its structural set-up, is inseparable. Mirroring the Indigenous paradigm, the whole transcends the sum of its core foundations of ontology, epistemology, axiology, methodology, values of respect, relationships, reciprocity, responsibility, relevance, and representation, and finally Knowledge and Elders; the synergy of these components creates a relational depth and quality that individual elements could never achieve in isolation. I will describe the components of an Indigenous Paradigm for leading and researching that can be learned from the Metis fisherman's net.

### **Ontology**

We cannot discuss an Indigenous Paradigm without clarifying ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology. The ontology is represented by the float line, which is the top of the net. Floats are attached and represent multiple realities that exist in relation to the truth. Thus, an object, thing, or idea is not as important as one's relationship to it. Depending on the context, everyone will have a different relationship with a piece of knowledge. When represented as sets, the number of relationships increases as interactions grow. Each knot on the mesh depicts each paired relationship representing multiple realities. Next, we will look at epistemology as it is represented as the lead line of the net.

### **Epistemology**

The lead line at the bottom of the net is weighted and assists in keeping the form of the net in the water. Epistemologies come from Indigenous culture, worldview, language, history, spirituality, time, and places and are critical to self-identity and personal grounding. The weights are the Indigenous epistemologies that keep Indigenous people grounded. Emanating mesh lines

connect the lead line to the float line and represent systems of knowledge in a relational connection. Next, we will look at each side of the net as axiology and methodology.

### **Axiology**

There are two ends of a net. One end is anchored to the land, tied to a sturdy log. The strength of the log is akin to Indigenous Knowledge Holders and Knowledge Keepers keeping us firmly attached to our purpose. Weighted lines anchor both ends of the net to the bottom, ensuring the structure remains submerged and stable. These weights represent epistemologies or knowledge systems as previously discussed. The line running from top to bottom, as the edge of the net, can be seen as an expression of Indigenous axiology. Indigenous axiology is built on what is most valuable to Indigenous people. This line teaches educational leaders and researchers that relational accountability to fulfill roles and obligations committed to or promised is essential for success. Additionally, the line represents the inseparable relationships that must be formed and valued within Indigenous value systems. Accountability within this line is strengthened because the knowledge interpreted must be respectful of, and help build on, the established relationships that emerged from learning together. Edges help define connections within the network. The fourth edge completes the interrelationship of this teaching: understanding a system of values and methods for a particular purpose.

### **Methodology**

Leadership and research methodology guide the process to its targeted realization. Two guidelines that tie to the anchor are located on the outward-reaching end of the net. The top guideline represents inquiry strategies (Wilson, 2008) and outlines how the school leader as a researcher will arrive at the fulfillment of purpose. Strategies of inquiry allow the researcher to be local community responsive and allow for multiple approaches to knowledge gathering such

as storytelling (âcimostakewin) and talking circles. The bottom guideline represents the principles or values of relational accountability. Relational accountability I have experienced in my lifetime includes respect, relevance, relationships, responsibility, reciprocity, and reverence. Adherence to these values is an ethical responsibility when working with Indigenous people. The net truly is more than the sum of its parts. When navigating confronting principles I pause to acknowledge the autonomy of others; while I cannot dictate their choices or timeline for change, I recognize that misalignment is often inevitable. In these moments of confrontation, I prioritize self-preservation by establishing common ground and moving on. Next, I will listen and learn. Reconciliation requires action and my choice may be advocacy by participating in a debate to counter ideas, I may research, and there are times when I have had to access justice. What I always do is turn to our people whether it is for comfort, to learn, to process, but mostly to assure myself that I am not alone as I continue forward.

### **Parts of the whole**

The net is further representative of survival, family, independence, a way of life, and so much more. Ultimately, the net represents the reality of the Indigenous lived experience. Being mindful of leadership and research involving Indigenous peoples is respect for real lives, work that serves a real purpose, and recognizing the value in genuine relationships. The net has value even when it is folded and stored.

My net came from a forgotten stored box. I could see remnants of fish left behind as dark, flaky skin. My net had two holes; one small, the other large. I thought of the remaining fish remnants as a representation of the reciprocity of Indigenous people's interdependence with the water and land. Like knowledge flaked and wiped away, those flakes reminded me of Indigenous knowledge lost in life transitions. I thought of the two holes as the history, culture, and languages

we have lost due to colonization. Nevertheless, those spaces reminded me of opportunities Indigenous leadership research is called to fill.

The water represents the knowledge that continues to flow through time, place, and space despite our limitations. So willing to be shared with all. Water is the life-giving substance in relationship with all the earth and that which surrounds it. When placed in the water the net begins expanding with pride and purpose and takes on a quality inclusive of survival, opportunity, and purpose. Renewed with the knowledge that it knows what to do, the net only has to be set up, and then one waits. This reflective opportunity to rest and enjoy what is flowing around and through is a time to prepare for the bounty that is sure to come. Waiting provides the space and time to gather in laughter, eat, have a drink, and talk about the events of the day.

### **Lessons from the Net**

There are additional lessons learned from the net that are better experienced but still offer teachings to guide my dual role as a school leader and researcher. These insights stem directly from the oral tradition shared by Paul Courtoreille from the Gift Lake Metis Settlement. "You can get different size of nets to catch different size of fish." This statement signifies that all school leadership and research contributions, regardless of their scale, carry inherent value and are essential to the collective ecosystem. "It has to be put away carefully." This teaches that sustained success in leadership is contingent upon the intentionality and care invested during the preparation and 'set-up' phases. "Two people help." This underscores that *wahkohtowin* is foundational; relationships are the primary engine of effective leadership and ethical research. "The people working with you have to know what they are doing." This mandates that Indigenous research must be led by or co-constructed with Indigenous people through every stage, ensuring cultural competency and epistemic integrity. "The running line is the rope used to

tie one end to your net and use a jigger to pull it." This signifies that the researcher-leader's journey requires a guide; the community members act as the "running line," providing the necessary pull and direction to navigate unfamiliar depths. "In the summer, it is easier." This acknowledges the seasonal nature of learning; there are specific times for preparation, observation, and other times for the active 'harvest' of work. "The knot has to be solid as the net can hold thousands of pounds." This represents the strength of multiple realities; when Indigenous Knowledge systems are properly interconnected, they possess the structural integrity to support immense communal weight. "You develop patience." This emphasizes the importance of decelerating the research process, resisting the Western urge to rush results in favor of meaningful relationship-building. "You learn to pull it a certain way to pull it out itself." By honouring the intricacies of the Indigenous paradigm, the researcher allows the Knowledge to reveal itself naturally rather than forcing an interpretation. "You had to listen really really well." The researcher is a participant in the story; true learning requires deep listening with the ears, head, and heart, a practice of radical presence. "I would stand still." This symbolizes the necessity of reflexivity; in Indigenous ways of knowing, stillness is the prerequisite for insight. "Fishing license number would go on the stake." This represents a commitment to Indigenous protocols and sovereignty; the researcher must respect the laws of the land and the community's governance over their own data. "My dad and I ran our fishing outfit...the rest of the team working alongside. This reinforces Indigenous autonomy; the community maintains absolute choice over who accesses their Knowledge and how that 'outfit' is managed.

To synthesize these teachings, the net serves as a holistic framework for Metis research and school leadership, where technical skill is inseparable from ethical responsibility. This 'story-net' shifts the role of the researcher from an external observer to a relational participant

who must prioritize the following: guided navigation by community Elders, structural integrity of respect, reciprocity, and responsibility, reflective presence found in patience, and sovereign governance of Indigenous autonomy. By weaving Paul Courtoreille's traditional teachings into the academic paradigm, the research process itself becomes an act of decolonization, transforming an extractive exercise into a relational ceremony of leadership.

### **Requesting Knowledge**

This study employed an Indigenous relational methodology grounded in conversational Knowledge sharing. The approach prioritized relationships, trust, and respect for Indigenous Knowledge systems while engaging Elders, Knowledge holders, and community members from the Metis Settlements of Alberta. The purpose of this methodological approach was to gather guidance that would inform the development of an online learning module for school leaders. The research process unfolded through several stages, including community engagement and permission from Settlement leadership, one-on-one conversations with participants, community dialogue sessions, analysis of the Knowledge shared, and the iterative development and refinement of the online module.

The Knowledge that I sought was gathered primarily through conversations. I endeavoured to retain as much Knowledge as possible in my memory and supplemented this learning with handwritten field notes written immediately after the conversations. I chose not to use a recording device in recognition of the fact that Indigenous Knowledge is shared through whole-body attentiveness to listening, body language, and silence (Archibald, 2008). I also felt that the presence of a recording device could detract from my ability to remain present and attentive during the conversational process. Additionally, a recording device could have been

perceived as an invasion of privacy, potentially limiting a participant's willingness to speak openly (Kovach, 2020).

Prior to seeking Knowledge from the Metis Settlement communities, I met with the elected leadership of the Metis Settlements General Council to explain the research plan and request permission to proceed. Following this meeting, I sent an email to each Settlement administrator, including the study poster and all relevant forms. I then followed up with a telephone call to confirm receipt of the materials and to answer any questions regarding the study.

Throughout the research process, the study was reviewed by Settlement Elders Floyd Thompson and Paul Courtoreille, who provided guidance and advice as the work progressed. Elder Floyd Thompson, my father, has served for more than forty-four years as an elected community leader and remains committed to the language, culture, and history of the Metis Settlements, including the education of Settlement members. Elder Paul Courtoreille is a member of the Gift Lake Metis Settlement and an advocate for the community's future. As a fluent Cree speaker, Paul adheres to the Cree value of *wahkohtowin* to guide his life choices.

I was prepared to engage in as many conversations with Elders, Knowledge Holders, and Knowledge Keepers as necessary to inform the development of the online module, although I had planned for eight to twelve conversations. Establishing trust through engagement required using an Indigenous consensus approach, ensuring that participants had opportunities to hear others' perspectives and concerns during three planned open community sessions. In these conversations, I sought to maintain balance by participating respectfully and incorporating relationality. An important part of these conversations was reminding participants to speak to me as if I knew nothing.

Facilitating these conversations required drawing upon my experiences as a veteran educator who has worked primarily with Indigenous children, families, and communities. These facilitation skills included active listening, awareness of participants' responses and behaviours, and guiding conversations toward consensus where appropriate. A teaching my father shared guided my learning during these discussions. He would say that there are eight Metis Settlements of Alberta and therefore eight perspectives. When those perspectives came together in harmony to define a direction, they created a ninth understanding. It took me decades to fully appreciate the meaning behind this teaching.

My chosen method for requesting and engaging in Knowledge sharing involved both in-person one-to-one conversations and community engagement sessions. During these conversations, I reviewed elements of the developing online module and asked questions that invited discussion about the content and ways it could be improved. Participants therefore contributed not only Knowledge and experience but also guidance regarding how that Knowledge could be represented in the module.

Working with the initial one-to-one participants during the analysis stage of the study was critical to ensuring that the resulting module accurately reflected the Indigenous Knowledge shared throughout the research process.

In brief, the steps taken in this research exploration are summarized in Figure 5. The process began with one-to-one conversations with participants, followed by initial analysis. Next came the design of the online module, after which a draft version was shared with Metis Settlement community members for additional advice and feedback. Following this stage, I analyzed participants' guidance and refined the module accordingly. Although I initially

anticipated this process to take two months, it ultimately took four months, with additional participants wishing to contribute.

**Figure 5**

*Steps Taken in the Research Process*



**Procedures of the study**

*Timelines*

The study took place over a twelve-month period. In this time, I undertook twelve trips to the eight Metis Settlements of Alberta communities, and one trip to the Metis Settlements General Council office in Edmonton. While I had initially planned to complete the research within six months, I quickly realized that the communities work on their own timetables and I had to be patient and wait and used the time to keep reading books and articles.

*One-to-one Conversations*

Conversational methods were utilized in the face-to-face situations including interviews and community sessions. The interviews were not really interviews. Rather, they took on a conversational flow where the participant picked up aspects of the questions that they wanted to focus on. Conversations did start with a dialogue about the research questions to establish a common interest in conducting the research with community participants. Some structure was expected (Kovach, 2020), and utilizing the conversational method facilitated discussion that was characteristic of Indigenous storytelling that included whole-body listening, silence, and created

shared space that was collaborative, dialogic, and reflexive. For the Metis Settlements, I learned to describe these characteristics of Indigenous storytelling as a local Elder Conversation Protocol.

Listening within the shared storytelling space was necessary. There were cases where a cell phone-recorded story or picture could potentially become a learning object for the module. In those cases, I asked permission to use a recording device and worked with the participant to use technology they were comfortable with. I digitized artifacts that were given to me and added them to the online module. The research questions were designed to allow a free flow of conversation reminiscent of kitchen-table time, when families gathered for stories. Using this aspect of the conversational method allowed me to better understand participants' views on aspects of Metis Settlements of Alberta Knowledge, which informed the design of the online module to support school leaders. Allowing the free flow of conversation enabled participants to bring their personal experiences, views, and opinions into the research design, further contributing to the Indigenous Research Paradigm approach. Following each conversation, I analyzed my written notes and typed the information and Knowledge gathered to search for themes. This ongoing analysis process informed the design and content of the online module.

### *Designing the Online Module*

Findings from the conversations informed the design of the online module, including its content and characteristics. The objective of the online module was to identify Metis Settlements of Alberta Knowledge that could support learning trajectories for school leaders serving in northern Alberta K-12 schools. The content and look of the module were based on the information shared by the participants. I organized the information into the following broad areas: organizing ideas, guiding questions, learning outcomes, Indigenous Knowledge,

understanding, and skills and procedures based on the Indigenous Wholistic Theoretical Framework. The organization was supported by a technology-enabled learning environment, including synchronous e-learning (e.g., online chat and videoconferencing) and asynchronous e-learning, where coursework and communication can be delivered via the web, email, and community message forums.

### *Community Engagement Conversations*

The one-to-one conversations with Elders, Knowledge Holders, and Knowledge Keepers informed the initial draft of the online module. Initially, the design presentation to the community sessions was print-based, and by the third session, I had an online prototype developed using Google Sites. Each presentation to the community yielded feedback that verified the relevance of the learning content used to inform subsequent drafts of the module. Community members' participation was lively, and many expressed how much they were learning. Observing participants' expressions during the sessions gave me assurance that this research exploration was holistic, reflexive, interconnected, and relational (Smith, 2021). Additionally, the Tri-Council Policy Statement regarding ethical conduct supported these presented procedures as they ensured respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice in the form of respect to Indigenous Knowledge systems, inclusive of Indigenous people in the planning and decision process and affirmed respect for balance in the relationship between researcher and participants (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2022).

During the one-to-one conversations and community sessions, I ensured verbal and visual orientation and provided exemplars to support the community's understanding of the online module as it was being developed. The community engagement sessions verified the accuracy of Indigenous Knowledge, provided opportunities to expand the Knowledge, and assessed the

appropriateness of the content for the local context. Initially, I had planned four community sessions and held two in the east and two in the western Settlements. One session took place in Edmonton at the request of the Settlement Administration and staff. I had planned a Zoom open session for all community members and scheduled it for the end of April. Unfortunately, there were no participants. Throughout the research, and in line with the conversational method, I guided the conversations to encourage creativity in creating an online prototype module. Guiding the conversation meant I did not enter sessions with a prepared agenda. What I did was probe or seek with questions, comments, or inquiries about aspects of verification, accuracy, appropriateness, and presentation options.

Before beginning the one-to-one and community engagement conversations, I invited the attending Elder to lead an opening prayer, a community-accepted practice for gatherings. In response to this opening request, I presented the gifting protocol as agreed upon in earlier conversations. Utilizing the prayer offerings and prioritizing the creation of respectful conversational space enabled open co-creation of Knowledge among participants (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). Community conversations did not have an agenda, as previously stated, as co-creation of learning space further leads to a safe space and ongoing relationship-building, ensuring a multi-way process in the design of the online module (Poitras Pratt, 2020). I began the community conversations by sharing the findings to date in the draft module, simply asked the participants for their thoughts, and allowed the conversation to flow.

### *Analysis*

The analysis began immediately in this research process as I noted patterns, consistencies, and themes that emerged as Indigenous Knowledge was shared. Listening is how this process began and continued as I journaled notes to maintain my role as a responsible

researcher. Employing a manual process, I spent time reflecting with my journal notes and sorting the Indigenous Knowledge using a line-by-line coding procedure (Cohen et al., 2018). Next, I cut up the lines, sorted them, and moved them around to identify patterns and themes. Prior to the community engagement sessions, I utilized my identified Elder advisors in the analysis process to confirm and identify potential gaps. Next, I engaged participants in the community conversations to confirm and identify potential gaps as well. Prior to the final analysis, I planned to use NVivo 12 to organize, analyze, and visualize the knowledge gathered. When I presented this idea to four Elders, I was met with hesitancy and uncertainty. I decided that we would continue the analysis without the software, and I was met with nods of approval. I began and ended analysis with a manual process in respect of Indigenous Knowledge and the sacredness of the sharing (Kovach, 2020). I have outlined these steps in Figure 6 below as an Indigenous Analysis Process aligned with an Indigenous Research paradigm.

**Figure 6**

*Indigenous Analysis Process*



The findings were highlighted by identifying emerging themes. As the themes emerged, I used the Net Teachings framework to begin developing an interactive design that incorporated principles identified in the literature review and those that emerged during the gathering and analysis phases. Through ongoing telephone communication, I continuously shared and

discussed design and content with the Elders, Knowledge Holders, and Knowledge Keepers who were interested in the virtual meets.

### *Data Retention and Storage*

Data in the form of stories and notes in my journals, including one-on-one conversations and community sessions, will be retained for a minimum of five years in line with the recommendations of the Research Ethics Board at Athabasca University. The data I gathered throughout the study will be retained for future research publications and research integrity inquiries. During the retention period, the stories, insights, and Indigenous Knowledge shared will be stored on an encrypted external hard drive, which will be locked in a fire-grade safe in my locked private home office.

### *Inviting Participants*

Elders have played a prominent, guiding role in my life and my profession. Guided by a fundamental belief in the wisdom of our Elders, I sought their direction during the earliest stages of my research. This intentional outreach ensured that my potential research topics were grounded in community priorities and upheld the principles of relational accountability from the outset. For this study, I spoke with my father and a Cree-speaking member from Gift Lake to walk with me and provide guidance and mentorship as this research process unfolded. As personal advisors, they became the primary point of contact for my ideas. Additionally, they ensured that I adhered to respectful Indigenous relations, supported idea-sharing, and, finally, acted as champions for the research to benefit the Metis Settlement communities by discussing the research with others. Throughout the research, I revisited roles with participants to maintain clarity and focus. Initially, I sought out four Elders, four Knowledge Keepers, and four Knowledge Holders. Within three weeks of the research commencing, I had eighteen storytellers

waiting for me to arrive. The role of these individuals was to directly address the research question and sub-questions. These individuals had direct input into the development, design, and content of the training module for as long as they chose. I also clarified roles with the participants in the community session. Each group of participants heard an oral description of the research and their role. Free, prior, and informed consent included a written, signed consent form that informed the participant that they were free to withdraw from the research process at any time without fear of reprisal.

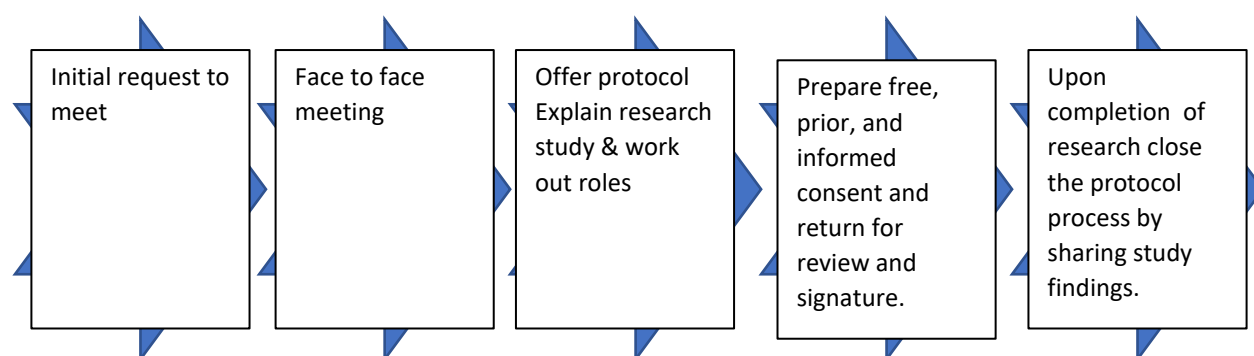
I did seek out participants who lived in the Metis Settlements of Alberta communities. In speaking with community leaders, I asked directly whether they had individuals they would advise me to approach. Based on the recommendations of community leaders and the advertising poster, I had more participants than I had initially planned. In keeping with a relational approach, I committed time for all who stepped forward. The open community sessions were posted in the community at public places, including the Settlement office building. I ensured that a notice was placed in the community newsletter where they existed, and finally, I posted on the community Facebook pages.

Elders are our acknowledged teachers in our communities. Elders are identified in the Metis Settlement communities primarily by age over 60, though not always. I met individuals in the Settlement communities who had the title of Elder bestowed upon them, and their ages ranged from fifty to sixty years. Through life experiences and personal characteristics, Elders are the primary source of local community truth, which serves as an ideal basis for addressing the research question. As part of the invitation process, I first requested to meet or speak with the Elder. This is *wahkohtowin*--relationship building. When I met with the Elder in person, I followed protocol as previously agreed upon, then discussed the research exploration with them,

and finally talked about role expectations for the duration of the study. With respect to the free, prior, and informed consent process, I did not go with consent in hand, ready to be signed. I met with the Elder, listened and engaged in the role conversation, left to prepare the consent, returned to the individual to review the consent, and, when there were no further questions, I got it signed. I outline this Indigenous Protocol Process in Figure 7 below. I followed this same protocol process for the Knowledge Holders and Knowledge Keepers.

**Figure 7**

*Indigenous Protocol Process*



For the community engagement conversations, I sought out a representative cross-section of community members utilizing community Facebook pages. I posted an explanation of the study and participant roles. Sharing this information early assisted in the prior and informed aspects of the free, prior, and informed consent process. Additionally, I prepared a participant invitation letter reiterating an explanation of the study and participant roles that was provided as a paper copy and included the consent to participate in the research study form. I did go through this consent form with participants prior to the community engagement conversations. During the community engagement sessions, I offered muffins, fruit, and juice as a form of reciprocity in knowledge sharing.

Invitations and requests to participate in this exploration were based on personal knowledge and contacts following a purposive sampling method (Cohen, et al., 2018). I chose this qualitative approach to identify and select information-rich participants for the design of the online module. There exists an array of purposive sampling designs, but this specific research exploration focused on criterion, opportunistic, and convenience sampling, which are explained in the following paragraph and guided by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018) in their work titled *Research Methods in Education, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition*.

Criterion sampling assisted in identifying and selecting participants who met the criteria for this research, namely the Metis Settlements of Alberta Indigenous Knowledge. I used this process to identify Elders, Knowledge Holders, and Knowledge Keepers. A more nonspecific emphasis approach is opportunistic and convenience sampling, which I used for the community engagement conversations. Metis Settlement communities hosted regular community gatherings throughout the year, and I requested permission through the identified Elders to attend, engage with the community, and continue building awareness of the study. Table 1 below indicates the total number of participants who signed consent forms for the study.

**Table 1***Community Participants*

	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8
# of Elder, KH, and KK	4	4	3	2	1	2	4	4

	CS1	CS2	CS3	CS4	CS5
# of participants	15	10	12	14	10

*Validity and Trustworthiness*

While I know many individuals in our Settlement communities, I do not know them all. Purposive sampling helped establish the trustworthiness required to conduct this type of research. Chilisa (2020) writes that relying on personal connections with Elders and other community members can only add to the robustness of perspectives, lending validity to the research design and outcomes. In this study, validity is the mechanism by which we assess cultural responsiveness, beginning by placing culture at the heart of discourse and practice. Additionally, validity concerns whether participants believe what has been produced is relevant to them (Chilisa, 2020). Finally, layering the knowledge shared from individuals to the community collective supported the research design and lent further credibility to the online module.

### *Tri-Council Policy Statement Chapter 9*

I will begin this section by highlighting the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* 2022, Chapter 9, which addresses research involving the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples of Canada. This section of the policy emphasizes that interpreting the ethics framework in Indigenous contexts must focus on respect for human dignity, including respect for persons, and on prioritizing concern for welfare and justice (Canadian Institutes of Health Research [CIHR] et al., 2022).

Beginning with respect for persons, I secured the free, prior, informed, and ongoing consent of all participants. In doing so, I considered whether the oral and written language I used was understandable and respectful of the environment I was presenting. I entered the participants lived space, respected their interactions, and recognized that the natural environment of their homes was sacred, distinct, and tied to personal identity. I consider myself female and positioned as the learner-researcher in the relationship. As the researcher, I was cognizant of the language I used, and my attire was not overly dressed and was respectful of the individual and their space.

Being respectful of the individual and their space led to the principle of concern for welfare and included physical, social, historical, economic, community, and cultural environments. Ethical considerations included Indigenous collective rights, interests, and responsibilities that serve the individual, and when I heard a negative response to a request, then I accepted that I was not ready or able to accept that Knowledge at that time and left the request and did not attempt to approach it with a different person or group. I further maintained an awareness of ethical considerations regarding the historical impacts of residential schools and ongoing colonial policies. In sharing the research findings, I addressed this awareness by making statements of impact and relating the research exploration as a potential way to enhance

participant capacity to maintain their culture, language, and identity (Canadian Institutes of Health et al., 2022). This statement was made in the explanation of the research letters. Prior to the research commencing, I made a community request for cultural protocols to determine participant needs and to secure access to trauma counselling, ensuring it would be readily available at any time during the research study. Fortunately, there was no need during the research.

The third Tri-Council Policy principle is justice. Ethical considerations were taken into account to ensure a balance between the researcher and the participants. Including participants throughout the research design and analysis phases reduced the potential for misunderstanding. Adhering to the value of *wahkohtowin* (all my relations) in the engagement prior to participant recruitment and maintaining this throughout the course of the research enhanced ethical practice and led to quality research, as indicated by participants' expressions of satisfaction when the sessions were over. While I had initially allowed two months to complete the conversations, the communities required additional time to build trust and communication, and to allow for mutually beneficial research goals.

The initial meeting with the Metis Settlements General Council included elected leadership from all eight communities and was in accordance with oral rules and customs governing research involving the Metis Settlements of Alberta. I met to explain the research and request a letter of support for the research project, which was provided. Community concerns regarding ownership of the online module and the knowledge that it contained were discussed at the initial meeting. Assurance was provided, and it was documented in the free and informed consent form that outlined how the Knowledge was to be treated and that any adaptations would require consent from the Metis Settlements General Council. The assignment of rights or

copyright arising from this research study was outlined in the research agreement and shared with participants prior to the commencement of the research.

There is diversity amongst the eight Metis Settlements of Alberta. Leaving the community engagement sessions open to the membership allowed for acceptance of differences in levels of education, employment, mobility, generational differences, and identity as First Nations, Metis, or Inuit. This research was not about membership and residents of the communities sending their children to school. All who came forward were valued for their Knowledge within the Indigenous paradigm. This statement was included in the research agreement.

This exploratory study depended on collaboration with the Metis Settlements. As outlined in previous sections of this chapter, the Indigenous research process and Indigenous Protocol Process were outlined in the research agreement. The relevance of this research study to the Metis Settlements of Alberta was beneficial, as the research process facilitated an increase in Indigenous Knowledge among the participants. Additionally, the resulting online module may yield both short-term and long-term benefits, as school leaders learn responsive leadership methods that are agreeable to the community and were set out by the community. The module development is intended to support all school leaders. For the purposes of meeting degree requirements and timelines, I had to limit the scope of the study to the Metis Settlements directly. Further collaboration allowed for discussion of risks and potential benefits, resulting in a process that minimized the risk of mistakes, such as the inclusion of online Knowledge that is forbidden due to its sacredness. Due to the relatively small size of each community, ethical consideration was given to strengthening the community's research capacity by ensuring that the collaborative

research approach was reciprocal in learning and by fostering opportunities for skill transfer and knowledge sharing.

The research agreement set out to support this research study addressed privacy and confidentiality as outlined in the Tri-Council Policy Statement (2022) Chapter 9: Research Involving the First Nations, Inuit, and Metis Peoples of Canada. Ethical consideration was given to individuals who did not wish to remain anonymous, as this is not in line with Indigenous ways of knowing and being. The act of naming is powerful within Indigenous knowledge systems, and in cases where individual attribution was significant, consent was documented, and their name was used as they requested.

### **Researcher Role**

The Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans 2022 affirms existing Indigenous rights in Canada, including the recognition of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and views, and the representation of Indigenous people in planning and decision-making from the earliest stages through to the research design and implementation. Additionally, the Tri-Council Policy Statement calls for balance in the relationship between researchers and participants and mutual benefit in researcher-community relations. Therefore, I acknowledged my research role included lending assistance to the desire of the Metis Settlements of Alberta to lend strength to their Indigenous Knowledge as indicated in the Recital section of the Metis Settlements Act 2000, which states, “the Metis should continue to have a land base to provide for the preservation and enhancement of Metis culture and identity and to enable the Metis to attain self-governance under the laws of Alberta” ( p.12). In doing so I ensured mutual benefit in researcher-community relations. Additionally, by inviting Elders into the process from the beginning and including community participants in the analysis of the

knowledge and online module design, I ensured balance in the research relationships while ensuring Metis Settlement representation throughout the research process.

I was born and raised in the Kikino Metis Settlement and remained committed to authentic engagement that valued *wahkohtowin*-all my relations. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2006) challenges colonial interpretations of authenticity that positions Indigenous cultures as static or unchanging. As she explains,

“At the heart of such a view of authenticity is a belief that Indigenous cultures cannot change, cannot recreate themselves and still claim to be indigenous. Nor can they be complicated, internally diverse or contradictory. Only the West has that privilege” (p.106).

Rather than reinforcing a fixed understanding of Indigenous identity, Tuhiwai Smith advocates for recognizing that Indigenous cultures continue to evolve, adapt, and recreate themselves within contemporary contexts. In this study, I understood Tuhiwai Smith’s insight as a call to employ processes that allowed both myself and community participants to learn and respond from an Indigenous mindset rather than through colonial assumptions about what Indigenous Knowledge should look like. Storytelling is the teaching heart of the Metis Settlements of Alberta culture, and it provides an appropriate approach to authentic, shared engagement. Through storytelling conversations, all participants, including myself, became learners and contributors in the research process as we collectively shaped the direction of this exploration.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations that are beyond the scope of this study included First Nations and Inuit populations outside of the Metis Settlement communities. These groups are recognized in

Canada as distinct and as such have their own research pathways. This study did not include off-Settlement Metis populations. Metis people are comprised of mixed ancestry and have evolved into their own unique cultural group. Metis in Canada have documented historical and legislative impacts brought forward by government policy and the *Metis Population Betterment Act* 1938 continued policies of oppression. The establishment of Metis Settlement areas resulted in acts of place-based suppression by the government, but they also established the only lands in Canada held and governed by Metis. The Metis Settlements of Alberta have a distinct historical foundation rooted in land, which remains central to their identity and governance (Bell, 1994; Martin, 1988; Pocklington, 1991; Sawchuk et al., 1981).

Additional delimitations included non-Metis school leaders. While the research intent was to explore how Metis Settlements of Alberta Indigenous Knowledge may inform an online module to support school leaders working in the North, I did not seek their input as the study questions did not include them. An additional population that was not included in this study was school-aged youth. While youth do hold Knowledge, they are not considered primary Knowledge Holders or Knowledge Keepers in Indigenous communities.

This work was supported by the Indigenous Wholistic Theoretical Framework which aligned with the main research question of how storytelling and Metis Settlements Indigenous Knowledge can inform the development of an online module designed for K-12 school leaders who work in northern Alberta schools. The focus centered on the stories, Indigenous Knowledge, and opinions of the participants and not on the objectives, activities, and assessment practices of learning design.

## **Limitations**

It was not possible to ensure equitable participation amongst the eight Metis Settlements due to time limitations and the extent of travel required. This limitation impacted the sample size of participation and the scope of Indigenous Knowledge that was accessed. Elders, Knowledge Holders, and Knowledge Keepers each have their own opinions. The research questions had an impact on the type and amount of Knowledge gathered and influenced my ability to thoroughly analyze. Unfortunately, stories told beyond the scope of the research were excluded from the study. Excluded stories requiring further research included topics of religion and spirituality, early leaders, genealogy, language acquisition, and community specific history. In addition to their own opinions, Elders, Knowledge Holders, and Knowledge Keepers have their own language with words used and how they are put together, including the Cree language. A limitation that existed was my own stage as a new Cree language learner and limited experiences with some traditional land-based experiences such as hide prepping and smoking meat. Finally, I was aware that I have both conscious and unconscious bias in my role as a school leader, community member, and researcher. I remained aware of my role as a novice researcher and trusted the guidance of the Elders and community engagement participants to support an open mind.

## **Summary**

This chapter outlined the methodology selected for this study. An IWF approach was chosen for its alignment with an Indigenous research paradigm and its recognition of storytelling as a vital method of teaching and learning among Metis Settlement community members. Through this approach, the study demonstrated how Indigenous Knowledge can be meaningfully framed and represented within the online module. A sample of 18 stories posed as conversations,

representing all 8 Settlements, was analyzed through manual coding, with me, as the researcher, taking an active role. Additionally, I outlined the ethical considerations involved in conducting research with members of the Metis Settlements of Alberta, ensuring alignment with the study's central research question: how storytelling and Indigenous Knowledge from the Metis Settlements of Alberta can inform the development of an online leadership module for K-12 school leaders in northern Alberta.

## Chapter Five: Knowledge Shared by Elders and Community Members

### Introduction

This chapter presents the documented conversations with Elders and community members residing in the Metis Settlements of Alberta. Using the process described in the previous chapter, I provide information about who they are and what they shared. I also describe the phases and timing, as well as challenges that were encountered. I also include a discussion of themes that emerged and assisted in answering my research question and sub-questions as below:

1. How can storytelling and Indigenous Knowledge from a Metis Settlements of Alberta perspective inform the development of an online module designed for K-12 school leaders who work in northern Alberta schools?
  - a. How do Metis Settlement people want to be understood by school leaders?
  - b. As shared by participants, how can Metis Settlement Indigenous Knowledge support these ideas?
  - c. How can storytelling be used to help educate school leaders about Metis Settlements of Alberta Indigenous Knowledge and approaches to living that can support school leader transformation?

Finally, this chapter presents how I organized and presented the data that was relevant to a particular issue or theme (Cohen et al., 2011) and reports how the Knowledge shared with me guided the organization of the online module using Indigenous Wholistic Theory principles (Absolon, 2010; Pidgeon, 2019). As discussed in earlier chapters, using this Knowledge gathered, I designed the module to better inform school principals coming into the Settlements.

### *Process Timelines*

The timelines of this study are shown in the following Table 2. It provides details of the readjusted timelines that were shared in Chapter Four.

**Table 2**

#### *Adjusted timeline of activities*

Process	Activity	December 2024	January 2025	February 2025	March 2025	April 2025	September- October 2025
REB application for approval	Application for initial approval	x					
REB minor revisions requested	Minor clarifications requested	x					
REB approval		x					
Recruitment tools developed	Email recruitment poster Post on community FaceBook pages	x	X				
Recruitment	Contact interested participants	x	X	x			
Individual interviews	Settlement visits	x	X	x			
Community Session 1				x			
Community Session 2				x			

Community Session 3		x	
Community Session 4		x	
Completion of data collection	Participant validation of notes		x
Completion of module verification	Community validation of module		x
Final module draft	Presented to selected participants		x

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### *Ethics Approval*

My candidacy was approved on August 13, 2024. I continued to work on my ethics application and applied for research ethics approval through Athabasca University's research ethics review board at the end of October 2024. After resubmitting for minor clarifications and attaining conditional approval, I received notice that my revisions were accepted and I obtained a Certification of Ethics Approval on December 20, 2024. I began recruiting participants the next day.

### **Elders, Knowledge Holders, Knowledge Keepers, Community Participants**

As mentioned in previous chapters, the participants in this research study are all residents of the Metis Settlements of Alberta: Buffalo Lake Metis Settlement, East Prairie Metis Settlement, Elizabeth Metis Settlement, Fishing Lake Metis Settlement, Gift Lake Metis Settlement, Kikino Metis Settlement, Paddle Prairie Metis Settlement, and Peavine Metis Settlement. A total of twenty-four individual conversations were conducted for this study, with all eight Settlements visited to gather stories and further recommendations on the content and

design of the online training module. The participants expressed a range of emotions throughout the conversations, including happiness that the study was being carried out and extreme anger that this study had to happen. The study exposed a sensitive topic, and to respect the privacy of the story tellers, I have removed names and numbered the Settlements in a random order. Additionally, while I had consent from some participants to use their names, I did not have consent to link a community name to individual participants. To emphasize relational accountability and community protection, there will be no attribution of a person's or community's name.

### **Knowledge Sharing**

In keeping with Metis approaches to Knowledge sharing, I called each session a conversation, rather than an interview. Rather than asking my questions directly, I broached each question as an opportunity for a conversation. Recognizing that Knowledge flows through individuals and does not exist in isolation, I attempted to note individual tones, word choices, and body language to interpret the stories being shared with me. To honour these individuals and the connection they maintain with the Knowledge shared, I have documented their words as closely as possible to their original form.

As I travelled to each community, I noted that we were in the middle of winter, storytelling time! Elders and community members shared stories orally and in context. The protocol I had developed with my mentors and shared in Appendix 1, provided me, as the researcher, with the relational pathway to enter and later re-enter conversational space and to explain the research goals in an acceptable manner. I explained the informed consent process, including the use of names and the research questions, and followed up by thanking the Elders for sharing their knowledge with me. Visiting, occasionally at a home, but more often at the

community center or Elder center, I would be handed an item such as an old cream separator, a Veteran's packet of information, or I would be following someone ahead of me as they took me to see a trail, an old house, or pointed out a historical point on the settlement such as an old road. These are examples of what I meant by context. All conversations were in English and there was no need for a translator. Occasionally, an individual would speak a word or phrase in Cree but would pause and translate to English for my understanding. I focused on my guiding questions using the protocol, but I also understood and allowed the story space to emerge as an element of knowledge co-creation and preservation (Dion, 2022). The stories that followed varied as each participant added their unique piece of experience to this growing narrative. As my handwritten notes captured these conversations, strong discussion points and themes emerged.

All participants spoke about the impacts of government policies with attempts to stamp out the Metis' choice to stay together. They had all heard about the government trying to 'lift boundaries' and all spoke about the hardships of settlement life concerning health, education, and well-being of families. Since I had shared the research questions as part of the protocol process, conversations flowed from various layers as the Elder chose what components they wanted to respond to. As each Elder shared life experiences as responses, all recognized that they possessed Knowledge and wished to share it. The following section consists of two parts: first, stories that emerged as strong discussion points, followed second by themes that arose from the community conversations. A strong qualitative nature underlined my handwritten notes making them an essential element of this research process in themselves. The exact wording, to the best of my ability, is included to uphold the Metis worldview and epistemology in shared stories.

## Community One Elder Conversations

Community One reflects on the harsh but necessary work of wildland firefighting, which provided income without training or opportunities for advancement, emphasizing that survival and providing for family were the main goals. They advocate for a return to basic, land-based Knowledge—like gardening, hunting, and gathering—as essential for mental, physical, and spiritual well-being, and as a source of pride and connection. The story tellers stress the importance of Indigenous knowledge, language, and culture, particularly for youth, and urge that education be rooted in these values rather than imposed government systems. They highlight the environmental degradation caused by industrial impacts on their land and call for land and water protection, cultural revitalization, and inclusive policy-making that centers Indigenous voices. Finally, the Elders recommend preserving genealogy and photographic history as part of honouring their people and heritage.

Wildland firefighting provided us with income. It was hard work, poor conditions, and no training. But it was about survival, and men were proud to come back with money to help out for the winter. We were never offered training or advice to advance or get further education. The people in our schools should know that we will work to ensure there is enough. Our kids need to be able to read and write to at least have enough.

The Knowledge we need is simple. Go find it in gardening, farming, hunting, building, and gathering. These skills contribute to physical, mental, and spiritual health. You know there is added strength for independence, and pride is the prize. Providing for self and connection with family by doing things together. It was also a form of recreation that came with the gathering: skills tests, strength tests, and playing scrub ball. You can learn a lot by playing, even the adults.

In the Cree language, there is knowledge that helps deal with stress about being able to help oneself or not.

I would like to put forward the following recommendation for you: A consultation process for kids be established that includes Indigenous thinking around industry and policies. We know this Knowledge but our kids have been robbed of their ability to think in ways that matter to us.

We are not well and the land is not well. No one in our community is safe from a human footprint of wells, seismic lines, roads, and cutlines. Our maps are important pieces of

history that mark change and will show the way back to helping our land to breathe. One outcome I would like to see in my lifetime is that Indigenous peoples and impacted communities be the first stop, not a side stop or the last stop, in the approval process.

Revitalizing our history, culture, and language is about the land. Once we know our land again, we can help our kids choose the right education they need so they can come home, work, and make a living, but most importantly, to protect our land from the government. Our schools are nothing if they do not know this. We do not need this government to tell our kids this. We must help our schools tell them this.

History includes our water. We don't even have the right information about the water we're trying to protect. There used to be fish, and you could hear the water running but now there are too many beavers. We had a relationship with our land that was based on values and a relationship with it. It gave us what we needed so we lived because we so easily could have died. Culture is important because it helps us notice issues like pollution. Our lake is getting polluted from recreation boats and sea-doo's. We must protect and limit what goes into the water. There must be a balance because when bad things add up bad things happen. Getting back to culture will teach us again to see that we have resources.

We have resources in the muskegs. We have fens to protect. We have wetlands to protect. Those things hide our berries and medicine for us. Our priority must be to the land. I don't care how others see me. We need to be heard, and I want to recommend implementing land preservation policies that minimize impacts on banks, water, and muskegs. And one more thing: I would like to recommend that our schools and Settlements establish a genealogy priority and a system to archive it.

History is in the pictures. We need to save pictures. Nowadays, everyone has a phone, but when the internet goes down or the power is out, there are no pictures to look at. We cannot forget that our resources include us as people and families, and that requires respect.

### **Community Two Elder Conversations**

In this community, the storytellers emphasize the deep significance of the Cree language as a spiritual, experiential, and relational way of understanding the world, something schools should support, not suppress. They propose developing a Cree-language video game with youth to promote storytelling through action and engagement, while emphasizing the importance of genealogical systems for Metis communities. This approach supports youth in embracing their full identities, rather than feeling compelled to choose between Indian and White identity

constructs. They advocate for recognizing and preserving Metis culture and history, including through the Federation of Metis Settlements, and for capturing stories in both written and visual forms. One Elder shares a personal healing story involving the land to illustrate the value of traditional knowledge and emphasizes that real education must include cultural teachings year-round. They call on community members to get involved, reminding us that true rewards come from protecting the land, keeping kids in school, and passing on wisdom. Ultimately, the Elders want schools to respect Indigenous Knowledge and recognize that meaningful learning, including math and spiritual power, can come from traditional games and practices.

#### Concerning the Cree Language:

I want to talk about the Cree language and schools. Cree is a spiritual, contextual, and living language. It includes all things experiential, spiritual, mental, relational, and is inherent. It represents what is above and below ground. There are principles of the language that include listening, making moral connections, and story telling skills. Schools can bridge our kids and technology to us and language. School principals cannot take that away from us. They must try help us because we need some help here.

I want to build a video game in Cree with some youth. Telling stories is not about us talking and you listening. Storytelling can be done by doing something together.

I am 74 years old and learning the language.

Genealogy has to be part of this. The settlements can set up a genealogy system like the MNA (Metis Nation of Alberta) or, better yet, work with the MNA. They already spent the money and have the system. I feel this is important because we are Metis. We can be proud of all that we are and not pick one side to be better than the other. We are both.

I want to be recognized as being Metis, not an Indian or treated like a white man. It seems that all schools do is teach kids that “when you get older, you have a choice to go the white man's way or the Indian way.” As far as I am concerned there is the Metis Settlement way.

I want to be seen as me. I have a culture and a history. What about the Federation of Metis Settlements? I am pretty sure that thing is still around. Can we use that to unite settlements to want to learn this stuff? Those stories are the best and when kids hear their Moosum’s name their heads pop up and they want to hear about it. We need to record those stories in some way, not just on film but on paper so they stick around.

On culture: Let me tell you a story of a time I was so sick I couldn't even hold my head up. My friend told me to go into the forest, find the best spruce, and hug it as long as I could. Then sit down, put my back against it, and just rest. That spruce has healing pheromones in it. I put my back against the tree and put my legs out on the ground. I just thought to myself as I was the tree. When you leave, leave an offering. We need to go back to this and find healing this way and not just rely on pills. I know there is a white powder from the trees. When you put a bit of water in it and put that in your ears, it gets rid of wax or ear infection. I guess what I am saying is that we have good Knowledge too. School principals think they know everything, but they don't know anything and they don't last long. You know why? They don't know us, and they don't understand us, so they try to make us like them.

Community members need to step up, but they won't unless they are asked. If I could recommend something, I would say we need cultural teachings year-round, and the members must help out. The pay will come when you still have your land, the next generation, and our kids stay in school and go on to the bigger schools. The pay is when they can come home and help.

I want others to know that we are smart. We survived and had to figure things out, fix things, and reuse things. We could learn a lot of math by watching and feeling math. I think that learning things like back in the day, we played hand games. From those games, I learned about spiritual power. That is no joke. I learned about patterns in people and life. That is mathematics that is meaningful. Try to teach cultural teachings that also include hand games.

### **Community Three Elder Conversations**

Stories from the Elders in community Three emphasize the importance of recognizing Metis identity, history, and culture in schools, urging principals to understand and respect their ways of life, which include land-based teachings, traditional medicines, and the Cree language. They advocate for experiential learning, teaching children how to harvest and use natural medicines such as yarrow, chaga, and rat root to promote health and prevent substance misuse. While some knowledge can be recorded, much of it, they argue, must be experienced, ideally through seasonal cultural activities shared across communities via a common calendar. They say if the principal really wants to learn, then this is the way to do it correctly. Elders added that the Cree language is not just for communication but also carries deep knowledge, especially in health and storytelling, which can lose meaning in translation. They see value in digital

storytelling and cross-settlement collaboration, stressing that preservation of culture requires community involvement. Ultimately, they assert the right of Metis people to define themselves, rooted in kinship, shared struggles, and pride—not in colonial categories or imposed definitions. They want to be seen not just through language or labels, but as hard-working people who lived with dignity and passed on meaningful knowledge.

Principals need to know that we are Metis and that we have a history and culture. When we teach our young people how we need to plant gardens and prioritize health, and teach our kids how to find rat root, how to get and use skunk juice, chaga, plantain, and use the berries for medicine, we will have helped educate them and helped them to be well instead of medicating themselves with bad things like drugs. I guess we can share our Knowledge with the school principals and try to teach them to help us. I am not sure about recording everything, but maybe experiencing it is better.

Some things that can be recorded include how to plant and harvest yarrow, use bear grease and roots, identify plants and know when to harvest, how to preserve, and how to harvest poplar powder.

Cree is for Cree people. Understanding the language is more than just using it for communicating. For our kids, Cree has the power to bring other teachers who are gone into their lives. Cree stories will never have the same impact when translated to English because, for white people, English is just about telling us what we are supposed to know.

I suppose digital storytelling can be used to help teach school principals. Not everything, but some things. If that is going to change them, then that is up to them. You can't make someone change. I would say recording is good because then everyone benefits. I would say that it would help if cultural teachings were where they fit in the calendar. Like you can't teach gardening in the dead of winter. So, make a community calendar and share it with all settlements, because we share a common history, culture, and language, but we also have our own history here.

People need to know that at the end of the day, health is everything. Cree is important because it contains knowledge. Take, for example, stories of the sun and the teachings... we need to incorporate or mix in where the knowledge and language make sense at that moment.

I like the idea of recording because then we can link partners so they can share resources. No more silos. I would like to learn about the other settlements, too! It's been a long time since I saw others from the Settlements. Most are gone now, and so are their stories. Principals don't know us. They come here and try teaching our kids, but they are not doing it very well. Preservation will take everyone in the community, so experiential learning is key. Every time we gather, we need to prioritize the language in

nakayâskamohtahitowina and nakayaskamohtahiwewin, introductions and teachings. Nothing should happen without incorporating Cree. For example, in Cree, the word for cancer describes something moving under the skin. Our people need to learn the Cree language for sunburn, chapped lips, heat exhaustion, and dehydration. *Wasaga* is skin; *ekosi osam ickosoot* means over heating, and *wesapahwhit* means very thirsty.

I am happy that you are here. It's important to establish what Metis is. We must know who we are. I believe Metis is not mixed. Maybe at first, people were mixed up! Haha that is funny. I think that initially the culture arose from the Scottish, French, Norwegian, and British, but now our kids are from cultures from everywhere. My dad told me his grandfather was a buffalo hunter. We knew we were part Saulteaux, part Cree, and lived around Fort Garry, Manitoba. My dad and his brother have a different understanding of history. He never listened to what dad had to say. There is a line between being First Nation, being assigned to a First Nation, accepting a treaty number, and Metis who want to hang on to First Nations culture. Metis culture is caught at a crossroads because of the polarity between the two cultures.

School leaders need to know what our culture is. Trying to define by a way of life is weak. It should be more about where you come from, who your parents are, and how you determine your path, including kinship, shared struggles, and efforts to preserve your culture. We, as Metis, have a right to define ourselves. It is an important thing for people to embrace their culture.

You can't define me by my language. I want to be known as a man who made a living for my family, and it was hard. The government has a lazy way of washing its hands. They did us wrong with whatever they defined as that, and that is what we will go with. The Metis I knew were never ashamed of who they were. We never hid it.

### **Community Four Elder Conversations**

Stories from the Elders in community Four emphasize the need for Metis people to be recognized as a distinct group with a rich history, culture, and language, particularly the Cree language, which they believe should be heard daily and taught meaningfully through purposeful programs, audio recordings, and syllabics. They reflect on the communal values of past generations, helping one another, raising children together, and building homes, highlighting a strong sense of unity, care, and leadership. The storytellers recall historical leaders, traditional governance, and a time when community dialogue was inclusive and informative, contrasting this with the disconnect seen in modern systems. They stress the importance of knowing and

protecting their land and water, and express frustration with leadership that either doesn't fully grasp long-term industrial planning or resists it. Women, they note, have been cultural carriers, preserving language, traditions, and crafts like hat-making. They advocate for documentation, recordings, books, and teachings to preserve stories and ensure that younger generations understand their roots, including the history of Metis road allowance people and the need to explore issues such as the split between the Settlements and the Metis Nation of Alberta.

Ultimately, the Elders wish to reclaim pride and knowledge for Metis people through cultural revival and land stewardship.

I believe that Metis people here want to be recognized as distinct. We need to maintain the history of scrip. How it was given and taken away. This land was given to us, and we accepted each other even though it was hard to live. The Cree language needs to be heard every day and at every chance. It is descriptive and can't be translated well into English. If we must put that on film, then so be it. Maybe write it down. Cree programs need to be purposeful and not just in school. Audio recordings are good because people can listen to them and repeat, so they get the pronunciation right for their place.

I am a person. We are the people. We have customs. When we heard someone had a baby, we would pack up stuff and go take care of them. We helped look after other people's kids. This was the help, care, and sense of community we had for helping each other. I remember a family moving in and they had a horse and wagon and everyone worked together to build a house for them. I remember William Jackknife as a first chairman after Joseph Dion was the supervisor. Moosum said he had to move to East Prairie and came back in '41, and he said they had to rely on those who could write.

I think syllabics are important because that is where you learn how to pronounce the Cree correctly. Learning that would be good for everyone because you must think.

I remember that Mary and Annie knew how to read syllabics. Where did it end? Why did it end? She learned from my mom. She wrote syllabics before she wrote English. The girls grew up in the same house, yet some learned and some didn't. I think it must have had something to do with the Catholic faith.

We need to remember our water ceremonies. Water is not a right but a gift, and we all need to commit to keeping the land clean.

A long time ago, everyone knew what was going on. People would talk and learn to form opinions about facts and everyone's needs. No one could be selfish. We were able to talk, ask questions, and table our concerns. Governance has evolved to white man's ways, with

only certain people knowing what is going on. Prior to 1990 and after is a huge difference. A lot of people don't know or don't understand the new governance imposed on us. The Federation had a lot to do to get people to agree on common things to help us get to better places. People would listen to those guys.

We must know our land. Every inch of it. Once we knew it. We knew it better than the surveyors. If we don't remember the water paths above and below ground, we will not know in time how to help the earth. How can our leadership even understand when companies begin planning decades before and our leaders just nod their heads.

I don't want principals thinking we are less than. We have a lot to be proud of. Who else can say they own as much land as we do? Our people need to know how we became road allowance people. It was about '59, and there was a conference in my dad's yard. I was with my gramma, and they built benches. You know, I want to know more about the split between the settlements and the MNA. We need recordings because they will be needed for the book writing. Strengthening is all about the land and protecting our land for the Metis people of the settlements.

I remember when my sister went to day school on the reserve, and she got kicked out. She had to take the bus to school in Cold Lake. Also, I don't know what fee simple means. I'm an old lady, but I am still searching. We used to take care of each other. We were so Metis. It was the women who were the backbone of the community and passed on languages and culture. Don't forget about hat making. We would pretty up our hats for Easter or other special events using whatever we had on hand.

### **Community Five Elder Conversations**

Community Five Elders told stories that highlighted Metis identity, culture, and connection to the land as far more important than money, especially as they grow older. They stress the importance of remembering gravesites, understanding the history of tuberculosis, and learning the true formation and legislation behind Metis Settlements to protect against potential future municipal takeovers. The storytellers call for school principals to truly see and understand the community by learning its governance history, visiting families, and engaging with oral storytelling traditions. They highlight the need for cultural teachings in schools, including parenting, music, dance, genealogy, traditional foods, and natural medicine. Elders expressed concern about the loss of communal bonds, language, and values like respect and Elder Knowledge. The Elders further underline the importance of wellness education to combat

modern health issues and believe schools should integrate land-based learning, the history of Metis veterans, and cultural mapping. Ultimately, they call for collaboration between schools and communities so that educators, children, and future generations can understand and carry forward Metis identity with pride.

We are people, and there are things more important than money or making money. Maybe it's because I am getting older, but nothing is more important than our land and the trees on this land. Our children need to remember the graveyards and who is buried in them. We have a health history that includes TB. The important history is the formation of the settlements. Be careful of the white man because the settlements will eventually be a municipality. We all need to know the legislation history, so people know the difference. To know where we are going, we need to know where we come from. I heard someone say that once.

Principals see us? They come here for a job. Some were good, though. They want to learn about us, then they should start with governance formation. They will know why we are the way we are when they find out how we were treated. Like, why did they dissolve some of the colonies? In the 30's, everyone was hungry, and they wanted land. My dad was from Wolf Lake and there was no compensation for us. That story needs to be told because it was all wrong. We were set up to fail, and then the government just kicked us out with no talk or anything. What about the history of traplines? What happened to them? There was more than those first five. They left us high and dry. What about other contributing members that we don't know? Can we recognize that?

Everything is good now, but it wasn't nice when you got up with ice in the wash. We would borrow the one heater thing to heat up the bathwater. Uncle Ray's house would be full in the evening because he had the TV. Principals need to go visiting. Teach our kids how to go visiting. We need to strengthen visiting because that is how knowledge was shared orally. The stories made relationships.

Our history needs to be visible in our schools. Parenting needs to be taught...traditional parenting vs genocidal parenting. Music is huge, and dancing is something that needs to be brought back. Back then, women were the disciplinarians, and dads were not parenting; they were working, hunting, and gathering. We need to be teaching respect by acknowledging Elder order. Lots happen in big families, and grief and loss are huge, and we can support each other. From a health perspective, we used to get pop and chips as a treat. Nowadays, kids expect it daily. We need to reframe food. Things like diabetes, cancer, and suicide are real, and our communities need a wellness framework.

There is a lot that can be shared to help a school principal work with our communities. To begin with history is a good start. Many adults don't even know this stuff. We don't know our birthday. When we know our birthday, we can have a legacy. These things are

important: genealogy, dances, food, clothing, traditions, fiddling, family gatherings, teepees, natural medicines, knowing the land where you are from, the Cree language, leaders growing leaders, and generations helping the next generation be leaders.

Adults don't tell us anything now. I think we should learn this stuff in school. I don't know what is going on or what is important. I have lost a sense of community. I don't even know what things mean anymore when I hear things. I want to speak Cree to our Elders and family. It's important to keep it alive. I am very interested in Cree. I would also like to do some projects with our Elders. For our community, we focus a lot on music: gospel singers, who sing in English and Cree, guitar, piano, banjo, bass, and bands. Music always brings our community together. Too bad it's mostly at funerals.

I think it's important we look at logging, and where we go hunting, so there's no more moose there anymore. We need to know about hunting and learn how to read our land boundaries.

Once people who work in schools see us as Metis then they can help us to think Indigenous. Schools can do so by having a class about medicines, herbs, tea, and foods. We can teach them, too. We can share our Metis veterans, military personnel, and law enforcement personnel. These guys showed that we wanted to be part of Canada. I think social studies is a good way to teach about genealogy, land, and mapping. These all tie together for land use studies. You are right. Principals must know so the teachers can know, and then the children will know. We must work together.

### **Community Six Elder Conversations**

The Elders in community Six deeply wish for school principals to truly see and respect their community as Woodland Cree and Metis people, recognizing the language, culture, and traditions that have been lost or are at risk. They express concern over the decline of Cree language use among youth, emphasizing that language holds the culture and respect that have been eroded over time. Annual culture camps and token gestures are not enough; meaningful, ongoing engagement is needed, including land-based learning, genealogy, and the sharing of traditional knowledge. They want school principals to prioritize history, music, storytelling, traditional parenting, governance, and cultural pride, things that connect children to their roots and Elders. The Elders, through their stories, believe schools should work alongside the community, not just serve government interests, and must stop treating students as outsiders in

their own homeland. They urge principals to see Metis children as full of potential, to help them develop confidence through literacy, land knowledge, and cultural teachings, and to value Elders as teachers. Acknowledging both strengths and struggles, the storytellers call for unity, healing, and a return to respect, where everyone has a role in shaping a thriving, proud community.

I would like the principal to see us as Woodland Cree. That is what I was taught. All my grandkids talk English. Our culture is gone. Not many talk Cree. Then some people say, "I understand, but I don't speak it." I think a good number of kids understand, but they don't talk it. It's disrespectful that they don't speak the language. The only fault is in us. We knew the language was important, but we let it go. The sad thing is that the culture is in the language. For the kids, it will be hard. They are far gone. I also think that a culture camp once a year is not enough. I remember the stories of people coming to the lake to exchange gifts of food, fur, and tobacco. There are burial sites, and I know one near the lake. A long time ago, when people died, they were just buried. I have to say what needs to be known is that what the white people got, they got from the natives, and others need to know that.

See me? That is a good one. They have eyes, but they don't see me. They only see the road when they drive in and drive out. But if they could learn anything, then genealogy would be nice. It's so important to show them how important history is. People are so lost. They just don't know. I think about the land lots. It's changed so much. Decisions were made that changed the land. There is still time to look after it. Maybe schools can learn and teach about maps and making sites - to show historical places to pick rat root and other medicines. I think a timeline of people and events would help people connect the stories and the people. We never even got teachers- the supervisor's wife was the teacher.

We have seen a lot of principals come and go. Some of them saw us. I wish they would see us all the time. Schools should not operate without the community. In '61 or so, Northlands School came. Half a day was grade 1, and then the high grades had half a day. Somehow, schools took away respect. My grandkids need to know what respect is. I raised all my grandkids. When they come to my place, they feel tough. Teaching respect is done through language and culture. A long time ago, when we were kids, we didn't stay where the Elders were talking. Today, kids are the bosses.

I wish the principals saw us as healthy. Then, they would work to keep that healthy. The way everyone is working is backwards. You can't put something back in the can the way it was before you took it out. I wish for the violin and the guitar. We'd go dancing like the jig and square dancing. Music is good for the soul. We worked hard, and we knew how to make a buck. We had sawmills here, and Patty's camp and Ernie's camp would play hockey. Now, no one seems to get along. I am not sure how we can fix that or if we

can fix where we are now. We have a school, and it has our kids, so we need to be there, too.

I don't care how anyone sees me. How that principal sees my grandkids is a different story. I say see my grandkids as they are, as Metis kids. Teach our settlement history before we all forget it. I know we have stories. I have heard about how they walked around and chose the land. But who did that? How are we linked to East Prairie? Teach about governance. How far does that go back, and how far forward can it go? I also think genealogy is a big one, so cousins don't have kids with cousins. We are rich in culture, but even that is disappearing. Culture is pretty important, like dances, language, traditional medicine, hunting, and fishing. Don't forget about gardens, hunting, and gathering. *Kwayskahstahsowin*, setting things right.

The parts that can be shared with outsiders: for me, it is important to prioritize music, dancing, and language. We don't eat pemmican anymore, but the act of making pemmican, gardening, and bush life are all activities that help us learn history, culture, and language.

I am old now, and my life was spent in politics. People need to understand the governance process, so they know how much control the government has over us. By knowing they can keep working to become a partner with the government, not a puppet. We need to think for ourselves and not buy into what MLAs say. Schools are here for the government, but if we step up, we can say, this school is here for us. Principals need to know that and work with us, not against us. We must keep resisting. We can use the law to maintain our way of life.

I want the principal to see that we are teachers too. George Bellerose's grandson taught the little kids to dance. They go to dances. Those little kids perform. It should be taught the music. I know that John Supernault sings and Marcel Auger jigs. We need to know the people who know the skills. Too much reliance on technology, and people are not learning.

I want the principal to know that even though someone leaves the settlement, they are still a settlement member who belongs there. People leave for many reasons, and maybe schools can help us early on. There are family feuds and people leaving the settlements. We must acknowledge the not-so-good things: name-calling, back-stabbing, Elders raising kids, nepotism, being singled out, left out, fighting, laughing at the younger generation trying to do things. Those things make a person bitter.

I would like the principal to see me like he would look at a child, with potential. We have stuff to offer still. I am alive. Things I could share with a principal are the good people that are doing good things, like Duke Chalifeaux, who is a wildland firefighter, and Shelley Hamelin, who is a teacher. We need to speak about opportunities. We need land-based learning because it offers healing. Schools need to make sure kids can read and write. To me, livelihood of commitment to community is most important. Education will give us the competence and confidence. I would tell our schoolteachers that our cemetery

needs to be cared for. I am too old to take care of family graves. My kids are gone and I could sure use the help. I would go, you know, and tell the kids about the good things people buried there did for our community. I would also tell them to take pride in your yard, clean it up. That shows taking pride in community. We need to champion and not pull down. Our leaders focus only on money and forget about other aspects of the community.

### **Community Seven Elder Conversations**

The Elders in community Seven shared that what truly matters is how the community is seen and valued, not just individuals. They reflect on a time when people helped themselves and each other, and stress that children must relearn self-reliance and hands-on, land-based knowledge that connects to real-life skills like home maintenance and traditional harvesting. The storytellers share a deep concern for the loss of Cree language, culture, and traditions, and want schools to be active spaces where Elders are respected and involved in teaching through gardening, music, storytelling, and Cree language revitalization. They propose ideas such as a "kookum in residence" program and the integration of Cree into schools and daycares to keep cultural knowledge alive. Remembering hard truths about colonial impacts, including land loss and cultural suppression, they stress the importance of genealogy, learning from the land, and telling buried stories, including painful ones about exploitation and survival. They call for school leaders to work with parents in ways that make sense culturally, and to honour Metis history and identity by centering land, tradition, and community healing.

It doesn't matter how anyone sees me. What is more important is how they see the community. They should know that we used to be able to help ourselves and each other. Our people have forgotten that. Now they want things done for them. Our children need to learn how to help themselves again. A school principal knowing that will make learning make sense for them. Learning from a book is not natural. We have natural ways to learn things like science and mathematics, and those include home maintenance, repairs, and taking pride in our homes. Each community had a store of some sort. A government store, and that store has a lot of history, good and bad, and people who tried to help us. We need to find and acknowledge who those people are, their stories, and where they come from.

We have a rich culture that has to do with our First Nations ancestors. We must know that the government wants us to bicker. There is much to learn from treaty people. Most of all, our language needs to be saved because it carries meaning and history. I'd personally like to see cultural events all over and throughout the year. The school is a great place to keep that learning alive. I want to go over there and share what I know, but I don't think my old stories would fit in. It would be good to share space with Elders, not ignore us or hide us away from everyone. We ain't treated so good anymore.

I have some great ideas to share. How about a kookum in residence program? I would like to retell books in Cree. I also know a lot of songs in Cree. I would like to hear our children sing in Cree again. I also think every school should have gardens. Flower gardens and food gardens.

I want to speak Cree so I can talk to other Elders. I like visiting my Elders. I like listening to them play. I feel relaxed and feel good. My grandpa is teaching me guitar. I like to learn in person – it's better. I like how Elders can show me. Music is important. You know Bryanna Auger wrote a song about residential school. I want to learn how to play the drums. My kookum told me that women played a huge role in the settling of the settlements, whether they liked it or not. That history must be remembered.

When I was young, we didn't learn because we were told to learn. We knew reading and writing was important, but we also had other learning. I had to learn how to harvest medicine because my mom couldn't bend over long.

We came here, and we had to survive. I've never had a chance to go to other Settlements, and I am too old now. I couldn't make the trip. I have always wanted to know about our land. What happened? How did it get taken? How did the other people fare? I hope our children get to know that story. The way I see it is that it's best if we use documentation, visuals, and hands-on learning to remember. Learning should start from everything on the land, including the vegetation. Where are the berries that used to be everywhere?

*Chewayisto*, put Cree in schools, daycares, put it everywhere. What about the way kids were treated? Couldn't even go to school all day because everyone had to help just to be able to live. We have burial stories that need to be told. I remember how, when we were kids, we used to make stick flutes, stickmen dancing marionettes. We made our own playthings.

I want them to know that I was a kid once. I remember that. I learned from my own parents and grandparents the things I needed to learn. Then the government came and decided what we had to learn. I don't care about those things. We have our own learning to do, so we don't get turned into something we are not. There is a story of below surface rights, and understanding colonial things is important. Schools need to talk to the parents in the words we understand. Learning must connect with what the land offers. Settlement land was and is for the Metis. And those Freemasons are a bunch of crooks.

I think that we can do it. We can help our schools. It's been hard because the white government doesn't really acknowledge us. Us Elders have our own traditions, then they

weren't allowed. But we hid those things. Today, some believe in the sweat lodge, and some believe in God. Religion is divided.

Genealogy is important. That way our children can find their relatives. I remember the stories of how they lined up the girls and they sold them in Grouard. The ones in charge sold them when they were young. When they got older, they got less money for them.

We cannot deny that without the First Nations we wouldn't be Metis. Our purpose should be self-forgiveness, so we don't have to lose people, deny culture, and deny identity.

### **Community Eight Elder Conversations**

Community Eight Elders emphasize the importance of recognizing the intelligence, leadership, and resilience within the Metis community, particularly by honouring past leaders and preserving Elders' stories. They stress that Metis culture is rooted in shared experiences, working, laughing, grieving, and surviving together, and these values must be passed down. The Elders call for the integration of Cree language into all aspects of community life and planning, noting the difference in how it feels when learned in schools versus through family. They advocate for teaching a full and accurate history of the Settlements starting from the 1800s, including land use, crafting, bush skills, education, entrepreneurship, and kinship. Finally, they reflect on the government's inconsistent treatment of the Metis, cycling through attempts to rehabilitate, develop, and now relate to the community, and assert the need to reclaim and assert Metis cultural identity.

I want them to know that we have smart people. Our leaders all have a story, and our past councillors cannot be forgotten. We need to know the details, recognize past leaders and history. I want to be able to ask questions. What are Metis relationships? They are values of doing things together. We worked, laughed, and survived together. We cried together, and we still even argue together.

We have our Elders and need to save their stories. They will keep the flame burning. This is a good time to visit. Winter is the time for stories, so that is when teaching should happen. Stick Cree in all community planning. Everyone needs to learn anyway.

I want to learn Cree so I can talk with ki-mâmâsisînaw. They always laugh when they talk Cree. When we learn Cree in school, we don't laugh.

Our kids don't even know basic facts about the settlements. Our history needs to start right from the 1800's; government history, veterans, maps/lands, traditional land use, crafting, quilting, sewing, hunting, entrepreneurship, knowing the land, bush skills, history of our settlements, history of education, history of how we made a living. We need to relearn what kinship means.

I have been asked that question. I say know that I am Metis and I have a culture. First, the government wanted to better us, then rehabilitate us, then re-establish us, then rehabilitate us again, then socially develop us, then develop us again, then rehabilitate us, and back and forth. Later, they wanted to improve us. Now they want a relationship with us.

The individual story gathering was followed by a return to the communities for the community conversations, in accordance with the protocol established and shared in Appendix One. The process began with a personal contact with the Settlement Administrator, sharing the current stage of the research and thanking them for their time. As part of this conversation, I would request their advice on whom to contact for the community session and would be directed to either the Elder worker or the Family Resource Network worker. Next, I would contact the worker and arrange a date, then send them the research poster. Originally, I thought of posting on community Facebook pages, but the community staff would want to post in public spaces and put up the poster. Sessions were set up in partnership with the Family Resource Network worker. For the community session, I provided water, juice, and desserts, and the staff provided a light meal, as they had a budget for it and were glad to sit in, participate, and listen to the engagement.

### **Community Conversations**

Over the course of the community conversations, held in four communities in February and March, the following themes emerged, indicating concepts some felt were gaps or needed depth to be added to what was presented. Due to consistent overlap in what was shared, the themes are not marked out by the community. Using line coding on the group discussion large

sheets, I identified the following themes: family, community, youth engagement, community leaders, and language development.

### *Family*

As shared by participants, recommendations focused on how families can engage in language learning through various immersive and interactive activities. Participants discussed how school principals can not only learn by participating but also by spearheading or partnering with the community to implement the ideas shared. Many of the ideas shared highlight the connection between the school, home, and community. Ideas included family immersion camps to provide an opportunity to practice the language in a supportive environment, while language outings, such as berry picking, fishing, or attending gopher and muskrat camps, help integrate learning with cultural experiences. Watching language cartoons and playing language-based games at school can make learning fun for children. Labelling objects and using common table talk phrases like ‘May I be excused?’ help reinforce everyday language use. Singing songs and reciting rhymes can also make language learning more engaging for all learners. Families can connect with grandparents and Elders through school to learn about their heritage and family history. Inviting Elders to join lunch provides a meaningful way to practice the language. Setting aside a day each week to speak as much of the language as possible, or to play word games, can encourage consistent practice. School principals can collaborate with Elders to develop language kits featuring themed materials to send to families to support learning at home. The focus on families as a priority included extended families, as families in the Metis Settlements tend to be quite large. In one case, one individual proudly showed me that he had over 400 cousins. The discussion of large families led naturally to the theme of community.

## *Community*

A strong sense of community can be fostered through various cultural and language-based activities. Participants shared many ideas, including traditional dances and weekly dance groups that feature traditional songs to help preserve and celebrate their heritage. At the same time, street signs and community interpretation signs promote the use of everyday language. Hands-on workshops such as sewing, carving, and regalia-making bring people together to learn traditional skills. Community bingo, card games, and culturally relevant Indigenous bingo with prizes such as moose antlers, hides, and beads create fun opportunities for connection. A dedicated community space featuring a library and a quiet area for language learning can support individuals seeking to improve their pronunciation. Engaging with Elders through one-on-one tea visits, group events, and community dinners provides meaningful opportunities to practice language. Encouraging greetings in the language, hosting a community-wide language day, and fostering connections between communities through dinners or virtual gatherings further strengthen linguistic ties. Monthly community meetings and newsletters featuring language words and lessons can help keep members engaged, while evening classes and cultural camps offer more in-depth learning experiences. Utilizing technology, such as YouTube and other digital tools, can make language accessible to all people in the Metis Settlements of Alberta, regardless of location. Attending community events, singing songs, creating language-related videos, and fundraising for resources and gatherings all contribute to a vibrant, engaged community dedicated to cultural and linguistic preservation, which further engages people of all ages, including youth.

### *Youth Engagement*

Engaging youth in language and cultural learning can be achieved through creative and interactive activities. Participants felt that experiential practices for school principals could be enhanced by co-creating learning objects that benefit youth. Ideas such as developing cartoons for kids and apps for adults can make language learning more accessible and enjoyable, and the principal learns as well. Principals can also encourage youth to create new games and songs for schools, fostering innovation and participation in language preservation. Elder and youth workshops, along with mentorship programs, provide meaningful opportunities for intergenerational learning, where Elders can welcome and guide youth in understanding their language and culture. During gatherings, when youth often have little to do, language classes can be offered as a productive and engaging alternative while adults are in meetings. Youth can also integrate language into music, making learning more dynamic and appealing. Conducting surveys to understand which skills are meaningful to them, such as trapping, can help tailor programs to youth interests and ensure active participation in cultural preservation.

### **Language and Leadership**

Cree language was the only language discussed with the participants who were involved. I did inquire about Michif (a mixed language, combining French and Cree), but no participant indicated that it was a language of choice. Language was a component of all conversations, yet so much data was gathered on the topic that it warranted its own section here. While there was no direct expectation that a school principal had to learn to speak Cree, the discussion focused on engaging with the language and working with the community and school to prioritize language teaching. Participants discussed the school principal and elected leaders, indicating that the roles each plays are influential in getting things done for the betterment of the community.

Community leaders, including principals, play a vital role in preserving language and culture. There is a desire for school staff, including the principal, as well as elected Metis Settlement council members, to be more actively involved in camps and gatherings, and to provide a clearer vision for language development. Additionally, language program development must include opportunities for speakers to reconnect with their language through storytelling and shared memories. Identifying badges indicating a speaker's fluency level could help learners seek guidance, while increased speaking opportunities and structured learning blocks with principals and fluent speakers can enhance proficiency. A well-structured language program should guide learners from introductory to advanced levels, incorporating land-based immersion experiences and a greater language presence at community gatherings. Correcting common errors through positive interaction and using translation for intermediate learners can aid in language development. Advanced learners can benefit from self-guided strategies, media arts, and expressive language-building activities.

Various initiatives, such as a master-apprentice program, full-time adult immersion, one-on-one camps with Elders, and language-only community camps, can create safe learning environments. Overcoming fear and trauma associated with language loss through healing programs, positive reinforcement, and removing barriers imposed by government and residential schools is essential. Daycare services should be available to support parents attending language workshops, while language learning apps and recorded lessons can facilitate ongoing practice. Experiential learning, such as documenting language while engaging in traditional crafts like spoon carving, moccasin making, tanning skins, and drum making, helps preserve cultural and linguistic knowledge.

Traditional dance groups, regalia creation, and weekly practice sessions also reinforce cultural identity. Genealogy trees can help members understand familial relationships and respectfully address Elders. Having cultural items available for learners to name in Cree helps retain the language of traditional ways. The process of becoming a fluent Cree speaker involves a progressive journey that begins with a personal commitment to learning basic skills involving mentoring, courses, and resources. Next, language learners progress to intensive immersion programs to develop conversational skills with listening comprehension. Following immersion is communication through dialogues on various topics, where an understanding of cultural nuances is embedded. Finally, achieving high proficiency, the speaker becomes a mentor, sharing language Knowledge and cultural Knowledge to contribute to the language within their community. Native speakers raised in Cree-speaking homes and communities acquire the language naturally, while second-language speakers must dedicate the time and study effort to achieve advanced proficiency and strive for natural fluency. By fostering language learning across all levels and integrating it into daily life, the community can ensure the survival and growth of the Cree language for future generations.

As shared by the participants, participating in community activities or creating opportunities in the school aligns the acts of preparing, storing, tending, and gathering with traditional Indigenous processes that emphasize sustainability, patience, respect for nature, and community building. These activities help develop leadership qualities like resilience, foresight, cultural stewardship, and ethical decision-making. When leaders engage with these practices, they not only honour Indigenous ways of knowing but also cultivate qualities that make them more effective, compassionate, and responsible leaders. This holistic approach to leadership fosters stronger communities and more sustainable, meaningful leadership practices.

## **Giving Back**

As a researcher or story gatherer, giving back to the communities that shared their stories meant ensuring my approaches were rooted in respect, reciprocity, and lasting relationships. I began by returning the Knowledge in clear language. I printed coloured copies of the module sections and used large wall sticky notes to record comments. Next, I shared the findings with the community first, and credited contributors by name where I had consent. Throughout the process, I ensured their voices remained visible and central. Inherent in the story gathering approach is building ongoing relationships by staying connected. I would send a text to an Elder letting them know when I got home or I would send a short thank you message. Following principles of OCAP (Ownership, Control, Access, Possession), I affirmed to the participants that the research would be returned to the community to continue bringing local context to the online learning platform. Ultimately, I recognize that these community members are not just participants; they are teachers, Knowledge Keepers, and leaders who have entrusted me with their truths.

## **Making Sense**

As I listened to what I was told and reflected on the research questions, I recognized that the communities would not provide me with exact details on what should be included in the content and design of the online training module. The research study had occurred within the traditional storytelling time of winter. I had travelled to each community and sat with storytellers at their kitchen tables, community centers, or important places on their land and I had listened. I had gone back to engage with the community members as groups and processed through stories, comments, and gaps to identify themes, suggestions, actions, and labels. Chapter Six describes the data analysis process and its influence on the development of the online training module.

## **Chapter Six: Searching the Water and Gaining Direction**

As I journeyed from community to community, I was never alone. I learned alongside my Elder mentors as they clarified and answered my questions about what I was hearing.

Storytelling has guided us from childhood, and it is not uncommon to recall a story from long ago and find new meaning in it. I thought I knew a lot about this journey but soon discovered I did not know enough. In Chapter Five, I shared the stories as they were told. In this chapter, I will share the journey of clearing the water around the questions I began with. This chapter will provide detailed information on the process of understanding and making meaning of the stories, and translating the Knowledge gained into the online training module. Making sense of the stories required organizing them and examining the information they contained. That is the first part. In the second section, I will outline the themes that emerged from the coding process and how they led to the development of the online training module.

The inclusion of community Elder mentors from the very beginning of this research study proved to be an asset, adding strength to the chosen methodology and allowing me, the researcher, and the participants to be co-learners. As we collaboratively explored and discussed codes and themes, the powerful act of learning together with Elders connected us within the research process. I noted that the conversations changed from a serious to a joyous tone. Elders contacted me, wanting to continue the conversations more often than the previously arranged schedule and to see more of the training module components more quickly.

### **Collaborative Coding**

Identifying codes and themes is the task of qualitative research (Cohen et al., 2018). As such, themes are the recurring patterns, concepts, or ideas that a researcher identifies in the data. Insights were gained as the Elders and community members shared their experiences and

perspectives on what Knowledge can be shared with school principals to inform an online learning module to support leadership development. Cohen et al. (2018) state that there is no one correct way to analyze and present findings and recommend what they call a ‘fitness for purpose’ approach. Working with the Elders heavily relied on interpretation and multiple interpretations! As stories continued to be gathered, ongoing merging of analysis and interpretation took place in a back-and-forth process that was both iterative and dynamic.

In the subsequent phase, coding focused on establishing relationships between identified codes and categories. Each transcript was analyzed independently to gain a comprehensive understanding of individual participant perspectives. By the midpoint of the open coding process, most research questions had reached saturation; however, the role of Indigenous culture in shaping success had not. A few individuals believed that Indigenous culture should only be reserved for Indigenous people. In contrast, others thought that the teaching and learning process embedded in a culture could help non-Indigenous people recognize the value of Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

A third coding phase was undertaken to enhance conceptual clarity, during which questions and responses were systematically organized and grouped to delineate connections between codes and categories. At this stage, I enlisted the assistance of the four Elders, who expressed interest in this aspect of the research project. Following a coding training session about data reduction (Cohen et al., 2018), I met with each participant individually. This round of coding data underwent rigorous analysis, and broader categories were subsequently developed. The refinement and finalization of these overarching categories were extensive, necessitating three rounds of analysis as the Elders continued to provide input that would later become aspects of the online training module.

## **Metis Settlements of Alberta Digital Bundles**

The Red River cart wheel provides a central visual representation of the blueprint forming the module that holds the Knowledge sharing throughout this research. It is meant to accompany the fishing net teachings shared in Chapter Four, which represents an additional layer of Metis Knowledge sharing. The Red River cart wheel symbolizes movement, journey, and interconnected pathways through which Knowledge and relationships are carried across the Metis homeland. In contrast, the fishing net teaching represents the collective gathering of Knowledge through relationships and shared experiences. In Metis communities, a net does not rely on a single thread but on the strength of many strands and knots woven together. Similarly, the Knowledge informing this research emerged through relationships with Elders, Knowledge Holders, Knowledge Keepers, and community members whose teachings were woven together through storytelling and dialogue.

For this reason, both visuals are intentionally included. The Red River cart wheel represents the structural blueprint guiding the learning journey, while the fishing net reflects the relational process through which Knowledge was gathered and understood. Together, these images illustrate both the structure and the relational gathering of Knowledge that shaped the development of the online module and the research process itself.

The conversations and community engagement sessions generated a significant body of Knowledge that required careful reflection and analysis. In keeping with the relational approach described earlier, the analysis process sought to remain faithful to the meanings participants shared through storytelling and dialogue. To achieve this, handwritten field notes and reflections from the conversations were reviewed and organized through coding and categorization. After

completing coding and categorization, thematic extraction was conducted based on emergent categories. This phase centered on a nuanced interpretation of participants' perceptions, ideas, and intended meanings, with particular attention to the conclusions they sought to convey.

Following this thematic extraction, the following themes emerged:

1. Indigenous educational leadership
2. Perspective on teaching and learning
3. Approaches to support teaching and learning
4. Transitions to support teaching and learning
5. Essential Knowledge

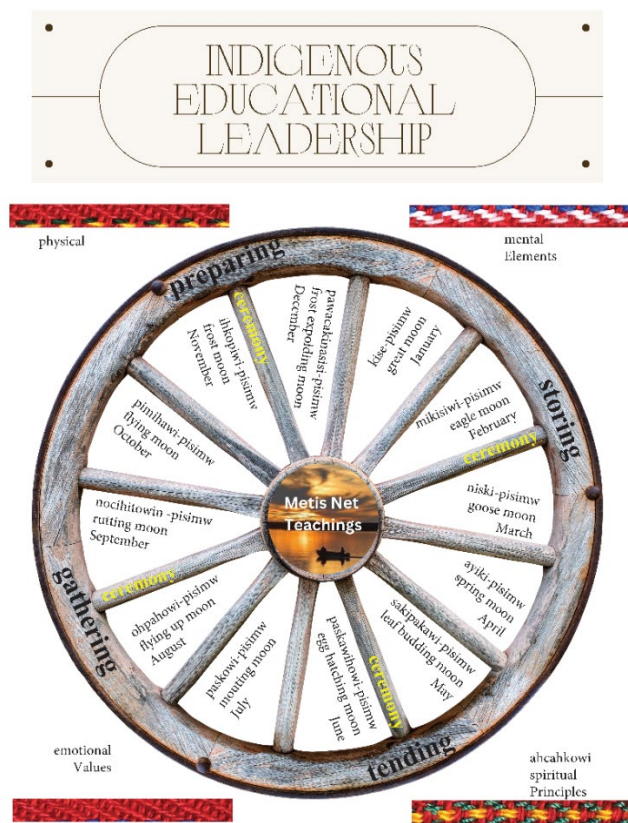
These five themes were taken back to the communities in March. Following an opening prayer and a small meal, I shared the purpose and process of the research study and invited any participant who wanted to stay and join the conversation. No person in any community left. Maintaining an invitational, kitchen-table conversation, we would gather in a circle, and I would serve as the writer while we discussed what had been heard to date and whether anything had been overlooked. The draft of the online training module was shared at a Metis Settlements of Alberta General Council meeting in Edmonton in April, where department leads and leadership of each of the eight Metis Settlements gathered, and the research findings were accepted.

Elders, community members, and leadership who participated in this research exploration agreed that the Cree language, Settlement history, and community culture are grounded in storytelling. Conversations began with my questions and ended with unique experiences being shared in various ways. I never knew where I would end up. I left with puzzle pieces that fit together quickly, forming a picture that would become an image map for the online learning

module. I developed the image map shown in Figure 8, which served as the starting point for the design process. Following the key five themes and extracting the objectives and teaching and learning activities, work with the Elder mentors continued to establish the leadership alignment components. The module draft components were returned to the communities in picture format as part of open community conversations to gather feedback. A consistent agreement emerged between the Elders and community members on storytelling and experiential learning, which would become the constructive learning model supporting the objectives of the online learning module.

**Figure 8**

*Image Map of the Online Learning Module*



## Indigenous Educational Leadership

Elders spoke highly about those in the community who were respected for their Knowledge of Cree, history, storytelling, talking, and survival skills. Stories were shared about leaders who had learned lessons from the past to take on the government about land issues. Stories were also told about how leaders prepared their families and communities for the future. Floyd Thompson, a long-serving elected leader from Kikino, often repeats this phrase in mentoring conversations: “*We cannot effectively plan for our future if we do not know our past.*”

With the guidance of Elders, Indigenous Educational Leadership was defined as a focus on community, collaboration, and a commitment to the inclusion and safety of Indigenous Knowledge, as shared with school leaders (Bouvier et al., 2016). Knowledge shared with school leaders was intended to support them in establishing the community's practices and values as the foundation of the school culture. Elders identified these practices as local community where traditions, relationships, and values are at the forefront; school community which was expressed as how those values and practices are lived out by teachers, staff, and students within the school; and finally, competent contexts as environments where educators and school leaders can succeed because the cultural foundation makes them feel capable, respected, and supported.

When discussing the local community, all the Elders spoke about the Metis Settlements of Alberta and the importance of legislative knowledge and land protection. Elders equally emphasized the value of local perspectives by highlighting holistic, community-center approaches to education. Elders identified and prioritized relational learning, in which students, teachers, school leaders, and communities collaborate to create sustainable, supportive, inclusive, and respectful learning environments.

School community conversations acknowledged the unique histories, cultures, and identities of individual communities, fostering a sense of belonging among students and promoting inclusive, respectful learning environments. Elders emphasized the school principal's role in creating conditions that enable students to succeed, which involves integrating the classroom with the community and bringing the community into the classrooms.

Competencies that would support community inclusion in schools included collaboration and shared leadership approaches. With a focus on engaging all education partners, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Indigenous educators can guide schools in incorporating traditional teachings, land-based learning, and culturally responsive practices to achieve school improvement, including enhanced student learning outcomes. When school leaders are inclusive and practices reflect diverse worldviews, participants feel that the education system strengthens its commitment to quality learning experiences and equity for all students.

### **Perspective on teaching and learning**

Insight into the stories reflected what the participants were willing to share, were deemed acceptable to represent in the online module, and were prioritized as necessary. The descriptors reflect the participants who were involved, acknowledging that Knowledge is always partial, contextual, and situated within relationships of trust. What is shared in this section does not claim to represent the full breadth of community Knowledge or lived experiences, but rather what participants determined could be shared in this specific format and timeframe. As such, the current version is both meaningful and incomplete; it provides a foundation while also signalling the importance of ongoing dialogue. This section offers an opportunity to expand further through deeper consultation, community validation, and the inclusion of additional voices, particularly Elders, youth, and other Knowledge Holders whose perspectives had not yet been captured.

Future iterations of the module may more fully reflect the community's layered understandings and ensure that the school culture remains grounded in values identified and affirmed at the local level.

The first of the four sections reflects Knowledge shared regarding the history of the Settlements. It indicates the importance placed on knowing the early years of the Settlements, Federation years, pre- and post-Accord years, local area contributions to surrounding communities, and key governance areas such as the Metis Settlements Appeals Tribunal, Strategic Training Initiatives, Health, and the development of General Council and local by-laws. The second section reflects the Knowledge shared within the mapping of the land. Knowledge that participants wished to share includes the extensive technological footprint, development of the fishing and trapping industries, sawmills, roads, and infrastructure. The third section reflects artisans, craftspeople, and sports. Emphasis was placed on the crafts, music, dance, actors, preservation, sewing, gathering, writers, and storytellers, as well as sports highlights of baseball, softball, hockey, and rodeo. The final section outlines the various people and professions mentioned during the conversations. Participants discussed the inclusion of elected leaders, veterans, wildland and volunteer firefighters, law enforcement, healthcare professionals, teachers, lawyers, social workers, and instructors.

### **Approaches to support teaching and learning**

In the analysis phase with Elders, themes centered on the cyclical nature of preparing, storing, tending, and gathering. The discussion focused on how these four processes can support school leaders in ways that align with traditional Indigenous practices by emphasizing interconnectedness, sustainability, resilience, mentorship, patience, environmental stewardship, identity, and trust. Throughout the analysis, Elders used the metaphor of a mirror, where they

held and taught the Indigenous perspective, and the school leader's and leadership alignment were reflected. The following sections outline details that emerged during the analysis phase, aligning the Indigenous perspective with leadership learning.

### *Interconnectedness and Community Responsibility*

Traditional Indigenous processes emphasize the interconnectedness of all living things. Preparing, storing, tending, and gathering are not just individual tasks but communal activities that reflect a holistic approach to life. Every action has an impact on the community and the environment, reinforcing the responsibility to care for both the land and one another. Leaders who engage in or promote these practices recognize the importance of long-term thinking and sustainable decision-making. Leadership in this context is about fostering relationships with individuals, the land, and the broader community. This fosters a leadership style characterized by mutual respect, accountability, and a long-term vision for the overall well-being of all.

### *Sustainability and Stewardship*

Indigenous cultures have traditionally practiced sustainable resource management, ensuring that gathering and tending to natural resources are done with great care. Methods such as crop rotation, selective harvesting, and food preservation through drying, smoking, and canning reflect a deep understanding of ecological balance and long-term sustainability. Leaders who adopt sustainable practices incorporate these principles into their leadership approach. Effective leadership is not about immediate gains but stewarding human, natural, and financial resources to ensure long-term stability. These leaders prioritize careful planning, nurturing talent, and protecting resources for future generations.

### *Resilience and Self-Sufficiency*

The Metis Settlements of Alberta communities have always emphasized self-sufficiency, with individuals and communities developing skills to gather food, medicine, and materials. These practices fostered resilience, enabling communities to thrive even in the most challenging conditions. Leaders who encourage self-sufficiency cultivate resilience in themselves and others. They recognize the importance of resourcefulness and adaptability, essential qualities in leadership. Leaders who guide others through difficult times while remaining grounded in strong community values inspire trust and perseverance within their teams.

### *Knowledge Sharing and Mentorship*

In Indigenous cultures, knowledge about preparing, storing, and gathering is passed down through oral traditions, ceremonies, and hands-on mentorship (Cruikshank, 1994). Elders, family members, and community leaders play a vital role in teaching younger generations these critical skills. In Indigenous and modern contexts, effective leadership involves mentorship and knowledge transfer. Leaders who engage in these processes learn to mentor others, fostering a culture of sharing wisdom and supporting others' growth. This creates a leadership cycle where knowledge is continuously passed down, ensuring continuity and development within communities and learning organizations.

### *Patience, Planning, and Timing*

Many Metis Settlement cultural traditions emphasize patience and respect for natural rhythms. Activities such as gathering and harvesting are tied to seasonal cycles and require careful planning and timing to ensure success. Leaders who understand the importance of timing and preparation develop patience and foresight. They recognize that just as crops need time to grow, relationships, projects, and initiatives require thoughtful nurturing. This approach helps

them make strategic, well-considered decisions rather than rushing into actions without proper planning.

### *Respect for Nature and Environmental Stewardship*

Elders spoke about traditional Indigenous practices that are deeply rooted in respect for the land and nature. Whether gathering plants, hunting animals, or utilizing natural materials, the Metis people, like many other Indigenous communities, take only what is necessary and ensure that ecosystems remain balanced. This respect for nature is reflected in leadership practices that prioritize ethical decision-making, environmental sustainability, and community well-being. School leaders who are mindful of their impact on the world cultivate a sense of accountability and responsibility, ensuring that their school outcomes make a positive contribution to society.

### *Cultural Continuity and Identity*

For Metis Settlement communities, preparing and gathering are not just practical tasks but also spiritual, cultural, and ceremonial acts. These traditions maintain connections to ancestors, the land, and cultural heritage. School leaders who engage in these practices recognize the importance of cultural continuity in leadership. Just as Indigenous communities pass down traditions and values, school leaders can play a crucial role in preserving and transmitting cultural identity. This strengthens their sense of purpose, enabling them to lead with authenticity and deep respect for the community's heritage.

### *Building Trust and Consensus*

Elders spoke about how traditional leadership relied on consensus-building, where decisions are made collectively with input from the community. This approach fostered trust, cooperation, and respect for the collective well-being. In modern school leadership contexts,

building consensus and fostering trust are essential skills. Leaders who participate in communal activities such as gathering or preparing learn the value of collaboration and active listening. These skills enable them to create inclusive environments where all voices are heard, ensuring that decisions reflect the needs and aspirations of the entire group.

By preparing, tending, gathering, and storing, leaders align with traditional Indigenous practices that emphasize sustainability, patience, respect for nature, and community building. These activities help develop leadership qualities like resilience, foresight, cultural stewardship, and ethical decision-making. When leaders engage with these practices, they not only honour Indigenous ways of knowing but also cultivate qualities that make them more effective, compassionate, and responsible leaders. This holistic approach to leadership fosters stronger communities and more sustainable, meaningful leadership practices. The following section will outline the transition between preparing, storing, tending, and gathering and offer insight into the connection of school leadership development.

### **Transitions to Support Teaching and Learning**

Throughout the conversations, Elders would share how ceremonies were acknowledged to mark transitions—such as rites of passage, seasonal changes, marriages, deaths, political highlights, or other important life events—and how these events still hold deep significance in Metis Settlement culture, symbolizing growth, learning, and community connection. These ceremonies often involved rituals held in homes, churches, and on the land that acknowledge people's transitions, offering guidance, teachings, and blessings for the future. The connection between these ceremonies and school leadership development is profound, as both emphasize key principles such as growth, responsibility, respect, and community engagement.

## **Acknowledgment of Growth and Development**

Many Indigenous ceremonies celebrate individual and communal growth, recognizing the transition from one stage of life to another. This could include ceremonies for children transitioning into adulthood, for harvest, or for major life milestones. Just as Indigenous ceremonies acknowledge transitions, school leadership development involves recognizing stages of growth from novice to experienced leader. Acknowledging these stages helps school leaders reflect on their growth, development, and responsibilities, much like an individual might reflect on their learning and maturity through a ceremony. Ceremonies provide a structured way to mark progress and transition, encouraging leaders to reflect on their experiences and continue learning.

Further exploration of how ceremony could be represented within the module focused on framing ceremony as both a learning strategy and a leadership practice. Practical ways include beginning and ending each training session with a short reflective ‘ceremony’, does not have to be spiritual or religious, signaling transition into and out of learning, creating a sense of importance and continuity. Another opportunity includes milestone marking such as holding a small progress ceremony which would serve to connect the act of finishing a stage with reflection and recognition. Personal transition rituals such as journaling, offering tobacco, or planting something as a personal ceremony at the end of a module would serve to anchor learning in a memorable way and symbolize transition into applying Knowledge. Finally, within the module itself, wording of how ceremony will be used as a way of marking progress and transitions, how ceremonies are opportunities to pause, reflect on what has been learned, and how those teachings will be carried forward to honour the learning process and commit to continued leadership learning can be utilized.

## **Community and Collective Responsibility**

Many Indigenous traditions emphasize the collective nature of transitions, where ceremonies are not just for the individual but for the entire community. These events often highlight people's interconnectedness as they come together to support and witness one another's changes. Effective school leadership is inherently a communal process. Leaders must consider the well-being of students, teachers, families, and the broader community. By recognizing the importance of community in ceremonies, school leaders can cultivate a leadership style that prioritizes collaboration, collective decision-making, and community building. Within the module, working in a context that values Indigenous Knowledge, teachings on how ceremonies mark life stages and leadership responsibilities include inviting Elders or Knowledge Keepers to share how ceremonies support reflection, humility, and accountability. Transitioning into leadership roles requires school leaders to build strong relationships and to work with others toward shared goals, just as Indigenous ceremonies bring the community together for a common purpose.

## **Respect for Tradition and Continuity**

Indigenous ceremonies often draw on long-standing traditions that have been passed down through generations. These practices help maintain continuity within the culture, ensuring that the teachings, values, and wisdom of past generations are honoured and carried forward. School leaders who are mindful of tradition, whether within Indigenous cultures or broader educational practices, can cultivate a deep respect for continuity. Just as ceremonies mark important transitions while connecting people to their heritage, school leaders can focus on respecting the history and culture of their institutions, ensuring that essential traditions are passed on and that leadership practices evolve in a way that honours those who came before. This

respect for continuity is critical in creating schools that are both innovative and grounded in core values.

### **Spiritual and Personal Reflection**

Many Indigenous ceremonies encourage personal reflection and spiritual growth. They create a space for individuals to connect with their inner selves, their ancestors, and their life's purpose. These moments of reflection help individuals understand their role in the broader context of their community and the natural world. School leaders must also engage in self-reflection to foster their growth. Indigenous ceremonies can serve as a model for leadership development, highlighting the importance of introspection, humility, and self-awareness in a leader's journey. Just as ceremonies provide a space for personal reflection, school leaders can benefit from opportunities to reflect on their decisions, actions, and their impact on students and staff. Regular reflection can help leaders develop emotional intelligence, enhance their problem-solving abilities, and maintain a sense of purpose in their work.

For non-Indigenous school leaders entering Indigenous communities, ceremonies are not meant to be copied, but to learn from the principles that ceremonies embody and translate the principles into leadership practice. Within the module, this could look like positioning ceremonies as a model - not a template. The emphasis places Indigenous ceremonies as something not replicated without community guidance. Additionally, when positioning ceremony as a model, the ceremony can inspire leadership approaches by highlighting values of reflection, humility, accountability, and relational responsibility. When non-Indigenous leaders participate in ceremony, learning from underlying principles include introspection by pausing, reflecting, and examining their own assumptions before acting; humility, as leadership as service is recognized knowing the leader is a guest in the community; self-awareness, where support to

leaders in becoming mindful of how their decisions and presence affect students, staff, and community; and finally, relational accountability, where leaders learn that leadership is about reciprocity and care, not just business. As personal practice, it is important to invite leaders to create their own personal rituals (non-Indigenous in form, but inspired by the spirit of ceremony), such as writing a letter to themselves about their commitments, or planting something symbolic of growth.

Wording within the module may reflect how, within Indigenous communities, ceremonies provide a structured way to mark important transitions, honour relationships, and ground leadership in humility and self-awareness. For non-Indigenous school leaders, these ceremonies can serve as a model - not to be replicated, but to inspire leadership practices that emphasize reflection, humility, and relational accountability. Additionally, wording that highlights that within this training module, exploration of how leaders can incorporate these principles into their own leadership journeys, creating personal practices that support continuous growth and respectful engagement within the community can be included.

### **Rituals for Transition and Renewal**

Ceremonies often mark transitions in a person's life—such as the passage from childhood to adulthood or from one phase of life to another. They help guide people through changes, offering support, teachings, and a sense of renewal. These ceremonies remind individuals that transition is a natural and necessary part of life, encouraging people to embrace new roles and responsibilities. School leaders also experience transitions in their careers, such as stepping into a new leadership role, managing organizational change, or adapting to new educational standards. Ceremonies that focus on transitions can inspire school leaders to view these moments as opportunities for growth and renewal. For instance, a leadership transition may involve

mentorship, community support, or symbolic rituals that help the leader navigate challenges and understand their responsibilities in a new capacity.

Moving from principle to practice involves treating ceremonial thinking as a lens for designing leadership transitions, while respecting Indigenous traditions. Realizing principle to practice could involve mentorship as a transitional rite where new leaders are paired with experienced mentors, framing this relationship as part of the leader's transition journey. By building in structured reflection conversations, these checkpoints echo ceremonial markers of progress. Positioning transition as a relationship-building moment and not just a job change could include a respectful welcome event. As a community welcome and support moment, a new leader could host a circle where community members have an opportunity to share expectations, hopes, and advice. Transition further offers opportunity for continuity and responsibility where the outgoing leader hands over a symbolic item, such as a book of community stories, or a community artisan craft, highlighting stewardship. As a form of collective acknowledgement of the transition, building in structured moments where the leader publicly acknowledges what they are inheriting and how they plan to carry it forward brings power to naming responsibilities and mirrors the way ceremonies clarify roles and intentions.

Within the module, wording would include how transitions in leadership are not just administrative changes, they are opportunities for growth and renewal. By drawing inspiration from the role of ceremonies in marking life changes, school leaders can embrace mentorship, community involvement, and symbolic acts that assist them in stepping into new responsibilities with clarity and humility. Fostering transitional practices that honour relationships and treat leadership milestones as meaningful steps provides the necessary structure for a transformative leadership journey.

## **Building Resilience and Strength**

Ceremonial practices are often designed to foster resilience and strength, providing individuals with the wisdom and support they need to overcome challenges. For example, coming-of-age ceremonies may impart knowledge about responsibility, resilience, and the expectations that individuals have within their community. Education leaders face numerous challenges, including navigating complex relationships and making difficult decisions that prioritize the well-being of their students. Just as Indigenous ceremonies help individuals develop inner strength and resilience, school leaders can benefit from developing these same qualities. Through mentorship, reflection, and ongoing professional development, leaders can enhance their ability to navigate adversity and lead their communities with confidence.

In the context of the Metis Settlements of Alberta, leaders can enhance their ability to navigate by grounding mentorship, reflection, and professional growth in Metis Settlement worldviews, histories, and governance traditions. Some ways this might transpire include mentorship rooted in community by pairing new school leaders with respected Elders, Knowledge Keepers, or experienced Metis community leaders who can share teachings about Settlement governance, kinship responsibilities, and the history of Metis advocacy. Additionally, reflection through cultural practice by incorporating Metis ceremonies such as flag raising, including community music and dance in school events, and relying on traditional practices of gathering and dialogue will encourage leaders to think collectively rather than in isolation. Further, professional development connected to identity and place that involves offering leadership learning inclusive of Metis Settlement history, rights, and contemporary issues, will allow leaders to situate their work within the broader struggle for recognition and self-determination. Integrating land-based learning such as trapping, harvesting, or crafts offers a way

of grounding leadership in community experience. Finally, building resilience through community support encourages leaders to draw on the collective strength of the Settlements, forming networks across different communities to share strategies, resources, and encouragement. Leadership growth is not about generic skills; it becomes a living, community-rooted process that strengthens the leaders and reaffirms Metis Settlements of Alberta culture and identity.

### **Ceremonies as a Framework for Celebration**

In many Indigenous cultures, ceremonies celebrate life, harvest, achievements, and collective milestones. These celebrations reinforce the value of individual and communal achievements while encouraging people to move forward in a positive direction. In a school context, leadership ceremonies can be framed as celebrations of accomplishments—whether they involve student success, teacher achievements, or the collective progress of the school community. Recognizing and celebrating milestones enables school leaders to boost morale, cultivate a positive school culture, and promote ongoing growth and development. Like Indigenous ceremonies, these celebrations help leaders acknowledge achievements and inspire hope for future successes.

Indigenous ceremonies for marking transitions offer profound lessons for the development of school leadership. By emphasizing community, reflection, resilience, respect for tradition, and the celebration of growth, these ceremonies provide a powerful model for education leaders. School leaders who draw inspiration from these practices can better navigate their transitions, foster strong community bonds, and develop leadership practices honouring tradition while embracing change. Ultimately, Indigenous ceremonies teach school leaders to view leadership as a role and a continuous process of personal and communal transformation.

## **Essential Knowledge**

As the data analysis proceeded, the Elders identified a need to code some of the data into a year-round learning calendar. These essential Knowledge components formed the basis of the Red River cart wheel spoke spaces, as illustrated in the image presented earlier (Figure 7), which focuses on teaching and celebrating the Cree language, history, culture, and traditions throughout various months. Elders identified that learning that focused on languages, history, and culture could have a significant impact on school principals' learning growth as educational leaders. The Elders identified the following impacts: culturally responsive leadership, strengthening community connections, promoting knowledge systems, developing through collaboration, fostering critical thinking, facilitating holistic education, empowering educators, and building leadership skills.

Elder conversations identified school principals involved in integrating Cree language and Metis cultural teachings as better equipped to create culturally responsive learning environments. They gain a deeper understanding of the diverse cultural backgrounds of their students, enabling them to advocate for inclusive education practices that honour Indigenous perspectives and histories.

School leaders who engage with local history and traditions help themselves foster stronger relationships with the surrounding community. By incorporating teachings on Metis history and local community contributions, principals build trust and show their commitment to supporting students' cultural identities. This fosters a sense of belonging and respect among students, families, and educators.

By supporting the integration of Indigenous knowledge, including language, traditional practices, and storytelling, principals can create educational spaces that value alternative ways of

knowing. This promotes intellectual diversity and helps develop well-rounded students who are respectful of different cultures and worldviews. Elders shared how principals can engage in professional development by collaborating with local Elders, cultural leaders, and educators to deepen their understanding of Cree and Metis traditions. This learning will not only help them grow as leaders but also empower them to guide their staff in incorporating these teachings into their curricula and teaching strategies.

The focus on historical events, such as land rescindments and Metis colonial history, provides an opportunity for principals to support critical discussions in schools. Understanding the impact of these histories on students' families can enable principals to advocate for curricula that foster critical thinking, social justice, and awareness of the rights and histories of Metis Settlement peoples.

Elders also shared that incorporating hands-on experiences, such as wild food harvesting, traditional crafting, and survival skills, offers students practical life skills and an appreciation for their cultural heritage. Principals who experience and encourage this approach create holistic learning environments where students gain both academic knowledge and life skills. This can also enhance student engagement as they connect with learning in meaningful, experiential ways.

As leaders, principals can play a key role in guiding teachers to incorporate local history, language, and cultural teachings into their classrooms. By advocating for and supporting these efforts, principals ensure that educators are empowered to integrate culturally relevant content into their teaching, thereby fostering an inclusive curriculum that benefits all students. Leading initiatives in cultural education, from organizing immersion camps to supporting local cultural events, enables principals to refine their leadership skills in areas such as event coordination, collaboration, and fostering community partnerships. These experiences enable them to become

more effective leaders in managing diverse learning environments and ensuring that the cultural needs of Indigenous students are met.

In the next chapter, I will evaluate the study findings in relation to the questions that initiated this research exploration.

## Chapter Seven: A Virtual Kitchen Table

My learning journey has been transformative. Occupying the honoured space alongside Elders has provided more than just information; it has initiated a process of internalizing Metis methodologies that I am only beginning to truly comprehend. This experience was deeply humbling, as the Elders entrusted me not with ‘data’ but with the living flow of Knowledge from their own lives and ancestors. Following the principles of *wahkohtowin*, my role shifted from an academic observer to a steward of these stories. As Margaret Kovach (2021) emphasizes, capturing participants' experiences is a protective act, one that recognizes community members as authoritative research partners rather than subjects. By centering their voices, I am committed to a strengths-based representation that protects their contributions and honours the sacred spirit in which they were shared. I am proud to stand with each Metis, and other Indigenous scholars that I was blessed to learn from on this journey.

This chapter is a discussion, shares implications, and provides reflections as it describes the direction my initial question led me and the destination I ultimately reached: How can storytelling and Metis Settlements of Alberta Indigenous Knowledge inform the development of an online leadership training module designed for Kindergarten to grade 12 school leaders who work in northern Alberta schools? As part of the exploration, this research journey examined how Metis Settlement people want to be recognized, the principles that would support their ideas, and how storytelling could be effectively translated into an online environment. I learned that an asynchronous online environment must be balanced with in-person teaching and learning to mitigate the risk of cultural misunderstandings regarding the alignment of leadership content with Indigenous Knowledge. I also learned that reflection is a valued process for translating

reading, experiences, and conversations into meaningful insights, allowing school leaders to internalize and apply their learning effectively in their leadership practices.

Storytelling and Indigenous Knowledge of Metis Settlements in Alberta can play a crucial role in developing an online leadership training module for K-12 school leaders in northern Alberta. By integrating these cultural perspectives, the module can enhance cultural competence, foster relationship-building, and promote reconciliation in education. In the sections below, I discuss how this can be achieved.

### **Storytelling as a Pedagogical Approach**

Storytelling is a foundational teaching method in Indigenous cultures and can be woven into the training module to convey leadership principles through the lived experiences of the Metis. Elders emphasized that reflection naturally arises when challenges and solutions in narrative form including song, dance, and storytelling. Sharing the experiences of Metis students, families, and communities can further foster empathy and deepen understanding among leaders.

### **Metis Indigenous Knowledge for Leadership Development**

The Metis Settlements' cultural traditions, governance systems, and ways of knowing can inform leadership learning in several ways. Beginning with the historical and contemporary governance models, school leaders can initiate their leadership learning in a Metis Settlement by understanding how these communities govern themselves. This understanding can inspire school leaders to adopt inclusive, community-centered leadership approaches. Layering in Relationship-Based Leadership, school principals lead with Metis values that emphasize kinship, community, and respect, aligning with the need for strong school-community connections. Ultimately, when land-based learning and experiential knowledge converge, school leaders can draw on land-based

education models that emphasize holistic development, a concept particularly relevant for northern Alberta schools.

### **Culturally Responsive Leadership Practices**

Practices of culturally responsive leadership include mentor relationships with Elders and Knowledge Keepers sharing perspectives on leadership and community engagement. Sharing can be achieved through various means, including artifacts, experiences, reading and reflection, and live mentorship opportunities. Previous work of scholars such as Poitras Pratt (2022) with interactive digital storytelling, demonstrates how the featuring of Metis Elders can be extended to include educators, students, and leaders discussing the strengths and challenges of education in northern Alberta from the point of view of the communities involved. Additionally, it was suggested that case studies and role-playing could help school leaders practice applying Metis ways of knowing in real-world leadership scenarios.

### **Addressing Challenges in Northern Alberta Schools**

The learning opportunities presented should acknowledge the realities of northern Alberta schools, specifically the Metis Settlements of Alberta. Realities include the need for intentionally supporting Metis and Indigenous students' well-being and academic success. The distance between communities also necessitates addressing the challenges of rural and remote education through collaborative leadership. The closest and most important stakeholder is the local community. All educational outcomes must prioritize the strengthening of school-community relationships through culturally inclusive policies.

## **Reconciliation and Allyship**

Each participant in this research learning journey felt that when school leaders begin integrating Metis storytelling and Knowledge, they can become allies in reconciliation. As allies in reconciliation, school leaders will recognize and value Metis contributions to education, address systemic barriers that Metis students and families face, and actively advocate for Metis Settlement and Indigenous perspectives in school curricula and policies.

## **Technology-Assisted School Leader Pathways**

The online leadership learning pathways: Metis Settlement-Informed Leadership in Northern Alberta Schools is designed to support K-12 school leaders in deepening their understanding of Indigenous Knowledge and storytelling from Metis Settlements in Alberta. The pathways presented in this research may equip leaders with the cultural competence and strategies needed to foster meaningful relationships with Metis students, families, and communities while integrating Indigenous perspectives into school leadership. There are considerations that future designers need to be aware of regarding this model. To begin, the Elders must be involved, as they are the primary holders of Knowledge in the community, and their role centers on consent and the protection of Knowledge. Evaluation is not included, including paper tests, as there is no right or wrong when it comes to the learning needs indicated in these pathways. The model's intent is broader in scope, aiming to align school-based leadership standards with Indigenous perspectives.

Learning begins with the first module, articulated as Metis Net Teachings, within the hub of the Metis cart. Metis Net Teachings serves as an introduction to Metis ways of knowing and storytelling, providing foundational knowledge of Metis history and culture, and of the role of storytelling as a teaching and leadership tool. A welcome video from Metis Elders and

Knowledge Keepers sets the stage, followed by an interactive timeline of Metis history and the development of Metis settlements in Alberta. School leaders will explore storytelling as a means of knowledge transmission and engage in a personal reflection activity to connect their leadership experiences with Indigenous ways of knowing and understanding.

The embedded second module covers concepts of Metis governance and community leadership, introducing school leaders to Metis governance structures and the values of Metis leadership. Through case studies, participants will examine the self-governance systems of Metis Settlements and how these models can inform inclusive school leadership. A recorded panel discussion with Metis leaders will provide firsthand insights into community-centered leadership. Participants will then engage in an interactive scenario to apply relational leadership approaches in school settings, followed by a discussion board where they can reflect on how Metis governance principles might be integrated into their leadership practices.

Building on these concepts, an embedded third module can focus on relationship-based leadership and community engagement. Learning within this module may further equip school leaders with strategies to build trust and meaningful relationships with Metis students and families. A video testimonial featuring Metis parents and students will highlight both challenges and successes in northern Alberta schools. Leaders will explore best practices for community engagement, such as inviting Elders and Knowledge Keepers into schools, honouring Metis cultural celebrations and language, and developing mentorship programs for Metis students. To apply their learning, participants will create a community engagement plan tailored to the unique needs of their school and community.

The next phase of the learning encompassed as a fourth module, focuses on land-based learning and experiential education. In this section, a school principal is introduced to Metis

perspectives on land and learning. A video workshop featuring Metis educators will explain the importance of land-based education in fostering a holistic approach to learning. Participants will explore successful land-based initiatives from northern Alberta schools and then design their own culturally responsive land-based learning activity for their school or district.

Recognizing the unique challenges faced by schools in remote areas, a fifth module can address challenges in Northern Alberta schools. This module can focus on practical solutions for supporting Metis students in these settings. A discussion panel can explore issues such as teacher retention, protection, access, and maintenance of culturally relevant resources, as well as the importance of community partnerships. A breakout activity will enable participants to collaborate on strategies to overcome these barriers, and a resource toolkit can be provided featuring funding opportunities, curriculum integration ideas, and contacts within the Metis community.

The final instructional component, presented as the sixth module, addresses reconciliation and allyship in school leadership. This leadership learning intends to support school leaders in advancing reconciliation and becoming strong advocates for Indigenous inclusion. A workshop on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action will help participants understand their role in fostering systemic change within education. Leaders will also develop their unique district allyship framework for educators, ensuring educators leave the training with concrete strategies to promote reconciliation in their schools. The final assignment will require participants to develop an action plan to align and integrate Metis knowledge into their leadership approach.

Most participants felt that the ultimate evidence of learning is the actions of school leaders. Most also agreed that the modules were never intended to be completed by a school

principal. The online module was designed as a tool for lifelong learning, with the expectation that each year participants would share a Personal Leadership Statement with a school council, a community mentor, or an Elders' Advisory Group. Each year, the school principal, upon sharing their leadership statement, could receive a Certificate of Metis Settlement-Informed Leadership in Education - Year #, signed off by an Elder, a community-elected leader, a parent, a student, and the Superintendent. Additional features of the online leadership pathways could include guest speaker sessions (live or recorded), downloadable resource guides, peer discussion forums, and virtual field trips to Metis Settlements, ensuring a rich and engaging learning experience.

The proposed online leadership learning module offers a unique opportunity for school leaders in northern Alberta to develop culturally responsive leadership practices while deepening their understanding of Metis perspectives. Ultimately, the learning module equips school leaders with the tools to collaborate with communities to create culturally responsive and inclusive educational environments that honour and respect Metis perspectives, thereby contributing to a more equitable and supportive school system in northern Alberta. Like this research, the learning module exists in base form and is an opportunity to build in collaboration with the eight Metis Settlements.

### **Future Research**

As research by Metis people advances, there is a need for further evidence-based exploration to address the leadership competencies of school principals serving Metis learners. This will help address unanswered questions from the community about gaps in learning outcomes and advance the success of schools in the Settlements. Engaging with local Elders and the community as part of ongoing learning delivery models brings questions to the forefront regarding multimedia tools and the application of Metis pedagogy. As distance and online

credentialing programs continue to grow, school districts, principals, educators, and community members will face increasing challenges that will require investigation.

Ongoing support from the Metis Settlements General Council, local Council leadership, and school boards will only improve the process and help identify leadership concepts to enhance the design. At this time, the participants shared unique Knowledge deemed necessary, but the research questions did not address future builds and the direction of those potential builds. Further exploration and documentation of additional components would add depth to the learning module, thereby increasing its legitimacy as a professional development tool for enhancing school principals' leadership growth.

As principals experience success using the online module, the pathways for selection will need to be developed. The favourable success of the model used could have noteworthy implications for Indigenous learner success, prompting an area for future research. Additionally, as mentioned in previous chapters, it is essential that school principals receive appropriate and effective leadership learning support so they can provide teachers with pedagogically sound professional growth opportunities in the classroom. This suggests that future research should investigate how teachers serving in Settlement schools are supported in their learning to meet the Teacher Quality Standards, specifically Standard Five, which addresses foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, and how teacher and principal learning are aligning.

As a foundational approach to principal leadership growth in the Metis Settlements of Alberta, this research identifies an opportunity to further investigate and enhance leadership capacity. By deepening our understanding of the factors that foster educational excellence, we can better support the inherent potential and success of Metis learners. Research exploring how success in local community schools affects student performance, and how student success

contributes to local community school leadership learning initiatives, can deepen understanding of what makes a successful local community school principal.

An additional important question asks, what is the best way to combine asynchronous and synchronous delivery components to increase principal participation, access, and success? Conversations in this research study suggest that tensions may arise when digital learning formats intersect with long-standing cultural practices and expectations in Metis Settlement communities. Participants raised concerns with maintaining a relational, conversational nature of knowledge sharing, which is highly valued in Indigenous contexts. Other participants spoke about internet connectivity in the communities, unintentionally privileging those with stable internet access and comfort with speaking or acting in virtual settings. In one community with almost no internet access, the group spoke about how inequities among participants would keep them from connecting across the Settlements. Comments such as those just presented highlight the need for further updated research on the effects of technology on Metis Settlement communities.

Community conversations highlighted that while asynchronous learning may provide flexibility, it can limit opportunities for real-time dialogue, relational accountability, and the collective sharing of stories that are central to Indigenous Knowledge transfer. On the other hand, synchronous sessions may pose challenges for participants with limited internet connectivity, varying schedules, or responsibilities to family and community that take precedence over fixed meeting times. There may also be cultural tensions when community-sacred or community-specific teachings are shared in digital spaces where protocols cannot be fully respected, such as who is present, how the Knowledge is received, and how it is stored. Overall, several participants in the community conversations reflected on concerns about

technology-mediated interactions disrupting traditional ways of building trust, engaging in collaborative problem-solving, or respecting community rhythms such as seasonal responsibilities, family obligations, and local governance cycles. For example, some Elders expressed feeling pressured to adapt to external timelines or communication styles that do not align with their own slower, more reflective pace, which supports meaningful dialogue. Others worried about cultural nuances of place and whole-body language that is lost when discussions occur through screens rather than face-to-face.

From a program design perspective, participants suggested a blended approach that intentionally braids culturally grounded practices into both synchronous and asynchronous environments. This might include offering multiple time options for live sessions, embedding opportunities for one-to-one relational conversations, using storytelling or land-based prompts within online environments, and allowing greater autonomy in how the community teachers contribute. Opportunities could include co-designing the engagement formats, such as recordings that can be revisited with mentor guidance, or structured opportunities for principals to reflect with local Knowledge Keepers. These can help maintain cultural integrity while online learning with community Elders and leaders to ensure protocols are respected, incorporating blended approaches that braid together technology with in-person gatherings where possible, and providing alternatives for those who cannot attend live sessions. Asynchronous content could be focused on foundational materials with readings, videos, or case studies, while reserving synchronous time for community-building, discussions, and guided reflections with Elders or mentors. Offering multiple formats for engagement, such as recordings that can be revisited with guidance from a mentor, or structured opportunities for principals to reflect with local Knowledge Keepers, can help maintain cultural integrity while still increasing accessibility. In

this way, conflicts between technology and tradition can become opportunities for innovation, leading to a more inclusive, respectful, and sustainable professional learning model.

A final thought on future research stemming from this study concerns the need for adequate financial support. Funding is the fundamental requisite of any educational institution, and without a commitment to funding the professional development of school leaders, inclusive of community needs such as payment fees, supplies, and food, learning often does not occur. Also, culturally inclusive design and development require budgetary commitments. Furthermore, sites may require upgrading of their technology infrastructure in rural areas, which necessitates significant funding allocations as well as partnerships.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to explore how storytelling and Metis Settlements of Alberta Knowledge could inform the development of an online learning module designed to support the leadership growth of school principals serving in Metis Settlement schools. The study was intentionally designed to focus on Metis Settlement Elders and collaboration with the community on module design. The module itself serves as a draft and is designed to provide communities with the space to continue its development. The participants' stories, thoughts, ideas, and experiences provided the answers to the research question which is then realized through the module prototype that has gone through several co-creation phases. Additionally, the results of this study show that there is a place for culture within an online framework inclusive of face-to-face experiences. Challenges associated with essential components were discussed and revealed that Metis Settlements of Alberta languages, history, and culture are critical elements in shaping success of school principals. Some of the barriers to integrating culture, including program design and delivery of an online leadership learning process, were uncovered.

As these barriers were uncovered through co-constructed dialogue with participants, consistent emphasis of the central role of relationships, cultural protocols, and community accountability emerged with a focus on shaping how leaders learn. This collaboration not only informed the design of the module but also lent to the research process itself. The participatory approach and by integrating methods such as Net Teachings, the study opened ways of gathering and sharing Knowledge that are more reflective of Metis values. These online and hybrid teaching practices create space for stories, reflections, and cultural teachings to circulate in digital form, while still anchoring them in the guidance of Elders and the lived realities of participants.

The significance of these findings lies in how they push beyond conventional online learning models, demonstrating that technology can be reshaped to serve Metis Settlement priorities rather than simply imposed as a one-size-fits-all tool. The co-designed module provides a template for how future programs might balance flexibility, accessibility, and cultural integrity, ensuring that principals and community leaders can participate fully without sacrificing the relational and place-based foundations of Metis Knowledge. Furthermore, the pathways envisioned through this work extend beyond individual leadership training: they suggest ways for Metis Settlement communities, leaders, and students to continue building digital learning environments that strengthen cultural identity, nurture intergenerational relationships, and equip future leaders with both the skills of contemporary school administration, and the wisdom of their own traditions. In this way, the barriers uncovered through the research also became pathways to innovation, charting a course for culturally grounded leadership development that can adapt to evolving needs of the Metis Settlements of Alberta communities.

## Reflections

With thirty-two years of experience in the field of education and twenty of those years as a school principal, hindsight tells me that this research study is long overdue. As I reflect on the past five years, I can see my own story emerging as I transformed, and this dissertation took shape. In the initial chapter titled, The Introduction, I struggled to find my way as a Metis scholar, to articulate what I had experienced in life and to shape those experiences into a methodology that resonated, and to build this dissertation into something that was written by the people and for the people of the Metis Settlements of Alberta. As I moved into the literature review section, I discovered many activists who would come to aid my journey as I entered the waters of Western academia.

Activism emerged as the central scholarly characteristic as I began writing the Literature Review chapter, which evolved into two chapters. I sought out those who were already immersed in creating space for Indigenous Knowledge at all levels of academia. As I gathered those published voices to assess the scope of where I was entering the research stream, I knew that I could not forget the ancestral voices of the Metis Settlements of Alberta. Those voices contained the Indigenous worldview unique to the Metis Settlements of Alberta. Although considered grey literature in today's academia, I was determined to elevate their Knowledge to a place that honoured what they had to say and would guide not only myself but also those who would come after me. As I read the storied voices of Indigenous scholars and individuals from the Metis Settlements, I began to understand more clearly the guidance of ethical practices as the research methodology emerged and was being developed.

Reflections on the chosen methodology resulted in a deepening understanding of the inter-relationship between the storytellers and researcher. This process revealed how the act of

storytelling was not a one-way transmission of knowledge, but rather a co-constructed narrative shaped by mutual trust, cultural sensitivity, and shared vulnerability. As I engaged more deeply with the Elders' and community members lived experiences, it became clear that the methodological choices, particularly those emphasizing dialogue and reflexivity, directly influenced the authenticity and richness of the stories shared. Further, the module guides principals into the practice of these culturally embedded experiential practices. This dynamic underscored the ethical responsibility of myself, as the researcher, to not only represent the stories faithfully, but also to remain critically aware of my own positionality and impact throughout the research journey.

Within Indigenous approaches to ethics, this responsibility extends beyond conventional academic standards of consent and confidentiality, emphasizing relational accountability, respect for cultural protocols, and the recognition that Knowledge is held collectively rather than owned individually. In this context, ethics is not a set of rules applied externally, but a way of being in relationship with participants, Elders, and communities. My task, therefore, was to ensure that stories were not only gathered with permission but also shared in ways that honoured the intent of the storytellers, maintained community integrity, and contributed to the broader goals of cultural continuity. By grounding the research in principles of reciprocity, respect, responsibility, and relevance, I worked to align the methodology with Metis ways of knowing, thereby ensuring that the research process itself modeled the values it sought to support in leadership development.

As I considered the research findings within the context of education and principal learning, the insights challenged not only my own experiences but the traditional conventional leadership frameworks. The findings underscored the limitations of purely technical or

managerial models, pointing instead to the importance of reflective practice, mentorship, and context-responsive leadership learning and growth. As the analysis unfolded, I grew increasingly excited by the realization that effective principal learning cannot be one-dimensional; it must consider the unique dynamics of diverse Metis Settlement communities, the evolving pressures of shifting educational policies, and the ongoing personal growth of leaders themselves. Each Metis Settlement community carries its own histories, values, and social structures, meaning that the leadership approaches that work in one context may not translate seamlessly to another. At the same time, principals operate within broader policy environments that are often fluid, complex, and at times in tension with local priorities, requiring them to navigate mandates while remaining responsive to community needs. Beyond these external factors, the personal development of leaders, including their capacity for self-reflection, cultural understanding, and relational awareness, is equally critical; a principal's ability to lead effectively is intertwined with their own growth and adaptability. Taken together, these findings suggest that professional learning for Metis school leaders must be designed as a holistic process, one that integrates culturally grounded practices, practical policy navigation, and opportunities for deep personal reflection. This multidimensional approach holds the potential not only to enhance leadership effectiveness but also to strengthen the connections between schools, communities, and the broader Metis Settlement cultural framework.

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## Appendix A: Metis Settlements General Council Letter of Support



### Metis Settlements General Council

November 26, 2024

**RE:** Proposed Research in the Metis Settlements of Alberta

Dear Ms. Thompson,

Congratulations on passing your research proposal defense!

We are looking forward to future conversations about your proposed research dissertation entitled *Informing Technology-Assisted School Leader Pathways using Metis Settlements of Alberta Digital Bundles*.

This letter confirms that we fully support your research proposal.

As far as our MSGC leadership is aware, no research is focused on educational leadership led by Metis Settlement membership. Therefore, we feel that this research would greatly benefit the Metis Settlements in Alberta, not only in managing Metis Settlement languages, culture, and history throughout the proposed study area but also for the entirety of the province of Alberta and Canada.

This research has the potential to substantially enhance the general populace's knowledge and facilitate improved understanding through relationships of significant cultural landscapes. The importance of education designed to support school leaders who work with Metis Settlements' children is of vital importance to ensure the success of our children in today's public-school systems.

The significance of the project outcomes cannot only help address our own revitalization efforts, but also inform community collaboration with school, health, and justice systems.

We appreciate the early involvement of the Metis Settlements General Council in these discussions and look forward to regular sessions as your exciting research moves forward.

As community leaders, we are more than willing to walk with you and we are invested in how this research can further the interests of the Metis Settlements in Alberta.

Sincerely,

Mr. Dave Lamouche  
President

Ms. Brenda Blyan  
Vice President

**OUR LAND. OUR CULTURE. OUR FUTURE.**

Suite 101 10335-172 St Edmonton, Alberta T5S 1K9 Phone: 780.822.4096 Fax: 780.489.9558 Toll Free 1-888-213-4400 [www.msgc.ca](http://www.msgc.ca)

## Appendix B: Letter of Information

### LETTER OF INFORMATION

#### Shortened Version

#### Project Lead:

Laurie L. Thompson  
[laurieleethompson@gmail.com](mailto:laurieleethompson@gmail.com)  
 780.623.8585 (cell)

#### Supervisor:

Dr. Debra Hoven  
[debrah@athabascau.ca](mailto:debrah@athabascau.ca)

tansi, I am extending this invitation to request your participation in a Knowledge-gathering project entitled:

### **Informing Technology-Assisted School Leader Pathways using Metis Settlements of Alberta Digital Bundles**

I invite you to please carefully read the information shared in this invitation letter as it will inform you what this project is about and what your participation will involve if you choose to participate. If you have any questions about the project or would like more information before you consent to participate, please contact the project lead, Laurie Thompson.

#### **Introduction**

tansi, kakiyawiyak, Laurie Thompson, nitisiyihkason. Kikino Metis Settlement, ohci niya. Floyd Thompson notiway ekwa Marcella, nee White, nikawiy. I am the kiskinohamâkîw okimâw of Kikino School and have been an educator for thirty-one years.

I am a Doctor of Education student at Athabasca University. As a requirement to complete my degree, I am conducting a research project about how people of the Metis Settlements of Alberta and storytelling can be used to inform school leader development modules.

I am conducting this project under the supervision of Dr. Debra Hoven.

#### **Why am I being asked to join this conversation?**

Elders, Knowledge Holders, Knowledge Keepers, and community members of the Metis Settlements of Alberta are being invited to join this conversation because of their knowledge related to the history, culture, and languages of their respective communities.

#### **What is the purpose of this research project?**

The project hopes to bring forward local history, culture, and language that can be used effectively in an online module to support training intended for school leaders.

#### **What will I be asked to do?**

As an Elder, Knowledge Holder, or Knowledge Keeper participant, you will be asked to share stories about history, culture, or language and talk about how that storied knowledge can help educate school leaders. The conversation will take about 60-90 minutes of your time and will be arranged on a date that is convenient for you.

A Cree language interpreter will be available to support language needs.

As a community participant, you will be asked to take part in a community engagement session to provide feedback on the development of an online module built from knowledge shared by Elders that can help educate school leaders. The session will take about 60-90 minutes of your time and will be arranged for a date that is convenient for the community.

Engagement sessions will begin with an introduction to my connections to the Metis Settlements of Alberta and an introduction to the research project. I will keep handwritten notes throughout the project.

I will respect reciprocity by offering protocol to Elders, Knowledge Holders, and Knowledge Keepers that will be discussed before the offering. Reciprocity with community members will come in the form of food that will be shared in the spirit of relational engagement.

This research will respect and follow four principles:

**OWNERSHIP:** I respect and honour that the people will only share what they know they are able and capable of sharing.

**CONTROL:** I will review findings, through analysis, with the sharers and give them the final consent to share that knowledge.

**ACCESS:** Participants will review and have final approval of notes documented and Knowledge entered into the training module.

**POSSESSION:** The members of the Metis Settlements know their own needs related to school leadership. The members will determine what Knowledge and how that Knowledge is presented within the online training module.

### **What are my risks and benefits?**

There is minimal risk associated with this project. A potential risk may include a need for mental health support. Metis Settlement mental health support workers can be made available to meet with you in person or by telephone, to discuss your concerns or needs.

Benefits to community engagements include having an opportunity to come together and share thoughts and experiences about what successful school leadership looks like for Metis Settlement learners. Participants could potentially become more aware of how they can personally add to the improvement of student success in Metis Settlement schools. In terms of benefits to the community, the research process and online module design will provide a basis to help ensure there are appropriate educational resources available for school leaders.

### **Are there any real or perceived Conflict of Interests?**

I have no title or role at any academic institute or school jurisdiction involved in the certification or hiring of school leaders, there is no conflict of interest.

**Do I have to take part in this project?**

You do not have to take part in this project. Your participation in this project is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any questions or share information that you are not comfortable sharing. You may withdraw from the project at any time, including any time during conversations, or during the knowledge analysis process by contacting me or my supervisor, Dr. Debra Hoven, at the contact information at the top of this letter.

**How will my privacy and confidentiality be protected?**

Your privacy and confidentiality including identities, personal information, and data will be kept safe from unauthorized access, use, or disclosure throughout this project.

All information collected will be maintained in confidence with paper transcripts and notes stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. All electronic records including notes, transcripts, and audio will be stored on a password-protected electronic storage device that is password protected. All electronic records including notes, transcripts, and audio stored on my home computer will be on a password-protected computer as well as on a secondary password-protected file.

Any data related to an identifiable individual who has withdrawn at any time from the project will not be retained. Please note that any anonymous data will still be used.

**How will my anonymity be protected?**

Every reasonable effort will be made to ensure your anonymity and you will not be identified in publications without your written permission.

A name may be used in the final research documents, dissertation, module, or both, only if consent is given through the Using Your Name signed form.

**How will the results of the study be shared?**

This research project will be shared back to the Metis Settlements of Alberta communities by making paper copies available, e-mailing a copy to requests, and through a publicly shared video outlining the findings of the research including the development of an online training module. The final dissertation will be posted on the researcher's website.

The results of the study will be submitted to Athabasca University as a research report in partial fulfillment for a Doctor of Education degree. The existence of the research will be listed in an abstract posted online at the Athabasca University Library's Digital Thesis and Study Room, and the final research paper will be publicly available.

**How can I provide consent to participate?**

You can sign the attached form and send it by e-mail to [laurieleethompson@gmail.com](mailto:laurieleethompson@gmail.com) or you can sign the consent form in person at your community.

**Who can I contact for more information or to indicate my interest in participating in the research project?**

Thank you for your consideration of this invitation. Your questions or requests for further information can be made by contacting me, Laurie Thompson, by email at [laurieleethompson@gmail.com](mailto:laurieleethompson@gmail.com) or by cell at 780.623.8585, or my supervisor, Dr. Debra Hoven at [debrah@athabascau.ca](mailto:debrah@athabascau.ca).

If you are ready to participate in this project, please complete and sign the attached Informed Consent Form and return it to Laurie Thompson by the indicated email address or bring the form to the community engagement session in your community on the posted dates. ki-nanaskomitin

hay-hay  
Laurie L. Thompson

**This project has been reviewed by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board. Should you have any comments or concerns regarding your treatment as a participant in this project, please contact the Research Ethics Officer at 780.213.2033 or by e-mail to [rebsec@athabascau.ca](mailto:rebsec@athabascau.ca)**

## Appendix C: Letter of Informed Consent

### Letter of Informed Consent

**Project Lead:**

Laurie L. Thompson  
[laurieleethompson@gmail.com](mailto:laurieleethompson@gmail.com)  
 780.623.8585 (cell)

**Supervisor:**

Dr. Debra Hoven  
[debrah@athabascau.ca](mailto:debrah@athabascau.ca)

### Informing Technology-Assisted School Leader Pathways using Metis Settlements of Alberta Digital Bundles

My signature on this form means that:

- I have read/received the information about the research project in the invitation letter provided to me.
- I have been able to ask questions that I had about this project.
- I am satisfied with the answers to any questions I have.
- I understand what the research project is about and what I will be asked to do.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from participating in the research project without having to give a reason and that doing so will not affect me now or in the future.
- I understand that if I choose to withdraw after knowledge has been shared, my information can be removed from the project at my request if notification of my request to be removed is given within two weeks,
- I understand that knowledge is being sought anonymously, and therefore cannot be removed once the knowledge-seeking process has ended.

My signature confirms:

- I have read what this research project is about and understand the risks and benefits. I have had time to think about participating in the project and had the opportunity to ask questions and have had my questions answered to my satisfaction.
- I understand that participating in the project is entirely voluntary and that I may end my participation at any time without any penalty or negative consequences.
- I understand that I may refuse to answer certain questions.
- I am aware that I may contact the researcher, research supervisor, or the Office of Research Ethics if I have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research procedures; by telephone at 780.213.2033 or by e-mail to [rebsec@athabascau.ca](mailto:rebsec@athabascau.ca)

- I have been given a copy of this Informed Consent form for my records; and
- I agree to participate in this research project.

### **Non-written Consent**

- In some situations, a participant may not be able to provide written consent. A participating individual may extend consent to have a family member or community designate print the participant's name and sign their designated name in full view of the participant.
- The assent of the individual participant will be sought and maintained.

I have been fully informed of the objectives of the project being conducted. I understand these objectives and consent to being interviewed or participating in the engagement conversations for the project. I understand that steps will be undertaken to ensure that this interview will remain confidential unless I consent to being identified. I also understand that, if I wish to withdraw from the study at any time during the data collection period, I may do so without any repercussions.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Designate

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Principal Investigator's Signature:

I have explained this project to the best of my ability. I invited questions and responded to any that were asked. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in participating in the research project, and any potential risks and that he or she has freely chosen to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Principal Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix D: Community Poster

**Your voice matters. Sharing community history, culture, and language to inform school leader training can make a difference in the lives of our Metis learners.**

**JOIN THE CONVERSATION  
TO HELP CO-CREATE AN ONLINE TRAINING  
MODULE FOR K-12 SCHOOL LEADERS**



This project is being conducted with support from the Metis Settlements General Council.

**Our stories- Our truth- Our history.**

**INFORMING TECHNOLOGY ASSISTED SCHOOL LEADER PATHWAYS USING METIS SETTLEMENTS OF ALBERTA DIGITAL BUNDLES.**

**\*THIS IS A RESEARCH PROJECT RELATED TO K-12 SCHOOL LEADER TRAINING**

**Laurie Thompson is from the Kikino Metis Settlement and is an Athabasca University Doctoral student.**

**laurieleethompson@gmail.com  
780.623.8585**

I will be in your settlement to interview Elders and will follow up with engagement with community members to provide opportunities for feedback and additional information to guide the development of an online training module. This poster will be updated and posted publicly in your community each time I will be in your community.

**METIS SETTLEMENT**

Date:

Time:

Place:

## Appendix E: Using Your Name

### Using Your Name

#### Project Lead:

Laurie L. Thompson  
[laurieleethompson@gmail.com](mailto:laurieleethompson@gmail.com)  
 780.623.8585 (cell)

#### Supervisor:

Dr. Debra Hoven  
[debrah@athabascau.ca](mailto:debrah@athabascau.ca)

### Informing Technology-Assisted School Leader Pathways using Metis

#### Settlements of Alberta Digital Bundles

In some cases, an individual who participates in this study is rightfully proud of the Indigenous Knowledge they have and their ability to share that knowledge with others and would like to have their name listed in this published research.

If you would like to request that I use your name, if possible, please mark the area below.

Please know that I will not be able to use your name if I feel there is anything that might harm you in any way in this research report. I will provide an opportunity for you to respond to my research report before publication.

For most people, using a fake name or being described in a general manner is the right choice, so you do not need to mark the area below, but you may if you wish.

Please use my name if possible: (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

What is the exact name you would like me to use? (optional)

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Designate

Date

I have explained this project's publication to the best of my ability. I invited questions and responded to any that were asked. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in using their name in publication as well as the potential risks and benefits that may result from using their name in this research that he or she has freely chosen to participate in.

---

Signature of Principal Investigator

---

Date

## **Appendix F: Elders Interview Script**

### **Interview Script with Questions: Elders, Knowledge Holders, Knowledge Keepers**

**Project Lead:**

Laurie L. Thompson  
[laurieleethompson@gmail.com](mailto:laurieleethompson@gmail.com)  
 780.623.8585 (cell)

**Supervisor:**

Dr. Debra Hoven  
[debrah@athabasca.ca](mailto:debrah@athabasca.ca)

### **Informing Technology-Assisted School Leader Pathways using Metis Settlements of Alberta Digital Bundles**

**Time and location to be determined.**

**Opening Comments**

tansi, kinanaskomitin. I believe that your knowledge will be valuable to this research study and the Metis Settlements of Alberta. I want to assure you before we begin, that the confidentiality of responses is guaranteed.

I will be recording this conversation through hand-written notes, please know that I am listening and may pause during the conversation. Following this conversation, I will make additional notes as I reflect upon our conversation today. If you wish, I will send you the notes or I can call you and read the notes to you. You will also have an opportunity to see the results of the research study to provide additional feedback.

Our time together today will take about one hour. If you want us to take more time beyond that I will be more than happy to do that with you.

**Conversation**

The following questions will serve as a guide and you are welcome to share any information that relates to the questions as part of your response. If there are any questions you are uncomfortable with you do not have to answer. At any time during this conversation, you may stop. You are welcome to request more time or a different time to continue this conversation. You are also welcome to raise any point you feel is important and would like to discuss.

The overall research question for this study is how storytelling and Indigenous Knowledge from a Metis Settlements of Alberta perspective, can inform the development of an online module designed for k-12 school leaders who work in Northern Alberta schools?

The other questions that will help form our conversation were selected to gather knowledge that can be included in the online module. These questions explore:

- How do Metis Settlement people want to be recognized and understood by school leaders?
- How can the history, culture, and languages of the Metis Settlements of Alberta support these ideas?
- How can Indigenous Knowledge support these ideas?
- How can storytelling be used to help educate school leaders about Metis Settlements of Alberta history, culture, and languages, and how that connects to approaches to living?
- How can digital storytelling be used to help educate school leaders about Indigenous Knowledge and approaches to living that can support school leader transformation?
- Can stories still have the same impact when translated into English? How can Cree story impact be maintained when translated?
- How can community members, including leaders and community staff, respond to supporting school completion goals?
- Is there anything else that you feel is important and can be discussed before we bring this conversation to a close?

### **Concluding remarks to Elders, Knowledge Holders, Knowledge Keepers**

ah hay. Sharing your knowledge with me today has been a gift that I am very grateful for. Our conversation is coming to a close and I want to extend my thanks for your participation. I will prepare a copy of my notes and my reflections for you if you wish to read them. Would you like me to print a copy for you or e-mail the notes to you?

Ikosi mâka, sawâc kîhtwâm kawâpamitin

## **Appendix G: Community Members Script**

### **Interview Scrip with Questions: Community Members**

**Project Lead:**

Laurie L. Thompson  
[laurieleethompson@gmail.com](mailto:laurieleethompson@gmail.com)  
 780.623.8585 (cell)

**Supervisor:**

Dr. Debra Hoven  
[debrah@athabascau.ca](mailto:debrah@athabascau.ca)

### **Informing Technology-Assisted School Leader Pathways using Metis Settlements of Alberta Digital Bundles**

**Time and location to be determined.**

**Opening Comments**

tansi, kinanaskomitin. I believe that your knowledge will be valuable to this research study and the Metis Settlements of Alberta. I want to assure you before we begin that the confidentiality of responses is guaranteed.

I will be recording this conversation through hand-written notes, please know that I am listening and may pause during the conversation. Following this conversation, I will make additional notes as I reflect upon our conversation today. If you wish, I will send you the notes or I can call you and read the notes to you. You will also have an opportunity to see the results of the research study to provide additional feedback.

Our time together today will take about two hours.

**Conversation**

I have previously met with Elders, Knowledge Holders, and Knowledge Keepers from the eight Metis Settlements of Alberta communities. We discussed the following questions, and the results of those conversations are reflected in the design and content that will be shared at this time. You are welcome to raise any point you feel is important and would like to add to this discussion.

The overall research question for this study is how storytelling and Indigenous Knowledge from a Metis Settlements of Alberta perspective, can inform the development of an online module designed for k-12 school leaders who work in Northern Alberta schools?

The other questions discussed were selected to gather knowledge that could be included in the online module. These questions explored:

- How do Metis Settlement people want to be recognized and understood by school leaders?
- How can the history, culture, and languages of the Metis Settlements of Alberta support these ideas?
- How can Indigenous Knowledge support these ideas?
- How can storytelling be used to help educate school leaders about Metis Settlements of Alberta history, culture, and languages, and how that connects to approaches to living?
- How can digital storytelling be used to help educate school leaders about Indigenous Knowledge and approaches to living that can support school leader transformation?
- Can stories still have the same impact when translated into English? How can Cree story impact be maintained when translated?
- How can community members, including leaders and community staff, respond to supporting school completion goals?

For this conversation, key questions to guide our conversations include:

- What are your first impressions of the learning materials?
- What is needed to increase the effectiveness of the module?
- Do you feel the module will help school leaders learn about the history, culture, and languages of the Metis Settlements of Alberta to improve the learning experiences of students?
- Do you feel the module will help school leaders learn about Indigenous Knowledge to improve the learning experiences of students?
- How can digital storytelling be used as an appropriate medium to share stories with school leaders about Metis Settlements of Alberta people?
- How can missing elements within the module be included?

### **Concluding remarks to Elders, Knowledge Holders, Knowledge Keepers**

ah hay. Sharing your knowledge with me today has been a gift that I am very grateful for. Our conversation is coming to a close and I want to extend my thanks for your participation. For those who indicated earlier, I will prepare a copy of my notes and my reflections for you and get them to you as indicated on the sign-up sheet here. If you missed getting your name on this sign-up, you are welcome to come and add your name and indicate whether you would like a printed copy or an e-mail copy.

Ikosi mâka, sawâc kîhtwâm kawâpamitin

## Appendix H: Certification of Ethical Approval



### CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

The Athabasca University Research Ethics Board (REB) has reviewed and approved the research project noted below. The REB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2) and Athabasca University Policy and Procedures.

**Ethics File No.:** 25910

**Principal Investigator:**

Miss. Laurie Thompson, Doctoral Student  
Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences\Doctor of Education (EdD) in Distance Education

**Supervisor/Project Team:**

Dr. Debra Hoven (Supervisor)

**Project Title:**

Informing Technology-Assisted School Leader Pathways using Metis Settlements of Alberta Digital Bundles

**Effective Date:** December 20, 2024

**Expiry Date:** December 19, 2025

**Restrictions:**

Any modification/amendment to the approved research must be submitted to the AUREB for approval prior to proceeding. Any adverse event or incidental findings must be reported to the AUREB as soon as possible, for review.

Ethical approval is valid **for a period of one year**. A request for renewal must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date if a project is ongoing beyond one year.

An Ethics Final Report must be submitted when the research is complete (*i.e. all participant contact and data collection is concluded, no follow-up with participants is anticipated and findings have been made available/provided to participants (if applicable)*) or the research is terminated.

**Approved by:**

**Date: December 20, 2024**

Frits Pannekoek, Chair  
Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences, Departmental Ethics Review Committee