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Mino-bimaadiziwin: ReIndigenizing through Land-based Learning

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Abstract

In response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 62nd and 63rd Calls to Action, the author takes a transformative, servant leadership approach to embedding Indigenous knowledge to the K-12 classrooms in Ontario with a focus on reIndigenizing through land-based learning. Student well-being and achievement data show Indigenous students in both provincial and Indigenous community schools are below that of their non-Indigenous peers, and the impact of residential schools in Treaty 3 territory is an intergenerational crisis that demands immediate attention and shift for educational leadership. As a Métis scholarly practitioner, the author centres Indigenous research and personal positionality in creating a change implementation plan which focuses on learning from, on, and with the land as a daily act of reconciliation. The traditional medicine wheel is used throughout the Dissertation-in-Practice to align holistic, lifelong learning with change leadership, monitoring, evaluation, and disrupting the status quo. Culturally responsive pedagogy is explored through research and practical examples of shifting practice, policy, and ontological perspectives to outline practical solutions for complex issues. The work is centred on mino-bimaadiizin, the Anishinaabek teaching of leading a good life.

Keywords: land-based learning, Truth and Reconciliation, transformative leadership, reIndigenization, Calls to Action

Executive Summary

This Dissertation-in-Practice is a response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) (2015) 62nd and 63rd Calls to Action to make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools and develop curriculum and best practices on Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The problem of practice centres on the Indigenous learner's well-being and achievement and the need to shift away from colonial practices and to place high priority on embedding Indigenous knowledges and ways of being.

The author emphasizes the need for Indigenous voices through research and scholarship and situates herself as a female Métis scholarly practitioner who lives and works in Treaty 3 territory. With experience in both provincial and First Nation K-12 education, she uses her own experiences and first-hand experiences in the classroom to reinforce the moral imperative to respond to the TRC Calls to Action. Chapter One explores the organizational context and clearly uses the problem of practice to establish a leadership-focused vision for change. Leading a K-12 land-based learning school requires the principal to place high priority on Indigenous knowledges and ways of being while supporting educators to work through and with the Ontario provincial curriculum. The Nadler-Tushman congruence model (1989) is used to tailor specific factors related to the desired change, and the First Nations holistic lifelong learning model (Canadian Council on Learning [CCL], 2007) is used as the foundation for addressing the problem of practice.

Principles from the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (2007) and the Royal Commission for Aboriginal People (2006) also reinforce the emphasis on holistic, lifelong learning where culturally rich, language-centred instruction are required to prepare our youth to be leaders of tomorrow. It is from here that the guiding questions are

established, school context is explored, and a leadership-focused vision for change based is defined based on reconciliatory goals.

In the second chapter, the FNHLLM (2007) is used to further demonstrate an Indigenous perspective on the necessity to move away from academic-focused priorities, and to shift toward holistic, lifelong learning. At the heart of the tree in the model is the traditional (Anishinaabek) medicine wheel, which serves as a focus for the remainder of the change implementation. A modified change path model (Deszca et al, 2020) aligns the leadership approach to change with the framework, and the stages of awakening, mobilization, acceleration, and actualization are used to frame the problem of practice and connections to leadership.

Organizational change readiness is a challenge for transformative leaders, especially where issues of equity and race are inherent and present over generations. PESTEL factors (political, economic, sociological, technical, environmental, and legal) are considered, and Sharma's (2017) model for capacity development is used to clarify the interconnected nature of transformational leadership and daily, technical solutions. Finally, three possible strategies are introduced as a means of addressing the problem of practice: a creative partnership, the creation of cultural matrix, and a proposed community dialogue. Each possible approach is analyzed under a variety of criteria and conditions, with a final strategy justified with critique and analysis at the conclusion of the second chapter.

Chapter Three introduces the plan for implementing change with a focus on strategic alignment, communication, monitoring & evaluation, and knowledge mobilization. With Indigenous voices to guide the conversation, a variety of land-based practices are used as practical examples for opportunities for communication, collaboration, and shifting practices. Through the lens of a servant, transformative leader, a picture is drawn of the flattened

organization of First Nation schooling where community partners, Chief & Council, and knowledge holders serve as active participants in setting goals and monitoring progress. The reader is taken once again through the medicine wheel teachings to align change implementation, and a one-year, three-year, and five-year plan are introduced through the cycles of inquiry.

In exploring the options for monitoring and evaluating change, the change path model outlines opportunities for not only the principal of the school, but also students, educators, community partners, and professional learning communities to analyse, reflect on, and redirect learning goals. In light of the context-specific work of Treaty 3 education, knowledge mobilization is centred on aligning practices with Grand Council Treaty 3 with special focus on the land, treaty agreements, and kinamaadiwin inaakonigewin (the treaty right to education), as it relates to Anishinaabe education (Baskatawang, 2023). Through Deming's plan, do, study, act model (1993), the medicine wheel teachings once again align with the monitoring, evaluation, and knowledge mobilization in this Dissertation-in-Practice.

The complex duality of embedding Indigenous knowledges and land-based practices into the Ontario curriculum is a braid that is slowly unwound as future next steps are outlined at the conclusion of the third chapter. Future considerations include moving beyond the community school to explore partnerships and collaborations with not only neighbouring provincial schools, but also First Nation schools in and beyond Treaty 3. In its conclusion, the DiP loops back to the problem of practice with a hope for practical, research-based solutions for decolonizing and reIndigenizing the K-12 classroom.

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This journey could not have been completed without my village of family and friends who not only accept my proclamations of the next adventure but encourage me to embark on them with fierce enthusiasm simply out of love and adoration. My partner in all things, Eion, who plays along, carries the load, and listens from the heart, there is no one I'd rather do life with than you. I am a mom of fierce warriors. I look at your faces each day here at my office desk and am grateful for your patience for late dinners, closed office doors, and 'just a moment' gestures during the online classes and late-night research. Hannah, Hunter, and Izzy, you are the best part of my day, every day, and the reason I persevere in all things. To my mom, who told me when I was little I could do or be anything I wanted and I believed you, I give you the biggest squeezer hug of all. My siblings, nieces, aunties and nana, you are part of the braid that keeps me all together. Leigha, thank you for the late-night laughs, and Sushi Girls, for reminding me adventure awaits. These reprieves quite literally fuel my work and remind me who I am.

Our cohort is affectionately known as the Dream Team, and I could not imagine a better group of colleagues to share the challenges or celebrate the milestones. To my 'pineapple crew', your voices are here in this work, and you live in my heart. I would like to acknowledge our fearless leaders as well, the EdD professors and Dr. Phillipa Myers, who serve not only as guides but advocates and life-changers for scholarly practitioners. My colleague and now friend, Dr. John Scott Lowrey, you are the heart of this program and I appreciate you more than you know.

The work of this Dissertation-in-Practice is rooted in the teachings of the medicine wheel, cyclical in nature, holistic, and representative of a lifelong journey. The doctoral path it turns out, is cyclical as well, as the end is also a beginning. We tell our stories through seasons, and as the present view from my window is lush, green foliage and the summer sun warms my face, I am

grateful for the time for reflection to recognize the others who have come before me. As a first generation Métis scholar and educational leader, my voice has been strengthened by my family and community. Maarsii to the Manitoba Métis Federation for support and sponsorship, and miigwetch to the ‘Makwa Mountain’ community for the honour and privilege of being part of our collaborative teaching and learning. We live on, with, and from the land, and I am grateful every day to share this walk with each of you.

Finally, I acknowledge that we are situated in Treaty 3 Territory, home of the Anishinaabe and Métis people, and the surrounding areas of Treaties 5 and 9 and the unceded territories whose schools I have served in various capacities over my career. As a citizen of the Manitoba Métis Federation and the Red River homeland, I also acknowledge Treaty 1 Territory and all other lands on Turtle Island upon which my family and ancestors reside, the roots of my own identity. I encourage you, the reader, to pause to reflect on the lands upon which you are located, and reflect on your relationship with aki, mother earth.

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List of Acronyms

AFN	Assembly of First Nations
CCL	Canadian Council on Learning
COO	Chiefs of Ontario
DiP	Dissertation-in-Practice
EDID	Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Decolonization
FNIGC	First Nations Information Governance Centre
FNHLLM	First Nation Holistic Lifelong Learning Model
FNMI	First Nations, Métis, Inuit
IK	Indigenous Knowledge
ISC	Indigenous Services Canada
K12	Kindergarten- Grade 12
LBL	Land-Based Learning
MMIWG2S+	Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Girls and 2-Spirited Plus
MMOP	Makwa Mountain Organization Plan (anonymized)
NDSD	Northern District School Division (anonymized)
OCAP	Ownership, Control, Access, Possession
PDSA	Plan, Do, Study, Act
PoP	Problem of Practice
RCAP	Royal Commission on Aboriginal People
TEK	Traditional Ecological Knowledge
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People

Glossary

Aboriginal: refers generally to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people (see also: Indigenous)

Anishinaabe Inaakonigewin: Indigenous (Ojibwe) customary law

Anishinaabek: the ways of knowing and being of the Anishinaabe people

FNMI: refers to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people; commonly used in Canada

Indigenous: refers generally to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people; international connotations

Indigegogy: term used to describe Indigenous (Anishinaabek) people's ways of teaching and learning; cultural and land-based teachings through Indigenous knowledges (Absolon, 2019)

Indigenization: incorporating Indigenous worldview, knowledge, and perspectives

Kinamaadiwin Inaakonigewin: the (Anishinaabek) process by which we practise teaching and learning; specific laws and practices referenced in Treaty 3 education (Baskatawang, 2023).

Knowledge holder: people who have accumulated a wealth of knowledge from previous knowledge holders or Elders and are recognized by their community as holding this knowledge (Cote-Meek & Moake-Pickering, 2020).

Land-based Learning (LBL): learning from, with and on the land; teachings passed through generations by Indigenous Elders, knowledge holders, and educators based on Indigenous teachings, history, culture, and practices.

Medicine Wheel: visual representation of holistic, lifelong learning used by some Indigenous people; represents the alignment and continuous interaction of the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual realms

Métis: a person or people of mixed European and Indigenous descent, often connected to a specific region (e.g., Red River Métis, Métis Nation of Ontario)

Mino-bimaadiziwin: living the good life (Ojibwe)

Turtle Island: territory of North America, derived from Indigenous creation stories

Chapter 1- Problem Posing

There is an urgent and pressing need to address the compounding issues of well-being, achievement and engagement with students, and a need to support educator professional learning in decolonization. According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) 62nd and 63rd Calls to Action (2015), leaders are called upon to support educators to embed age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, the historical and contemporary contributions of Indigenous people, and share these best practices through intercultural, holistic practices and Indigenous ways of knowing. While there is a common understanding that change takes time, (seven generations, according to Elders and Indigenous scholars), it is 150 years of colonial practices we are looking to undo. The good news is assimilation policies failed because Indigenous people have the secret of cultural survival, an enduring sense of themselves as people with a unique heritage and the right to cultural continuity (Vowel, 2016).

The following Dissertation-in-Practice outlines how we can improve our practices today while looking at the past and to the future through both a western and Indigenous lens. It is a look at leadership positionality, organizational context, a detailed problem of practice as well as change planning and leadership. Above all else, this is a commitment to address a need to put Indigenous youth and holistic, lifelong learning at the centre of the conversation as we create an iterative plan for the future through the actions we take today to walk in the way of mino-bimaadiziwin, the good life.

Leadership Position, Positionality and Lens

As an Indigenous scholarly practitioner, I am positioned as a Métis woman working and living in Treaty 3 Territory on Turtle Island and am a member of the Red River Métis homeland. I have spent a lifetime learning from and on these lands as a student, educator, and leader for

most of the years I have walked this earth. I am an invited guest to the traditional territory on which our school is situated and came first to support the learning community as a teacher and most recently, as school principal. My agency connects me to both the school learning teams and the community itself; there is little distinction or separation between the two as the community plays a significant role in our operations. As a researcher, I understand there is a need to examine how the Indigenous research paradigm and epistemologies can lead to a better understanding of, and provision for, the needs of Indigenous people (Blackstock, 2007; Wilson, 2008). However, it is with over twenty years of experience in public education that the duality of my teaching and instructional leadership in the broader community has brought me to this leadership position.

I have seen the gaps, cracks, and brokenness of public education in our struggles to serve the distinct needs of our Indigenous students and their caregivers. I have chosen to focus my teaching practice and research on those at the margins, the quiet places where the hopes, dreams and stories of our most disenfranchised students and families live, and to bring children to the centre of the conversation (Safir &Dugan, 2021). Not surprisingly, perhaps, this calling to critique and disrupt the status quo (Shields, 2019) does not always sit well with traditional, colonial practices in publicly funded, structural functional public education. It has prompted me to have many challenging and courageous conversations about race and how our current curriculum, pedagogy, processes, and policies continue to put up barriers rather than create pathways for our youth (Capper, 2019; Deszca et al., 2021; Singleton & Linton, 2006; Wilson, 2008). However, I believe it is the responsibility of all educators on these lands to take up the TRC's Calls to Action (2015) in every context to make these small and large shifts in education.

As a school leader, I have the opportunity to work with our community to create a culture of teaching and learning that is holistic and embraces both western and Indigenous knowledges

and ways of being. As a member of the Indigenous Education Council (pseudonym), I am positioned to participate in policy creation not only within the school, but also with other Indigenous and public schools and community partners through existing and burgeoning partnerships, both locally and on a global scale. Additionally, there are opportunities to align with the broader community goals as set out by our Elders to continue to create strong cultural connections, build opportunities for extended language development, and enhance family/caregiver connections to the school (Elders gathering, 2023). I serve as a connection between staff, students, and families with Chief and Council, while continuing to create and support existing partnerships with community programs, Elders, and knowledge holders. While these may seem like lofty goals, the nature of my role as principal is one of servant leadership focused on student lifelong learning and the Indigenous holistic learning model (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007).

I have a strong connection to the land; I am an environmental steward who centres goals for sustainability in my life and teaching practice and I spend recreational time on the land year-round. Having reconnected with my Métis roots as a young adult, I am raising my own daughters with traditional teachings of my Métis family, strong warrior women, and our local Indigenous community. I have spent most of my life in colonial education systems and have seen first-hand the discrepancies of the *hidden curriculum* in which students are expected to achieve and succeed in settings which often do not address culturally informed curriculum and Indigenous practices (Cherubini, 2020). I have made it my life's work to bridge this gap. Elder Albert Marshall is known to have introduced the concept of Two-Eyed Seeing:

> Two-Eyed Seeing adamantly, respectfully, and passionately asks that we bring together our different ways of knowing to motivate people, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike,

> to use all our understandings so we can leave the world a better place and not compromise the opportunities for our youth (in the sense of Seven Generations) through our own inaction. (Bartlett et al., 2012)

It is through this dual lens of Western and Indigenous ways of knowing that my leadership continues to take shape as we look to redefine how success is measured through a holistic, experiential process (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007). Anishinaabe Inaakonigewin (customary law) also shares key teachings on environmental sustainability on taking what is needed, sharing what you have, and planning for the next generations (Baskatawang, 2023), which ties directly to my focus on land-based learning. I am situated to embed these leadership traits not only through my Métis heritage, but also as a commitment to reconcile the implied and overt colonization in our schools and community. It is a pivotal time as we reclaim Treaty 3 right to education and work with Grand Council Treaty 3 (GCT3) and other partners in the name of Kinamaadiwin Inaakonigewin, the (Anishinaabek) process by which we practise teaching and learning (Baskatawang, 2023).

As principal, I am tasked to lead a group of educators to support community goals to offer the highest quality of education to our students while embedding Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing and being. Direction comes directly from our Elders and the community but must align with Ontario curriculum standards, which requires constant and consistent reflection and reciprocal communication in all directions. My role as school administrator comes second to my role as educator, a significant and noteworthy statement I often share with staff, families, and community members. In fact, each member of our staff, regardless of role or stature, is referred to as an ‘educator’ to emphasize both the significance of our collective and individual roles in the education setting, as well as the student-centred nature of our work. The

concept of flattening the organization is borrowed from the business world as Forbes defines a flattened establishment as one which elevates each employee's responsibility inside the organization and eliminates excess management layers to improve coordination and communication (Craig, 2018). From an Indigenous lens, we understand that effective leaders stand with their people, gather them to gain their insight, listen effectively and make decisions with the support of the people (Battiste, 2013; Soken-Huberty, 2023). It is through this lens of position and positionality that the decolonizing work will be explored.

Organizational Context

The school receives federal funding by Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), which provides broad and diverse funding opportunities and access to resources (Government of Canada, 2017). The budget is approved by the community's Chief and Council with support from a team of consultants and accountants. Indigenous Services Canada, as a federal entity, provides guidelines to support the school through a policy framework which reflects the inherent right of self-government, respects treaty rights and treaty-based agreements, and supports First Nations control of First Nations education (Government of Canada: Indigenous Services Canada, 2016). In many ways, the school itself follows structures, policies, and procedures similar to public education in Ontario (such as funding based on nominal role) and also qualifies for second-level services such as human resources, special education, professional development for educators, networking, capacity building, technical support, etc. Therefore, Makwa Mountain is considered a First Nation school (as opposed to a provincial or federal school), with its unique connection to the community itself.

With that in mind, there is a growing movement toward Indigenous governing bodies (including First Nation Chief and Councils), to further reclaim Indigenous education with fewer

connections to both the provincial and federal governments. Grand Council Treaty 3 is working alongside its regional First Nations to create a specific land-based, language focused cultural curriculum which emphasizes the essential components of embedding land-based learning in the education and development of our youth for life-long learning (Chief & Smyth, 2017; Simpson, 2014). Kinamaadiwin Inaakonigewan (customary law) challenges our schools to "meet or exceed those of the province… and preserve Anishnaabemowin along with cultural and spiritual traditions and enable students to develop to their maximum potential" (Baskatawang, 2023). Indigenous holistic practices and Indigegogy (Anishinaabek teaching and learning) are at the heart of Makwa Mountain as a teaching lodge for our youth.

Governance

The governing structure is such that the principal is responsible for aspects of management and human resources, site maintenance, policies & procedures, school-based budgets, health & safety, and connections to community programming. As an instructional leader, I am also responsible for developing, coordinating, implementing, and evaluating school curriculum, supporting leadership teams, overseeing land-based, language and cultural connections, and supporting professional learning opportunities for all staff. It is expected that I work closely with other leaders of Indigenous and public schools as well as leaders at the local and provincial level. I report to the education counsellor directly, as well as Chief and Council for various school matters. Our organization also employs a consultant to help oversee policy, budget, hiring, and long-range planning (Makwa Mountain Organization Plan [MMOP], 2023). The school principal acts as a partner in education with strong connections to culture and community.

In addition, my role as principal necessitates establishing a leadership team within the school to elicit voice from the school community and to assist with decision-making, policy creation, organizational structures and distribute various leadership roles. While the staff is relatively small, the leadership team represents the interest groups of staff with a senior teacher, education assistant, language teacher and student success representative. It is the goal of the leadership team to ensure the school's action plan, (with roots in academic achievement, student safety, equity, and holistic learning) is embedded in our decision-making and planning.

Elders and knowledge holders play an important role in the direction of Makwa Mountain's daily operations. We focus on Indigenous teachings and Anishinaabemowin (the Ojibway language) in our daily work, and we actively seek guidance and support from our community members. As a land-based school, the daily activities in all grade levels integrate Indigenous knowledges (IK) into cross-curricular activities. For example, when exploring the fall harvest of manomin (wild rice), students might learn alongside not only their classroom teacher, but also a community elder with experience in harvesting which has been passed down for generations, the school nutrition program lead who shares practical and traditional learning opportunities for meal preparation, and the Indigenous language teacher who not only encourages bilingual language exploration throughout the activities, but also embeds differentiated activities across the subject areas. Supporting the concept of holistic, lifelong knowledge acquisition (Wilson, 2008; Joseph, 2020), students benefit from the interconnected partnerships with those whose knowledge and expertise can be shared in innovative ways.

Contextual Factors

While there are several Indigenous schools in the region with whom we connect, we also take pride in having a close relationship with our public schools as many students in the area

migrate among these on a regular basis. As a mid-sized community, students are connected through sports, activities, ceremony, clan, and family ties across the region. It is essential to note there are residential school sites upon these lands and most of our community members have direct connections to these either personally or via a close family member. We work continuously to build and renew a trusting relationship with those who experience intergenerational trauma, symptoms of addiction and mental illness, fewer years of formal education, cultural gaps and a removal from traditional knowledge and teachings (Battiste, 2013; Talaga, 2017; Wesley-Esquimaux & Callisou, 2010).

The school uses Ontario curriculum as a basis for K-12 instruction, assessment, evaluation, and reporting, and secondary students are offered traditional opportunities to graduate with an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD), including requirements for volunteer hours and credit accumulation. There is flexibility, however, to adapt our course structure with the land-based learning opportunities offered at Makwa Mountain. Cross-curricular instruction occurs at all grade levels and the classes are mixed grades; there are many additional features that enable staff and students to learn from and on the land. For example, budgets include a variety of funds to create land-based learning (LBL) opportunities in all seasons, acknowledging this requires funds for special equipment, cultural training, access to clothing, tools, and materials, as well as funds for honoraria for additional knowledge holders, Elders, community partners, and for travel outside of the community (MMOP, 2023). This is an important component of Indigenous ways of learning as it integrates intergenerational, cross-cultural, and land-based learning in a lifelong, holistic approach (Battiste, 2013). This is also emphasized by Weenie (2020) in her reminder that this interaction with land, community, kehte-ayak, (the old people), and traditional knowledge keepers are necessary for implementing land-based education

effectively. Additionally, the original goal to create this learning community was to adopt and adapt learning with traditional and contemporary knowledges and embedded Anishinaabemowin which is at the core of curriculum and pedagogy (MMOP, 2023). This remains at the forefront of the community's goals and plans for future development and school planning (Elders gathering, 2023).

An area of need as outlined by community consultations, family/caregiver feedback and Elders' direction (Elders gathering, 2023) is to maintain academic integrity and increase attendance, graduation rates and achievement for all students. There is much pride in the steady development of land-based practices and the ability to retain staff who are knowledgeable and confident in embedded Indigenous knowledges (IK) with cultural connections, however, it has been noted that there must be a balance with academic achievement aligned with provincial standards and credit accumulation in addition to the work being done in land-based learning (Elders gathering, 2023). Battiste & Henderson, (2009) and Baskatawang (2023) reinforce this notion that implementing traditional culture and ceremony as part of the curriculum must be done purposefully and with care, while our Elders reiterate the necessity for our youth to have all doors open, to move freely between education programs and have the best chances to pursue post-secondary education or the work force (Elders gathering, 2023).

As an equity-focused leader I have aimed to be purposeful in the hiring and recruitment of the educators and support staff within Makwa Mountain. As a team, we have co-created the goals which tie into our school strategic plan focused on student-centred teaching and learning, language and culture embedded in curriculum and pedagogy, and the integration of land-based practices into the Ontario curriculum. The First Nations holistic lifelong learning framework (CCL, 2007) has been adopted as our model and is continually referenced in our goals and

planning. Therefore, it is important to note that we aim to create learning teams where these ideologies are not only shared but embraced by our educators.

Barriers exist and challenges are plenty. The COVID-19 crisis hit the community hard. As Choudury (2021) states, “the pandemic often hit the poorest communities hardest with Black, Indigenous and people of colour facing disproportionately high rates of sickness and death due to a variety of socio-economic factors” (p.3), and the conditions in the First Nation were no exception. Also, with teacher shortages prominent across the area, Makwa Mountain not only aims for wage parity with our public counterparts, but also on-the-job training opportunities to extend or gain qualifications for all educators. We appreciate and embrace the unique opportunity to build a team of skilled educators specific to our context (Bolman & Deal, 2021) and aim to take a holistic approach to support our staff as well through care and attention to well-being intellectually, emotionally, physically, and spiritually (Bopp et al, 1985; Fiola, 2021; Katz, 2018).

Leadership Problem of Practice

This leadership problem of practice focuses on the development of meaningful and relevant practices in curriculum, pedagogy, and school-based leadership and is a direct response to the 62nd and 63rd Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015). The responsibility falls on administrators and school-based leadership teams to learn alongside, support, and encourage educators to not only understand the significance of embedding Indigenous knowledges as a step toward decolonization and reconciliation, but also to recognize and honour the land upon which we live and learn. Many of our students are coming to us each day without roots (Sinclair, 2021), many of whom have experienced intergenerational trauma as a direct result of the residential school system. In the lands known as Canada, we have systemically stripped away the rights, language, and culture of our First Nation, Métis, and Inuit

people by implementing an educational system in a manner that denies all of us a deep, rich history of our first peoples (Craft & Regan, 2020; Fiola, 2021; Katz, 2018; Kimmerer, 2013; Pidgeon, 2015; UNDRIP, 2007).

Across the north, there are notable discrepancies in education for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. There is also a growing gap when comparing Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal graduations rates: In 2021, 74% of Indigenous persons aged 25-64 had completed high school compared to 89% of non-indigenous persons (Statistics Canada, 2023). This is further exacerbated with the growing population of First Nation, Inuit, and Métis (FNMI) people in the Treaty 3 area and places demands on equity-focused educators and leaders to examine causation to reduce this gap. Educators are tasked with aligning provincial expectations, primarily built on western, colonized practices with embedded Indigenous knowledges and practices, but are lacking resources, support, and connections to Indigenous Elders and knowledge holders. In our region, 27 out of 60 Indigenous language teachers do not fluently speak Anishinaabemowin, the language they are hired to teach (personal correspondence, 2023). The Rideau Hall Foundation has set a goal to increase the number of FNMI educators by 10,000 through proposals focused on language, land, leadership. and love (RHF, 2023a) in an attempt to address the disproportionate number of Indigenous educators. All of this to say, there are notable gaps and a growing motivation and climate to address these gaps in the Treaty 3 area.

Educators and leaders across the country are beginning to develop Indigenizing practices as we are called upon to recognize September 30th as a National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Resources are shared and gatherings take place where recognition is made of the uncovering of unmarked graves of those who did not survive the atrocious conditions of Indian residential schools. With several former sites in the treaty area upon which Makwa Mountain

resides, it is implicit that school-aged children have immediate family members who were part of the residential school system. Intergenerational trauma sits front and centre as a challenge and reality of families across our community, not the least of which as it relates to a lack of faith and trust in the education system (TRC, 2015; Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, [RCAP], 1996; United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples [UNDRIP], 2007).

I am challenged as a school leader to keep in mind the macro level issues associated with the past and present inequities of those at the margins, primarily Indigenous students. The challenges of equity and inclusion are deeply rooted in this area with homelessness, addictions, poverty, incarcerations, and suicide rates at the forefront of discussions. Documentaries such as Thunder Bay (McMahon, 2023) and the series Little Bird (Hopkins &Tailfeathers, 2023) highlight the compounding effects of the historical stripping of Indigenous culture and identity and the current impact on families and youth in a regional context. As the uncovering of unmarked graves at residential school sites continues, the 2023 visit of Pope Francis also drew attention in the media and placed demands on Indigenous and non-Indigenous political leaders to continue to explore Treaty rights, papal bulls, and the Doctrine of Discovery (Winfield, 2023). There is a growing demand to address missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and 2-spirted (MMIWG2S+) at all levels of government. As a school and community leader, it is imperative that I am aware of the deep-rooted tensions and history of conflict not only in our local context but on a global level as well. One area in which I can focus these divisive factors is to be steadfast in our goal to centre our educational efforts on putting the rights, safety, and education of our children first. As Senator Murray Sinclair so famously states, “it is education that got us into this mess, and education that will get us out” (TRC report, 2015).

From a research perspective it is not surprising that school leaders are challenged with introducing effective practices and policies to improve the inequitable treatment of our students. In the community in which the school is situated, over half of the students across the public school board self-identify as FNMI, yet less than 2% of the educators self-identify as such (Northern District School Division (pseudonym), 2023). Choudhury (2022) and Hattie (2023) confirm that we are apt to resort to preconceived notions that change is unlikely and fall victim to confirmation bias in our action research due to extreme external factors. However, as a leader of this small land-based school I have the benefit of autonomy with a degree of separation from provincial governance, as well as the unique positionality to be on the front lines of a movement to collaborate on unique Treaty 3 education resurgence. In a more desirable state, Makwa Mountain will effectively integrate Indigenous knowledges, languages, and cultural practices into our Ontario K-12 curriculum and pedagogy through LBL in such a manner that our students are centred in the learning and will see personal academic, social, emotional. and physical growth and development (MMOP, 2023).

Framing the Problem of Practice

Understanding and appreciating the holistic and interconnected nature of Indigenous knowledge and ways of being is essential to leadership in education on Turtle Island. My role as a partner the education of our youth and leading our school community varies in some significant ways from that of provincial schools. The United Nations Declaration for Indigenous People states Indigenous peoples have the right to the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories, and aspirations which shall be appropriately reflected in education and public information (UNDRIP, 2007). The Royal Commission for Aboriginal People reiterates that Indigenous people advocate a holistic lifelong learning approach that will develop citizens who

can linguistically and culturally assume the responsibilities of their nation with contributions to the economy, innovative practices and leadership which is rooted in education of our youth (2006). It is through the building of relationships to meet these goals that the following discussion on framing the problem of practice is explored.

Present and Historical Context

In this Dissertation-in Practice (DiP), my role as principal is participatory and rooted in my understanding that I am an invited guest within the community. Unlike other provincial education structures which have a structural functional, hierarchical model for policy, procedures. and programming, Makwa Mountain is community-centred and takes a collaborative approach to many matters of decision-making and planning, especially those concerning a scope of vision and change. The TRC outlines themes of reconciliation including reconciliation as peaceful co-existence, repairing damaged trust, transforming education (on and off-reserve), and reconciliation as healing (Hopkins, 2020). There is a dark history of top-down, imposed change connected to colonization and this must remain at the forefront of our planning and interactions within the community as we strive to build trusting relationships.

Taking a holistic, interconnected approach to leading change also requires that we first do an analysis of the systems, policies, and procedures currently in place and strive to identify areas of strength and weakness. In this process, the Nadler-Tushman (1989) congruence model serves as starting point to personalize the process for Makwa Mountain and its position within the greater community. Here we position inputs and outputs as well as the relationships between key groups of individuals who have a stake in the change plan as seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Modified Nadler-Tushman Congruence Model

Note. A relationship between contextual inputs and outputs and PESTEL factors are presented.

It is imperative we consider the broader contextual forces shaping this study with a look at past/present educational systems and the role political, economic, environmental, and social factors play in framing the Problem of Practice. It has been established that there is a history of colonization in public education and that members of the community continue to build a trusting, healthy relationship with the education system (Battiste, 2013; Cote-Meek & Pickering, 2020). There is also a special context-specific construct of an Indigenous education system designed to "exercise our inherent jurisdiction in education of the Annishinaabe nation in Treaty 3, now and for future generations" (Baskatawang, 2023). While publicly funded, provincially run schools are mandated by Ontario Ministry of Education programs and policy, Makwa Mountain has direct

connection to Indigenous Services Canada at a federal level. The Ontario curriculum, however, is used in K-12 classes as well as the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) requirements. The overlap of First Nation, provincial and federal politics and policies creates an intricate web for designing effective teaching and learning opportunities for our students which, often, provides greater flexibility and individualization (CCL, 2007). This is evident from an economic standpoint as well as funding comes directly from a federal source, omitting the provincial stage, and allows school leaders and council members to personalize and prioritize budgets to put student needs at the forefront (ISC, 2023). An additional layer of future development comes from Grand Council Treaty 3 and Bimose Tribal Council, both of which have vested interest in developing and funding Indigenous education establishments.

Driving Change

Indigenous knowledges are best passed through Elders, language keepers and language speakers (Battiste, 2013; Katz, 2018; Wilson, 2008) yet our organization has struggled to fill the teaching positions in our Native Studies and Native Second Language classes, increasingly so, over the past 5 years. Community partnerships have been identified as a key component in school and board-wide planning through goals in meeting Indigenization and reconciliatory action (MMOP, 2023). Educators frequently state they understand the need to decolonize curriculum and pedagogy in our classrooms, yet also understand the importance of the phrase *nothing about us without us* and the risk of cultural appropriation. Therefore, there is a struggle with this important human resource issue to create necessary changes.

While there are many change drivers to be explored, other significant areas of focus are the physical factors of adopting land-based learning as one way to meet the recommendations as outlined by the TRC (2015). Across our organization we are blessed with a vast expanse of

boreal forest, thousands of lakes, and rivers, and four distinct seasons to both enhance and challenge outdoor experiences. Industry plays a key role in our communities as economies have been built on pulp and paper, mining, fishing, and hydroelectricity. There is a long history of colonizing the area through trapping, trade, and land ownership with treaties at the heart of local identity. Along with development comes tensions between land ownership and use. For example, the earliest known complaint about dumping waste in the local water system was issued in 1893. Local Elders share stories of learning for the first time that wild game and fish were no longer safe for consumption in the 1970's due to industrial mercury run-off (Luby, 2020).

The issue is much more complex than a matter of who owns the land and how the land is used. At the core is an ontological belief of relationality, *all our relations*, and the understanding we do not own the land, the land owns us. The collectivist approach where individual needs and gain are put aside in favour of collective well-being (Wilson, 2008) extends beyond human beings to include animals, the water, land, medicines, and other resources. Leddy and Miller (2024) explain "With Indigenous ontologies, humans are only one factor, no greater or lesser than any other" (p.33). Land use and ownership, in its contemporary context, takes a decidedly different approach with a vastly different interpretation of traditional ecological knowledge (Grenz, 2024, Nelson & Shilling, 2008). To say pressing environmental issues and differing belief systems play a role in racial tensions is an understatement, and our schools play a key role in bravely sharing in these discussions (Fiola, 2012; Leddy & Miller, 2024; RCAP, 1996).

Finally, as this action research focuses on balancing inequities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in northern Ontario, it is important to continuously place Indigenous students (in their community) at the centre of the conversation when doing a real-time analysis to frame the problem of practice. In Treaty 3 Territory, there are 28 First Nation communities which

are rural or remote, which means that most of our Indigenous students are required to leave their home community in order to pursue an education. For our families, this means saying goodbye to young people as they move to a larger community to board or go into care and reacclimate into an often-foreign environment. For youth, this challenges their mental health, social and physical well-being (Katz, 2018), and in a broader sense, often re-traumatizes family units with echoes of removing children from the home to attend residential school. Additionally, from an environmental lens, Indigenous land-based learning, and language-rich opportunities (in more urban schools) become less feasible and frequent due to lack of Indigenous language instructors, lack of exposure to the land, and pressures of Ontario curriculum structures across all grade levels (Battiste, 2013, Cote-Meek & Moake-Pickering, 2020; Wesley-Esquimaux & Callisou, 2019).

Regarding social implications, in addition to those woven through the above-mentioned discussion, Indigenous students and families are losing connection to culture, ceremony, inter-generational teachings and connection to language. Indeed, the 63rd Call to Action (2015) recommends "building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect" (p.239), speaking of the reciprocity and inclusivity for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike. The effects of the Indian Act's goal to assimilate Indigenous people and effectively annihilate our culture, history, language and identity through residential school policies and practices are still felt today throughout Turtle Island. However, the Pow Wow circuit runs strong in the summer, there is a rise in the number of First Nation learning spaces, programs and schools, and there is a resurgence of Indigenous language resources and programming becoming part of the discussions (Baskatawang, 2023; CCL, 2007). While it is easy to focus on the effects of colonization as a driving force for the need for change, it is imperative that we also

examine areas of growth that are being addressed in various areas such as these and incorporate theoretical components to fully understand change drivers.

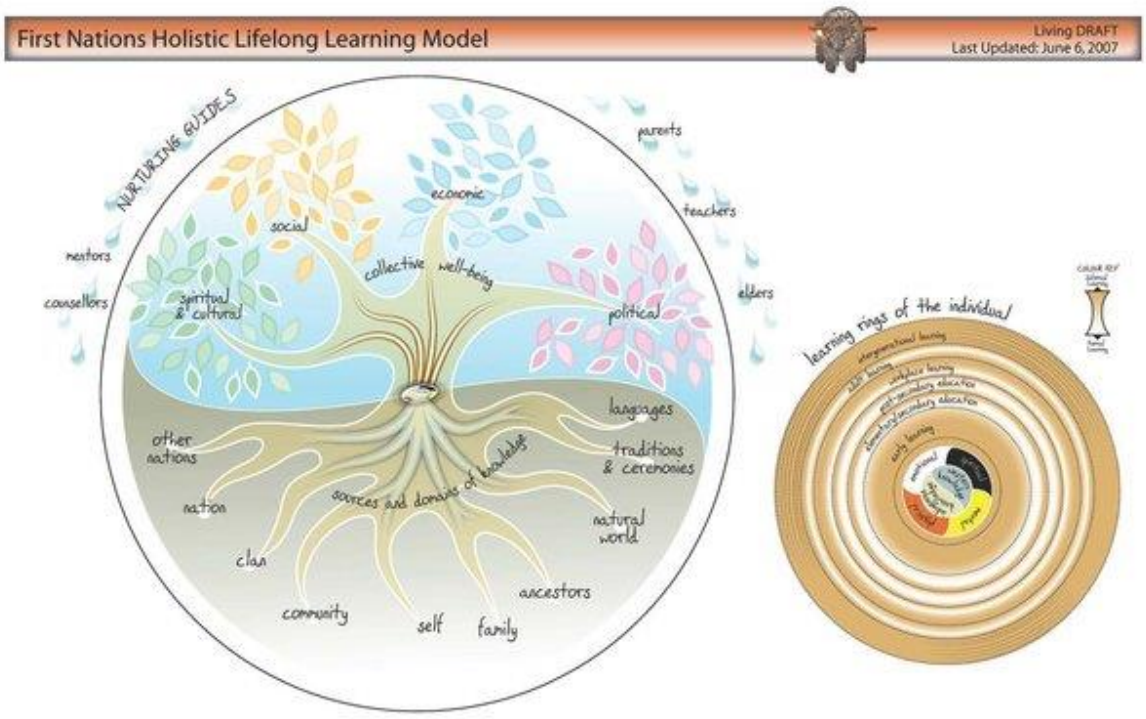
Theoretical Underpinnings

The work of closing the gap for Indigenous youth in the areas of well-being, academic achievement, attendance, and graduation rates is a lofty and grand goal. The PoP is rooted in TribalCrit theory reminding us colonization is not a historical concept but rather an "ongoing, pervasive structure that is rooted in a Eurocentric knowledge and power structure" (Hopkins, 2020). Brayboy (2005) reminds us that both Indigenous (tribal) knowledge and Western epistemology can serve both competing and complimentary roles, which I feel deeply as it informs this problem of practice. The concept of walking in two different worlds, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, is discussed by many of those who shared testimony in the Truth and Reconciliation Report (2015), and also by the students who are presently navigating education on- and off-reserve in my community.

At Makwa Mountain, we have adopted the stance that if we address the needs of the whole child and embed Indigenous knowledges in our daily curriculum and pedagogy, we will meet our students where they are and help to grow, support, and cultivate a holistic culture of teaching and learning. This in turn, will address our need to enhance student well-being, academic achievement, attendance, and graduation rates. Figure 2 represents our chosen framework for supporting this work in First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model (CCL,2007).

Figure 2

First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model



Note. The FNHLLM represents lifelong learning in an interconnected nature with inputs and outputs through the representation of roots, branches, and leaves. At the core of the model are the medicine wheel teachings as learning rings of the individual situated in the trunk of the tree.

As we have framed the problem of practice, a focus on the development of meaningful and relevant practices in curriculum, Indigegogy, and school-based leadership in direct response to the Calls to Action #62 and #63 from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015), it is possible now to share guiding questions to help support a leadership-focused vision for change.

Guiding Questions from the Problem of Practice

Three guiding questions frame this proposed Dissertation-in-Practice (DiP) through the problem of practice:

1. How might existing practices serve as strengths in Makwa Mountain's curriculum, Indigegogy, and practice? What is our story?

2. How might students in Makwa Mountain demonstrate their holistic growth and development through various measures with supports?

3.What impact can alignment of Indigenous knowledge and land-based practices with Ontario curriculum have on student attendance, achievement, well-being, and graduation rates?

My mother and Métis aunties have taught me to live first in a space of gratitude, regardless of circumstances, and that there is always something for which to be grateful. Mike Parkhill, an Indigenous language mentor and collector of stories agrees there is a tendency to share the dark Indigenous truths before, or sometimes instead of, sharing what is awesome and optimistic in Anishinaabek culture (Parkhill, 2018). Therefore, as a still-growing educational leader I am cognizant of the need to self-assess and examine the organization's strengths and areas of need. A strength-based, holistic approach is very much in alignment with Indigenous knowledges and ways of being where learning is cyclical, regenerative, and interconnected (CCL, 2007). As a school principal it is my role to work with our learning team and community members to assess what is presently working and what might need to change, and to what end.

Secondly, with the iterative process in mind, we return to the problem of practice and explore how we might be able to put our FNMI students first and take a holistic approach in closing the gap in well-being, attendance, achievement, and graduation rates. How might students in Makwa Mountain demonstrate growth holistically, with the Indigenous lifelong learning model to guide the work? What specific strategies, measures, and supports will best demonstrate growth in these areas?

Lastly, the focus on Treaty 3 lands and the impact of land-based learning will allow us to use both qualitative and quantitative data and experiential learning to connect to Ontario curriculum expectations. While there is a growing movement to implement a specific Treaty 3 curriculum in our area, and this is certainly on the radar for me as a research practitioner and school leader, the present context requires our work to tie into the provincial curricular context. What impact then, might integrated Indigenous knowledges and land-based learning practices have on student learning through the Ontario curriculum?

It is my steadfast belief that it is possible to deepen my understanding of the problem of practice through daily meaningful acts of reconciliation. These guiding questions will help our learning community to focus on reconfiguring conventional understanding and practices and lead to transformation in a good way (Wotherspoon & Milne, 2021) toward mino-bimaadiziwin at Makwa Mountain. Through this, my leadership-focused vision of change has transpired.

Leadership-Focused Vision for Change

The problem of practice asks us to address the issues of inequity in Indigenous students' well-being, attendance, academic achievement, and graduation rates based on current and historical data for students of Makwa Mountain. Leading change as a school principal requires me to use my agency and responsibilities in the areas of instructional leader, site manager and human resources manager within the school, as well as a community leader working with our education counsellor and Chief and Council under the guidelines of Indigenous Services Canada.

Through the First Nation holistic lifelong learning model (Figure 2), it is evident that the work of the organization can be directly viewed in the student-centred, holistic approach to growth and development. The relationship between the formal and informal organization, for example, is demonstrated in the roots of the tree (community, clan, natural world, etc.). The

congruence model (Figure 1) is a flow chart of the interconnected relationships that influence the organization and can help further identify needs and areas of growth in school-based planning and leadership. Senge (2006) supports this idea of leadership through systems thinking as a conceptual framework where a body of knowledge is used to make patterns clearer to help us see how to change or alter them effectively, which is especially significant in exploring the relationship between personal learning and organizational learning. As we explore the role of a leader then, it is important to examine school context, means for filling the gap between the existing and desired state, and to isolate meaningful goals and measures of success.

School Context

At the time of this writing, our secondary school students and educators are spending two days in the bush. Here, they are gathering local traditional medicines, identifying trees and plants, biking and hiking, making homemade woodfired pizzas and experiencing their first thermal cycles between a brisk autumn evening swim and a sauna. They came prepared to share stories by the fire that are tied to an Anishinaabek teaching or story and will collaboratively vote a winner for the most creative or spookiest story. Meanwhile, the primary and junior divisions are back at the school harvesting a moose hide with traditional skinning and tanning practices while members of the community drop in to share both teachings and laughter at the ongoing observations of the huge task at hand.

As I accepted the role of school principal, I imagined leadership of a student-centred teaching lodge that is rooted in Indigenous language and knowledge, is focused on holistic teaching and learning, where students are challenged with high expectations and there would be a seamless transition between school and land. Attendance, achievement, and engagement would be at or above provincial standards, where land-based activities are aligned with curricular

expectation, and all who are part of the learning community would feel safe, welcome, and honoured. Today, in this moment, it feels were approaching these goals in some very significant ways, and in others we have plenty of room to grow.

In exploring the gap between present and the envisioned state, it is important to look to the recent struggles Makwa Mountain has encountered. Frequent changes in leadership, lack of consistent or clear expectations, poor communication, poor student attendance, and lack of academic rigor are cited as present/past challenges when staff were asked to share a start-of-the-year survey to aid in our goal setting (MMOP, 2023). These issues were echoed in the Elders meeting (2023) and the school student information system data confirms both problematic attendance and achievement. 62% of students in grade 5-8 achieve consistently below the provincial average of 70% in Language and Mathematics, and no standardized data has been collected such as EQAO (Education Quality and Accountability Office, the public Ontario schools standardized assessments). In addition, 70% of students scheduled to graduate (by age and years in school) were not successful in the two years prior to my arrival. I would also add that students migrate regularly/frequently between the public schools and Makwa Mountain, as evidenced by system data and observation, causing further gaps in learning. Talaga (2017) and Katz (2018) note the compounded effect of absences with gaps in attendance, achievement, and well-being specifically for Indigenous students.

Connections to dedicated language or Indigenous culture teachers and knowledge holders and strong community partnerships are among the highest impact factors for successfully embedding Indigenous language and culture in a reconciliatory manner (Cote-Meek & Pickering, 2020; Craft & Regan, 2020; Fiola, 2021; Wilson-Raybould, 2022), and the school has struggled in both areas. Additionally, while there are many outdoor activities on the land, we are still

working toward shifting away from outdoor learning and continue to focus on the desired state of land-based learning, the distinction outlined here by Chief & Smyth (2017):

> Anishinaabe land-based education program must be founded on the principles of mino-bimaadiziwin, generally understood as a good and balanced life with all of Creation; the way to a good and balanced life and must empower students to see clearly the multitude of relationships that connect us to the land and water, to each other, to animals, to the spirit world, and to past and future generations. Land-based learning enables students to become critical and creative participants in their own educational journeys, and can connect them to a strong sense of identity and community. (p.16)

We recognize the need to be intentional in seeking, embedding, and reconciling Indigenous knowledges, culture, voices, traditions, language, and practices in LBL practices.

Finally, the three areas the school team identifies as areas of growth (goals) indicate an importance on embedding Ojibway language in daily activities, creating safe, warm, and welcoming spaces through holistic teaching and learning, and integrating land-based learning into Ontario curricular expectations in all grade levels (MMOP, 2023). As a transformative, servant leader and partner in education, it is my duty to ensure these goals drive and align with my own vision for change at a micro, meso, and macro level.

Filling the Gap

A transformative leader begins with a mandate for deep and equitable change that requires knowing oneself, one's organization, and one's community (Shields, 2019). With a familiarity and experience of the broader social factors and barriers to Indigenous student success, I am challenged to focus on micro factors such as my role as a leader within the school and partner within the community, instructional leadership, and creating a culture of learning

which is student-centred and holistic. Building relationships is highest priority and humility with a listen-first, speak second approach (Battiste, 2013; Parkhill, 2018; Weenie, 2020) will remain a leadership goal. This includes nurturing a leadership team within the school and connecting to Chief and Council, Elders committee and family members immediately and often.

At the meso level, the vision for embedded land-based learning through Indigegogy integrated with the Ontario curriculum is centred on building relationships, clear, reciprocal communication, and leading through instructional leadership. Indigegogy, a term used to describe Indigenous land-based and cultural teaching in both education and social work, is an approach taken to align curriculum and pedagogy in both the social work and education sectors (Cote-Meek & Moake-Pickering, 2020), and will be utilized in the alignment of Ontario curriculum and Indigenous land-based learning. Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy sits on a foundation of equity-seeking resources, practices, and epistemology (Capper,2019; Safir & Dugan, 2021), and this must be front and centre in the daily work, policies and procedures including a narrow focus on aligning western content and practices (Ontario curriculum), with Indigenous land-based, holistic practices that are culturally rich and meaningful for students at all grade levels.

Finally, a macro consideration is the leadership goal of adapting to a new system of educational law that is strength-based and steeped in Indigenous forward-thinking pride, not just from history of oppression and disparity. Baskatawang (2023) explains the Indigenous inherent right to governance of our own education systems (through UNDRIP and treaty agreements) in "response to the abject failure of the residential school system in Canada, as well as the public school system, to provide an education that is adequate for and relevant to the needs of Treaty 3 people in Anishinaabe territory" (p.11). With decades of experience in the public education

system aligned with my own experiences in colonial teaching and learning, an underlying theme of addressing inequity of our most marginalized community members throughout my career has evolved into the heart of my life's work. We are, I believe, on the precipice of systemic changes in the recreation and revitalization of Indigenous education and it is my honour and humbled privilege to be a small part of this.

Leadership Agency

One of the biggest differences between leading in Indigenous education and in public education schools is the aspect of collaborative decision-making and policy creation. As our school was not established for long before I assumed my principal role and there was no aspect of leadership succession nor a clearly defined hierarchy as is common in structural functional and transactional environments, I have learned to observe, ask many questions, and take a great deal of time to build relationships. I have read a lot about other Indigenous community's approach to First Nation education in Canada and elsewhere and have absorbed a great deal from *Community Dialogues on First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning* (CCL, 2007). Building relationships within the learning community and First Nation has taken priority, and extending these relationships to community partners allows us to provide incrementally more diverse opportunities for our learners. I continue to be part of public education Indigenous culture and language programming for our community as well as the Indigenous Education Committee, am becoming more familiar with ISC and First Nation policies and have a broad and diverse global professional learning community, so I have the sense I am very connected. As such, while I am learning the parameters of my agency lane and continually building my own knowledge bundle (Absolon, 2010), my role as a research practitioner aligns with and informs my daily work.

There is a gap, however, between the present and the envisioned future state for our students. Returning to the scenario shared with our students out learning on the land, the opportunities to participate in outdoor learning activities are not so difficult to create. With smaller class sizes, access to funding, and a relatively high student-to-adult ratio, our students and educators frequently find ourselves enjoying meaningful learning opportunities either on our own land-based site at the school or elsewhere in the community. However, the area that our Makwa Mountain Organization Plan (MMOP) which challenges us most is fostering a metacognitive link between LBL and Ontario curriculum connections. Barriers include time to plan and organize, familiarity with design-down planning, access to Indigenous knowledges and teachings in written form (resources) and understanding both in equal proportions (staff personal correspondence, 2023). My goal as a leader is to remove these barriers. Strategies for addressing these will be discussed further in Chapter 2, however it is worth noting that the need steers our planning and procedures on a regular basis as it is a shared goal for Makwa Mountain staff.

Leadership Goals

As I look to align school goals with a short and long-term vision for change, the problem of practice sits at the forefront under the protective umbrella of equity, diversity, inclusion, and decolonization. Our students and their families and caregivers are very close with our staff and students, and strong relationships are at the heart of our work. During the three-year plan which will be outlined in greater detail in Chapter 3, I aim to measure and observe notable increases in student well-being, attendance, achievement, and graduation rates. As we further explore the shift toward specific Treaty 3 educational programs, I believe a narrowed focus with additional personalized support tailored for our students in our own community will be beneficial. However, in the short term, using our strengths in relationship building and putting students first

will build a foundation for future growth and development. We will continue to grow staff capacity in creating and assessing land-based learning opportunities rooted in Indigenous knowledge and languages and build community support that aligns with a holistic approach through the First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model (CCL, 2007) with attention to all four quadrants of the medicine wheel: spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental development. These are measurable goals are directly related to the problem of practice and will be further explored in the upcoming discussions on epistemological and theoretical frameworks.

Chapter 1 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the problem of practice through my leadership positionality, organizational context, and vision for change. The work is situated specifically in the Treaty 3 region where our relationship to the land has played a significant role in both colonization and reconciliation, as well as the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and educators. In my role as a school leader, I have situated myself as a servant, transformative leader and invited guest within the First Nation, and established theoretical underpinnings based on the First Nations holistic lifelong learning model (CCL, 2007). Indigenous knowledge and land-based learning will continue to play a lead role in both theoretical frameworks and change planning in the following chapter.

Chapter 2: Planning and Development

In the following chapter, leadership approaches to change will frame the discussion around organizational readiness and ethical considerations in change planning. This will be expanded upon with an examination of organizational change and leadership approach to change, which will lead to recommended strategies to address the problem of practice. In summary, three strategies to address the problem of practice will be shared with one strategy of significance being highlighted.

Leadership Approach to Change

While the primary goal of schools is to educate children, it has been established that there is a moral underpinning to school-based leadership that is connected to this problem of practice. The Anishinabek are a proud people with a great sense of humour. Indeed, laughter plays a big role in our daily operations at Makwa Mountain and there is a sense of comfort and belonging that is shared by our staff, students, and community partners in our day-to-day operations of teaching and learning. The shift toward reIndigenizing curriculum and pedagogy falls in step with this approach as well. I am reminded of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) and believe this is what might be the intent of statements such as "Indigenous people have the right to dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories, and aspirations which shall be appropriately reflected in education and public information" (UNDRIP Article 15:1). My leadership approach speaks to this shift in prioritizing relationships and community as it relates to transformative servant leadership with Indigenous ways of knowing and being taking a central role in leading change.

For an Indigenous servant leader, the circle is an important symbol not only as a leadership metaphor, but also as a structure for daily operations. For example, major decisions

are rarely made by me as an individual, but rather through consultation with my leadership circle (which includes Chief and Council, Elders and/or our consultant), or with our school-based leadership team (lead teachers, a language and culture teacher, student success lead and special education teacher). In contrast to top-down leadership and decision-making in most structural-functional public education settings, this approach has roots in Indigenous practices dating back centuries which exists in our visions, dreams, ceremonies, songs, dances, and prayers (Absolon, 2010).

While we may not meet as often in actual literal talking circles, this practice places emphasis on open and clear communication, relationship building, and collaboration through regular and ongoing correspondence. An example of this comes in the form of planning our land-based activities for the month, season, or school year. Our entire school community meets for professional development days at the end of summer and all educators are asked to share in the vision for the school year ahead. We aim to ensure all voices are heard. Ideas, however small or lofty, are recorded through group conversations as well as a personal digital survey which is completed by all staff and shared directly with me. The goals of the school year are co-created in alignment with the Makwa Mountain Organization Plan (MMOP, 2023). In a related manner, Chief and Council bring the Elders together in the early fall for discussion and goal setting to plan for the year ahead. Prayer and ceremony such as smudging are integrated into the time together, and storytelling and reflection are woven throughout the process. The goal of the Elders gathering is to elicit the input of our wise, most experienced community members to reflect on the present and past, while planning for the ideal future state in all community and global matters (Wilson, 2008). In each example, leaders are part of the circle, assuming role as both leader and learner in building capacity and relationship building.

Crippen (2010) identifies ten traits specific to inclusive servant leadership in education: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to growth of people, and building community. The focus on community building situates me not only as member of the circle, but also in the reminder that I am an invited guest to the Makwa Mountain community. The direction I am given comes from the community itself, and I consider it both my responsibility and humble privilege to continue to work through this understanding of servant leadership.

Through this doctoral journey, the work of Indigenous scholars such as Wilson (2008) has challenged me to address my ontological approach (how I view reality), epistemological considerations (how I think about reality), methodology (how I acquire knowledge), as well as axiological considerations (ethics that frame my thinking). In this work, I am reminded of both my privilege and personal calling to lead alongside my colleagues with humility and from a learners' stance, from both a Western and Indigenous lens. Hopkins (2020) states:

> Schools play a central role in imposing the Western epistemological paradigm on Native peoples such that the individual willingly takes up Western knowledge. The outcome of dominating tribal knowledge in schools is that Native peoples have less access to their cultures, languages, and worldviews. (p.114).

As such, I continue to centre the Indigenous student at the heart of my planning, visioning, policy creation, focus on language, curriculum, pedagogy, and personal/ professional learning. The notion that knowledge exists in many forms, through *all our relations*, is never far from my mind.

The task of addressing the past and present colonial struggles through the Calls to Action (Truth and Reconciliation Commission [TRC], 2015) within the education system itself requires

me to also take a transformative approach to leading within the organization. As mentioned previously, I come to the role of school leader with many years of experience in public (provincial) education. I have shared my dissatisfaction with the highly colonial practices in the dominant culture and a moral imperative to make a shift away from these practices. The work of Capper (2019) and Shields (2011, 2020) help to formulate my understanding of the relationship between leadership and social justice with an emphasis on not only disrupting the status quo, but intentionally positioning the knowledge frameworks of the underrepresented at the forefront of daily work. In this case, we focus on Indigenous knowledges and ways of being. Shields outlines the following in her 2020 study of effective transformative leaders:

> As part of accepting the mandate for deep and equitable change, each leader established mutually respectful relationships with students, staff, families, and the community as a non-negotiable, prior to working with the teaching staff on implementing equitable and socially-just instructional strategies." (p.16).

In line with servant leadership, transformative leadership theory places significant emphasis on relationship building as a requisite for transformational change. Sharma (2017) describes the next steps of building relationships into purposeful intention for transformative change:

> When we establish entities… we have the choice to nurture the full potential of people who are part of that family or entity. We have the choice to use transformative processes in everyday life and in all our functions…we can proactively generate equitable and sustainable results based on universal values of dignity, equity, and compassion that shift the paradigm. (p.292)

It is through this lens of everyday action that we will now look at the pivotal role of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) in decolonizing and reIndigenizing our practices.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

One cannot explore the goals of decolonization and reIndigenization without exploring Indigenous critical theory through the lens of culturally responsive pedagogy. As we continue to unpack the problem of practice with a two-eyed approach, the greatest challenge I share with most school leaders in Ontario is the need to not only learn about the realities of the residential school system but also to unlearn a centuries-old way of knowing and being. Lopez (2020), a leading scholar, educator, and researcher in equity through decolonization, states the path to reconciliation in Canada and other western countries is to reject complicity in "the elevation of knowledge in the dominant culture in curriculum, teaching, leading, learning, classroom practices and policies" (p.42). Further, she states "Through the examination of our experiences we are able to explore ways of healing and new forms of knowledge. It is a process where we come to understand what we need to learn and relearn" (p.44). The personal experience, therefore, happens not only prior to leading change, but also in a lifelong, holistic nature in order to be truly transformative.

TribalCrit theory also encompasses these principles by exploring the role of power and law in relation to Indigenous sovereignty. Brayboy (2005) reminds us that "colonization is endemic to society" (p.430) and that knowledge (and knowledge acquisition) is intricately connected to culture. Baskatawang (2023) further extrapolates this concept through a deep look at the role of language revitalization and treaty rights, which in every aspect speaks to disrupting the status quo through an unapologetic centring of traditional and contemporary Indigenous knowledges.

The goals of our MMOP (2023) are in alignment with my leadership approach to be a transformative servant leader while embedding Indigenous knowledges. To focus on holistic, student-centred practices, adopt Indigenous languages and knowledges, and connect land-based learning to our Ontario curriculum expectations, our staff and students require a leader who builds strong relationships, is connected to the community and Indigenous knowledges and ways of being, and is dedicated to a student-centred, holistic approach to teaching and learning. Taking an iterative approach to change leadership is essential and embedding Indigenous knowledges and ways of being are non-negotiable (Absolon, 2019; Fiola, 2021; Shields, 2020). That is to say, the only way to create the change is to be a part of it at the ground level. The challenges are plentiful: reliance on effective communication, aligning priorities with a variety of players, creating structures for open and ongoing communication at all levels, sharing a vision, and being responsive to ongoing, real-time updates to educational law in Treaty 3 territory are but a few personal and systemic challenges. I am reminded regularly by my mentor (a Métis elder and knowledge holder), that I am not alone in the process, that the scope and effects of my leadership go much further than this generation, and that we are, in fact, in a time of unprecedented change and shift in the Anishinabek culture across Turtle Island (personal correspondence, 2023). The role of leadership on the land cannot be understated as I have come to understand specifically through Indigenous voices and scholarship. Kermoal & Altamirano-Jiménez (2016) remind us "rather than returning to a frozen Indigenous past, it is about reclaiming Indigenous knowledge to make sense of the present and imagine future possibilities" (p.8). This change, and a framework for leading the process, are further outlined in the following section.

Framework for Leading the Change Process

In the following section I will show how I have selected the First Nation holistic lifelong learning model (Canadian Council on Learning [CCL], 2007) paired with the change path model (Deszca et al., 2020) as frameworks to address this problem of practice. I will also identify second and third order change, limitations to the framework, and give context-specific applications through an equity, diversity, inclusion, and decolonizing lens.

Guiding Framework: First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model

As we explore the following set of frameworks, I will ask the reader to consider a wide-angle macro lens to gain context for the change, then to zoom in for a more focused view of the change path to address the problem of practice. When the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) set out to redefine how success is measured in FNMI communities and shared the results of a series of community consultations in 2007, a holistic lifelong learning model was adopted as a framework for change. Its emphasis on community dialogues explored how and where learning occurs in First Nation communities, the importance of well-being, and conditions that impact learning and the role of partnerships in contributing to learning (AFN, 2007). From here, three holistic lifelong learning models were established as living documents: a First Nation lifelong learning model, an Inuit lifelong learning model, and a Métis lifelong learning model. While I come from Métis heritage myself as a citizen of the Red River settlement, it is essential to situate the Anishinaabek people and culture at the heart of our collective work in the school and community as it is, in this case, the dominant culture at Makwa Mountain and the primary Indigenous culture in Treaty 3 Territory. Therefore, this Dissertation-in-Practice will centre on the First Nations holistic lifelong learning model (Figure 1) as a primary tool for change implementation with Makwa Mountain.

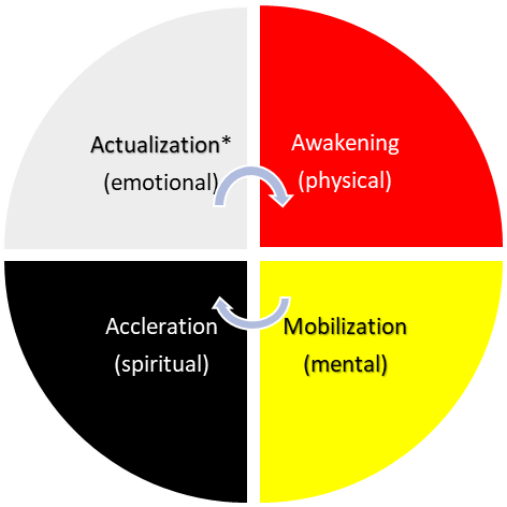
The FNHLLM (2007) represents holistic, lifelong learning with its connections to all beings. The roots represent what and how we learn: language, traditions, culture, and from community, family, the natural world and more. Moving up the tree, the trunk holds the heart of the tree, the traditional medicine wheel with its four interconnected quadrants: physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual realms for lifelong learning. Finally, the leaves of the trees represent the areas of growth and connection for all humans: social, spiritual, economic, and political, and as the individual grows, the leaves fall and regenerate, symbolizing the cycle of life within the Indigenous community. As a model, the FNHLLM not only drives this Dissertation-in-Practice, but also Makwa Mountain's vision and goals as a community school. We understand that student development is cyclical, interconnected, and lifelong, and we aim to meet the holistic needs of the whole child with a broader focus than intellectual development and academic achievement (Katz, 2008). While the model is complex, its connections to land-based learning specifically are significant as we aim to make connections through components in all areas: the roots, trunk, and leaves, as well as the outside environmental factors as nurturing guides making meaningful connections to western and Indigenous ways of knowing and being (CCL, 2007).

Primary Framework for Leading Change: Change Path Model

The change path model serves as a related framework to support the research in a secondary model as it aligns directly with the traditional Indigenous medicine wheel which is situated at the core of the tree as seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Change Path Model (Modified) Aligned with Traditional Medicine Wheel



Note. The traditional medicine wheel is represented here through design, colour, and interconnected quadrants. Added to the medicine wheel are the four stages of the adapted change path model: awakening, mobilization, acceleration, and actualization.

Deszca et al (2020) thoroughly constructed and modeled the change path theory in their organizational change toolkit by exploring other change frameworks and tailoring these to a hybrid model that is ideally suited for this problem of practice. By taking a research-based, guided approach through the stages of awakening, mobilization, acceleration, and institutionalization[1], the aforementioned PESTEL factors can be integrated into goal setting and planning for next steps.

[1] Deszca et al (2020) use the term *Institutionalization* in the change path model. Due to its potential colonial connections, it has been altered to 'Actualization' for use in this proposal.

Awakening occurs through a critical analysis where leaders scan their internal and external environments, a particularly essential goal for leaders as they require data from all significant parts of our organization (Deszca et al., 2020). The modified congruence model described in Chapter 1 is used as a framework for analysing inputs and outputs as well as the alignment of people, procedures, and policies. A critical component of our work here are the links between the organization's strategic plan which focuses on a decolonized approach to student achievement and well-being through responses to the TRC's (2015) 62nd and 63rd Calls to Action. An extension of this in many schools in Treaty 3 territory is the focus on land-based education and its impact on the broader environment which "connects school and community in the redesign of curricula to enable students to learn from their activism in community" (Radbourne, 2016). In my work teaching in an elementary provincial school, for example, students in the junior division planted a community garden after learning the Indigenous stories of the 3 Sisters (planting corn, beans, and squash together with an understanding of ecological interdependence and what grows together goes together). Students then raised funds to support the local community garden in their spring planting season. The project-based learning provided collaboration, opportunities for cross-curricular and cross-grade learning, connections to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2015) and proved a natural opening for embedded Indigenous storytelling of the 3 Sisters.

We focus on histories and culture specific to our school demographics and integrate student achievement and well-being in a cross-curricular manner through existing and developing connections to community. In relaying this to our staff and students, we would share that the awakening stage (Deszca et al., 2020) is aligned with the red, physical quadrant of the medicine wheel as we explore an individual's learning rings for formal education and

experiential learning throughout each stage of life (CCL, 2007). This is indicative of first order change, or the tacit reinforcement or application of existing understandings (Bartunek & Moch, 1987).

Mobilization addresses the systems, structures, and powers to create change. Our school improvement plan (MMOP, 2023) clearly outlines the mandate for selective staffing and that professional learning is key to supporting student success. It can not be understated that creating community partnerships is a significant and necessary step toward creating positive and welcoming relationships (Vowel, 2016). In the mobilization stage, a focus on effective communication is essential. As a leader I centre efforts at this stage on ongoing, regular, reciprocal communication with all of those who have a stake in student growth and learning, including staff, family/caregivers, community partners and Chief & Council. This focus on regrouping and alignment with specific school goals through open communication is an iterative process that centres on the spirit, or black section of the medicine wheel, commonly referred to as the winter stage of development. Here, story telling is at the heart of holistic development, likewise, with change planning and implementation through embedded land-based and traditional practices as well as documentation of these experiences.

In the acceleration stage, plans are made to bridge the gap between the present and desired future state and how the transition will be managed. Here we move from *what* change occurs to *how* it occurs. A key part of this stage includes action planning and implementation (Deszca et al., 2020). In my role as a participatory school leader, modelling this not only within my own school context but also within my professional learning community and leadership team will be essential. Second order change, such as modifying goals and metrics for success, is likely and should be considered as part of the process. For example, criteria for evaluating successful

integration of land-based concepts with Ontario curriculum may take a backseat to usage of a specific Treaty 3 land-based curriculum as related to Kinamaadiwin Inaakonigewin and the Treaty 3 Education Commission (Baskatawang, 2023). In our 2023 inspection feedback, monitoring educator practices around assessment & evaluation was a recommendation and aligns well with the goals of continued use with Growing Success (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010) in assessment for, of, and as learning. Collaboration is the cornerstone of the acceleration stage, so the goal is to have land-based learning conversations, provide cross-curricular exemplars and resources, and highlight connections to achievement, assessment, and evaluation in all K-12 classrooms.

While the actualization stage seems far off in the distance, by nature it demands that we as leaders track change, do ongoing assessments and tweak systems and structures accordingly (Deszca et al., 2020). Applying Indigenous knowledges often has a loose timeline, which is contrary to typical colonial practices (Cote-Meek & Moake-Pickering, 2022; Vowel, 2016; Wilson, 2008). This is noteworthy as this stage requires regular checkpoints for restructuring and analysis as well as a reminder to celebrate small wins and milestones (Deszca et al., 2020). In this stage I believe viewing effective assessment and evaluation practices through an inquiry lens is appropriate in this educational setting as we are a newly created team with a shared vision for growth and development of the organization. Actualization may take on different forms relative to short- and long-term goals. If the umbrella goal of reconciliation through reIndegnizing our curriculum and pedagogy remains at the forefront, the measurable goals must be more clearly defined. For example, working through the change path model, actualization may be identified through a shift in practice for educators to have embedded IK across two or three subject areas in a school year, with clearly defined next steps for the coming year. It is speculated that third order

change may be evident in these final stages where members of the organization will play a more pivotal role in changing the schemata as they see fit (Bartunek & Moch, 1987) and how the process of change leadership is both iterative and responsive.

Leadership Alignment

The key aspects of the change path model that are in closest alignment with my goals for leading this change process are that it is both collaborative and iterative. At each stage, the transformative servant leader is asked to keep students at the centre of the conversation whether it be with needs assessment, building relationships, instructional leadership, creating partnerships or analysing progress (Waters et al, 2003). The organization itself, with its connection to the environment, culture, and customs, must be considered in a holistic manner with consultation and co-creation of goals and assessment tools being done throughout the process.

The change path model is iterative in that one cannot outline details of every stage prior to completion, which is a key factor in Indigenous knowledge acquisition and ways of being. The PESTEL factors described earlier come into play along the change path (much like the leaves on the tree of the FNHLLM), which also help to personalize the model for our particular context.

Limitations

The change path model is a western tool used across sectors with application to educational organizations by many leaders and researchers. While it is integrated here to an Indigenous education framework, it should be noted that it has been modified in key areas, including the naming of the final stage. In Indigenous communities, holistic growth and development is cyclical, and while the Deszca et al. (2020) model has potential for looping, it is not inherent in its design, yet the action research, inquiry model described in our context would necessitate cyclical iterations. It is also a challenge to infer or predict variations of second or

third order change, although it is likely with this collaborative approach and is a goal of the change process. Finally, it is rare that any organization's personnel are at the same stage of change readiness at any one time, and this will be explored further in the section to follow.

Organizational Change Readiness

As the snow begins to fall from the late autumn sky, a sense of transition and setting in can be felt in the community. Daylight becomes scarce, not only with shortened days, but in northwestern Ontario there are often consecutive days of grey. Routines have been established and schedules become habit; students are often in the classroom in the morning and learning outdoors in the afternoons. Makwa Mountain's secondary site, the land school, is being prepared for use as we plan for heat in the seven buildings surrounding the fire, a building to represent each of the grandfather teachings, and a central firepit for heat, tanning hides, cooking foods, and offering medicines for blessing. Preparing for change comes natural in our Indigenous communities, indeed, across Turtle Island. It would be impossible to imagine trying to prevent the change in season, as it was impossible to imagine or predict a whole culture being erased by newcomers to this land. As stated early in this Dissertation-in-Practice, the good news is our people have not forgotten who we are. Here we are situated to examine the culminating and interconnected factors to assess change readiness in our learning community.

Change Readiness

> In the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) it is stated: Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth have told the Commission that they want to know the truth about the history and legacy of residential schools… to understand their responsibilities as parties to the Treaties… they want to learn about the rich contributions that Aboriginal peoples have made to this country" (p.185).

As if the Calls to Action are not imperative enough, the seminal work of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) clearly reports that we must look to historical Treaty relationships to move forward, guided by the "principles of mutual recognition, mutual respect, sharing, and mutual responsibility", and UNDRIP's 2007 statement confirms a right to protect and revitalize cultures, languages, and ways of life.

There is a sense that change is afoot in the Treaty 3 area with media and school districts participating in and promoting Truth and Reconciliation not only through national holidays, events, and land acknowledgements, but also in the establishment of alternatives to public education in general, such as Makwa Mountain as a land-based school. There is evidence that several provincial districts are adding Indigenous education goals to board action plans in the treaty area as well. However, as researchers we must look beyond qualitative and anecdotal evidence and explore change drivers to identify and quantify a readiness for change and do so through a definitive framework such as the modified congruence model introduced in chapter one and tools from our partners in Indigenous education.

The modified congruence model (Figure 1) provides a structure to identify inputs and outputs and the interconnected nature of the organization's people, processes, and procedures. The informal organization includes the goals and objectives of the Elders (Elders Gathering, 2023) and the Makwa Mountain Operation Plan (2023), as well as the work of the teaching lodge itself and associated strengths of the organization. Within the broader context of the formal organization sits the First Nation, Treaty 3 Education Authority, Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), and Kinamaadiwin Inaakonigewin (Indigenous customary law). I continue to learn roles and responsibilities of these organizations and organizational actors and the ways in which they intersect, my own role included. However, we are not the first First Nation to look at self-

governing our education system, and we have the work of the Canadian Council of Learning (CCL) to pave the way.

The CCL, responsible for the creation and implementation of the First Nation holistic lifelong learning model (2007). clearly outlines a framework for assessing change readiness through the model. Prior to analyzing the readiness of the community to make a necessary shift in education, the CCL community consultations establish the following as part of the process:

> The First Nation learner dwells in a world of continual reformation, where interactive cycles, rather than disconnected events, occur. In this world, nothing is simply a cause or an effect, but the expression of the interconnectedness of life. These relationships are circular rather than linear, holistic, and cumulative rather than compartmentalized. (p.38)

In the change readiness model, a needs assessment begins with a survey process for participants of all ages in the form of the Sources of Learning Survey (see Appendix A), where areas of foci include existing structures, needs, and supports for different age categories to represent holistic, lifelong learning.

The process of identifying change readiness continues to align with the FNHLLM as well as the modified congruence model as outlier contributing factors (or PESTEL factors) are considered for the indicators of inputs and outputs (in the congruence model) and leaves on the holistic model. I believe the interchangeability and intersection of these two models is significant as I consider our educators and leaders come from dual contexts (settler and Indigenous), and they also represent a variety of learning styles in their teaching practices.

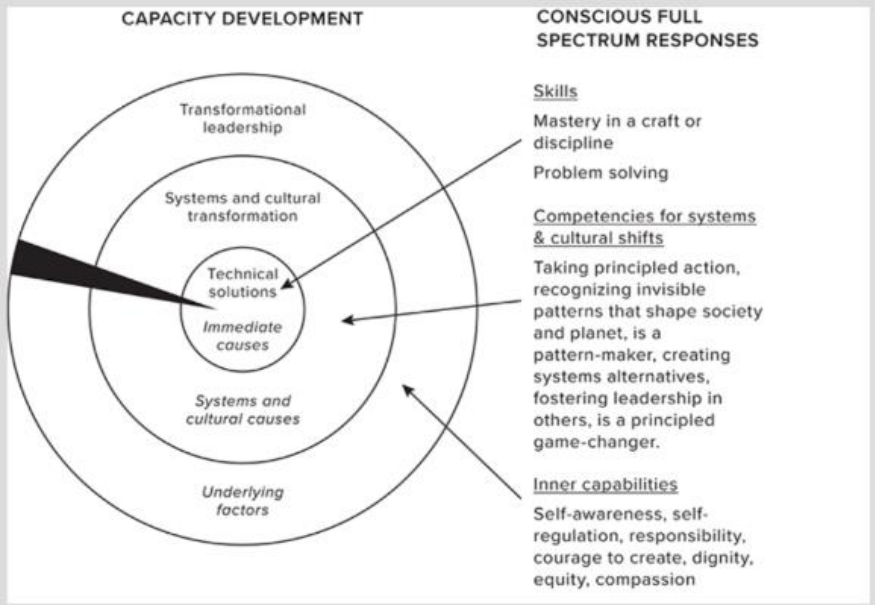
I have also been introduced to the concept of capacity development by Sharma (2017). “Capacity development is the process by which people, origins, and society as a whole unleash, strengthen, create, adapt, and maintain capacity over time” (p.261). To build capacity and

consider multiple voices is critical, as is taking a strength (or asset-based) approach to develop leadership within the organization. There is an intricate interrelationship between daily actions and transformative leadership, lending specifically to building capacity within the organization. Additionally, there must be consideration of personal (and epistemological) values, ethics, responsibility, and a focus on equity. These align with Indigenous views across many First Nation communities and the teachings I have been given as a Métis woman.

While the needs assessment and change readiness tools are mentioned above, my thinking and leadership, holistic approaches to capacity building, and analysis of change readiness are influenced by the following diagram. Figure 4 highlights the interconnected relationships and a full spectrum response to capacity development.

Figure 4

Capacity Development for Transformative Leaders



Note. Sharma's 2017 model aligns with the holistic, interconnected nature of both the leader's self-awareness as well as the capabilities for potential cultural shifts.

I believe the most notable alignment of each of these models is holistic, interconnected nature of analysing change readiness, as well as the concept of unknown or *invisible* factors. Many Indigenous scholars identify this phenomenon in relation to the spirit world, intergenerational teachings, Indigenous knowledge, and ways of being (Baskatawang, 2023; Battiste, 2013; Leddy & Miller, 2024; Talaga, 2017; Vowel, 2016; Wilson, 2008).

In addressing change readiness of the organization, we have framed the conversation around seasonal change, research, and theory. The tools provided by the Canadian Council on Learning (2007) align with the First Nation holistic lifelong learning model, which continues to be the primary framework to address the problem of practice. Supplementary frameworks such as the modified congruence model and Sharma's concept of capacity development for transformative leaders (2017) further support my leadership goals and epistemological underpinnings. This will lead to a conversation about ethical considerations as we continue to take a two-eyed approach to change planning.

Leadership Ethics in Organizational Change

In Treaty 3 territory, we are witnessing a quiet shift in Indigenous education that situates Indigenous learners at the centre of the conversation. There are four provincial school boards within Treaty 3 Territory and the first priority of the Chiefs of Ontario's First Nation Lifelong Learning Table (2023) focuses on building relationships through a reciprocal education approach in support of First Nation learners. In the following section I will introduce OCAP from the First Nations Governance Committee, (2000), then examine ethical considerations for the organizational context, the school context, my personal leadership, and the change process.

The Royal Commission for Aboriginal People (1996) played a significant role in addressing inequity and injustice for Indigenous people and was a catalyst for a very important

document known as OCAP which focuses on Indigenous information ownership, control, access, and possession. The First Nations Information Governance Centre is responsible for OCAP principles, and it serves as a cornerstone to all other ethical considerations related to this problem of practice as outlined below.

Organizational Considerations

The problem of practice being explored is rooted in the 62nd and 63rd Calls to Action (TRC ,2015), which in and of itself speaks to the ethical or moral obligation to address wrong-doing and work toward reconciliation through acknowledging the impact of residential schools on Turtle Island. As an Indigenous scholar, it is important that I recognize that a critical Indigenous theoretical approach requires a healthy relationship between the researcher and the researched; that is to say, I am both an invited guest and part of the problem and solutions. Within the public education system, ethics of care, respect, trust, and integrity are rooted in the work of the elementary teachers' union (ETFO, 2000), and while the First Nations schools (including Makwa Mountain) are not part of the provincial union, these ethical practices are adopted and embraced in line with professional standards of practice and have consistently been part of the teacher education programs for our staff.

Additionally, ownership, control, access, and possession of our community data, including the goals and objectives for school and community growth and development, are shared with the understanding that it represents a respectful, collaborative, and interconnected set of ontologies based on both traditional and visionary components.

On the First Nation itself, ethical considerations are rooted in the collective good, as previously stated, and the goals of the Elders and community at large. With social justice and equity considerations, the medicine wheel teachings embed an axiological framework in which

our relationships to one another and all our relations is highlighted (Leddy & Miller, 2024). Wilson (2008) helps us to make these connections by describing the mutual reality that is created through shared experiences, the values by which we come to make decisions and validate our actions, and the ethics that come from our thinking or morality. If we come back to the medicine wheel then, ethical considerations are evident in all areas of holistic growth and working toward mino bimaadiziwin (a good life), and as an organization this concept cannot be underestimated in planning for the greater community.

School Context

The goals of Makwa Mountain are outlined in the organizational plan (MMOP, 2023), which are directly linked to the wishes of the Elders and Chief and Council. With this comes a responsibility and accountability to care for the greater community through a commitment to holistic lifelong learning, alignment with language and culture, and a focus on the Indigenous learner. Again, data and information used to steer the problem of practice and possible solutions must be used with consideration for anonymity, cultural relevance, contextual significance, and consideration of future impact.

Leadership Ethical Considerations

I am deeply committed to the goals of our organization. Indeed, it is through the leadership and organizational framework that I position myself as a transformative servant leader and explore my own epistemological connections through the relationships, experiences, and interconnectedness of our organization. An example of this is as follows. I continue to strive to understand the ethical challenges in decolonizing and reIndigenizing our community through land-based learning. My theoretical understanding of LBL would be a flat line of text from research, however, through experiences and relationships with Elders, students, teachers,

language speakers and knowledge holders, I grow consistently in all four quadrants of the medicine wheel. We come together in ceremony, learn from, on, and with the land, and have shared experiences with trees, water, medicines, animals, the elements, and fresh air in all four seasons. I experience these things holistically, alongside my friends and colleagues, who are also along this experiential journey. We grow through reflection, problem-solving and sharing, and I learn more about my own identity and role in the community and all our relations through these connections in ways that research alone would never allow.

As a leader, my ethical considerations are to acknowledge, honour, and share these experiences, as well as to create a culture of learning for others to do the same. I honour and recognize my privilege, the diversity of our learners, the lightness and darkness of our past, as well as the goals and vision of the future. I am ethically bound to not only honour but celebrate the diversity of our smaller and broader community, but to help our students to see beyond themselves to local and global citizenship. It is difficult to untangle the interconnectedness of the ethical considerations, as I believe that it is all situated in holistic, lifelong learning and the heart of a lifelong educator and learner. However, it is said in the time of the seventh fire, "the Oshkibimaadiziig would retrace the steps of their ancestors and…the Indigenous way of life would come to thrive again (Fiola, 2021) and the Métis people will play an important role in this revitalization. It is through these teachings that, ultimately, my leadership ethical stance is rooted.

Strategies to Address the Problem of Practice

This chapter has focused on leadership approaches, framing the change process and the ethical considerations for organizational change, which sets the stage for strategies to address the problem of practice. Below, three possible strategies are identified, and a comparison is made

regarding change drivers, feasibility, connections to the questions and reIndigenizing goals. In conclusion, one strategy is selected as a preferred next step in leading organizational change.

Strategy One: The Partnership

Makwa Mountain is situated in a quiet rural setting where the land plays a significant role in daily learning, which ideally situates us for a variety of land-based learning opportunities on a daily basis. As mentioned, students frequently migrate between local public schools and the First Nation, and families share a variety of social activities, cultural connections and have all the regular interactions one might expect to find in a mid-sized northern community. Educators connect through these social events as well and have a shared interest in professional and personal learning experiences. Through these conversations, a proposal for partnership between learning communities is often discussed.

Forest Green (a pseudonym) is a local elementary school which is also classified as a forest school. By definition, a forest school is situated to include outdoor learning to connect children to nature, embrace student-led learning and focuses on personal, social, and emotional development of children (Harris, 2017). I suggest a partnership for a collaborative inquiry in educator professional learning would benefit educators, students, and community members alike. Under the direct leadership of school administrators, professional learning communities could be established for a year-long partnership to enhance and design co-created learning around areas such as connections between outdoor education/land-based learning, shared cultural experiences, literacy/ numeracy professional learning, or assessment and evaluation in experiential learning, for example.

Logistics of such a partnership would be for administrators to come together to discuss individual needs and wishes for the collaboration, aligning schedules and potential forms of

collaboration, and creating a template for monitoring progress and data. Communication is a critical component for all partners (and leaders), and at all stages of the year-long process (Fullan et al, 2021). As seen in Table 1, resources are considered with time, economics, technology, and commitment to human resources being significant with this possible strategy, however, alignment with decolonizing goals specific to Calls to Action 62 and 63 has great potential. Community connections have great potential for moving forward with a strength-based approach and a strength-in-numbers approach to professional development is another key highlight for this proposed strategy.

In this scenario, a leadership challenge is that both parties (schools) must have ultra clear expectations and a shared goal for a year's worth of learning. The Ontario government requires public schools to post the goals of professional activity days on public facing websites and school districts often mandate topics and professional learning schedules for much of the year. Therefore, aligning time and topics might be a major barrier, as well as finding release time for collaboration for teachers. I would predict another major barrier with funding student learning opportunities between schools with time, transportation, and varying policies on safety between public and First Nation organizations.

Potential alignment with the problem of practice and guiding questions is outlined in Table 2, and it is worth noting that if done effectively, a potential partnership not only has high potential for meeting decolonization and reconciliation goals, but also takes a strength-based approach which allows both school communities to reflect on, showcase, and enhance their unique qualities as a land-based school or forest school. The Chiefs of Ontario Bilateral Table on Education Strategic Plan (2017) outlines expectations in building relationships through what is known as the evergreen protocol. Here, the recommendation is to build relationships to "guide

collaborative work and partnerships between First Nations and the mainstream education system". The NNSD five-year strategic plan (currently in draft/ implementation status for 2024-2029), echoes this priority in similar language.

Table 1 delineates commitments to resources for this suggested strategy, including connections to the Calls to Action (2015) and specific decolonizing considerations.

Table 1

Solution Analyses for Suggested Strategies to Address Problem of Practice

	Solution 1- Partnership	Solution 2- Dialogue	Solution 3- Matrix
Resource Commitment **Time** **Fiscal** **Technology** **Human**	**HIGH** **MODERATE** **MODERATE** **HIGH**	**HIGH** **LOW/MODERATE** **LOW** **HIGH**	**MODERATE** **LOW** **LOW/MODERATE** **MODERATE**
Connection to Calls 62 and 63	**MODERATE**	**MODERATE/HIGH**	**HIGH**
Decolonizing/ ReIndigenizing	**High Degree**	**High Degree**	**High Degree**
OCAP Ethical Considerations	**Partial**	**High Degree**	**High Degree**
Community Centred	**High Degree**	**High Degree**	**High Degree**

Note. Table 1 provides a side-by-side comparison of features of each of the three possible solutions to address the problem of practice for this Dissertation.

Strategy Two: Community Dialogue for Growth Plan

In 2007 the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) partnered with the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) with the goal to create a means to measure success in learning for First Nations communities. Using the First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model, the chosen framework for this Dissertation-in-Practice, a series of consultations were done in a variety of communities

to discuss how and where learning occurs, the importance of learning in community well-being, the conditions that impact learning, and the role of community partners (CCL, 2007). With these clear connections to the problem of practice being explored here, the second proposed strategy is to replicate the consultation process with the Makwa Mountain First Nation.

The community dialogue is an iterative process designed to elicit engagement from those holding a stake in education on the First Nation at five stages: early years, youth, young adults, adults, and Elders (CCL, 2007). A project coordinator begins with initial contact with the community to establish a timeline, budget, proposal, and policies for the dialogues, then follows up with teleconference and face-to-face gatherings where conversation occurs, and data is collected. OCAP principles are highlighted throughout the process, and the FNHLLM is the framework through which dialogue occurs.

Logistics of this process is clearly outlined in the Community Dialogues on First Nation Holistic Lifelong Learning: Learning as a Community for Renewal and Growth document (2007), which is a clear benefit for a possible solution. It is apparent, however, that at time of writing the CCL is no longer offering the service, rather has offered the resources for communities or governing entities to replicate the process in the name of realizing goals for First Nation sovereignty, self-governance, and actualization (CCL, 2007). In meeting with the Grand Council Treaty 3 Education Committee, consultations are a recommended next step (GCT3 Education Gathering, 2023), and the Chiefs of Ontario Lifelong Learning Table (2023) also sites community consultations as high priority recommendations. Furthermore, the community is presently growing in educational programs from early years, through secondary education, and in into the trades as a means to align both needs of our K-12 learners and those outside this age

range. A consultation would serve to further develop wrap-around and lifelong learning opportunities.

There is a great list of possible benefits to this strategy as outlined in Table 1, including one in particular which focuses on ownership, control, access, and possession. While the resources required to complete a formal community dialogue include a notable commitment to time, technology, and human resources to complete the audit and dialogue, this is also a clear step toward decolonization, reIndigenization, and direct connection to the school and community goals of honouring Indigenous voices at all levels. It is a strength-based approach (noted in the first guiding question), and is literally situated in the FNHLLM, which offers excellent alignment. Data collected in this process would be very useful as we strive to meet the holistic, lifelong learning needs and has potential to address the issues of well-being and achievement with effective application.

This strategy does not showcase specific connections linking Ontario curriculum and land-based learning as outlined in the first strategy, nor does it have immediate opportunities to embed instructional leadership at the school level as it places higher significance on voices from the community itself. Planning a community consultation would also come from Chief and Council, which could potentially be a barrier for buy-in for a variety of reasons. Lack of understanding, systemic mistrust or other priorities might be barriers for leadership as well as community involvement in the process, and time for completion is another area that I would find challenging as the timeframe is flexible. Table 2 provides a summary of this analysis with relation to addressing the guiding questions.

Table 2

Potential for Addressing Guiding Questions

	Solution 1- Partnership	Solution 2- Dialogue	Solution 3- Matrix
Existing practices/ Indigegogy: what is our story?	**Moderate Potential**	**High Potential**	**High Potential**
How do we measure holistic growth?	**Moderate Potential**	**Moderate/ High Potential**	Moderate/ **High Potential**
Impact of aligning LBL and ON curriculum?	**High Potential**	**Low/ Moderate Potential**	**High Potential**

Note. Alignment of possible solutions with Guiding Questions to address the Problem of Practice.

Strategy Three: The Cultural Matrix

The third suggested strategy would be almost entirely school-based and relies heavily on solid instructional leadership and effective collection and collation of data. One of the biggest areas of need and potential growth is to align Makwa Mountain's land-based learning program with Ontario curriculum expectations. The proposed strategy is to create a matrix to explicitly achieve this task.

A year-long goal for action research and professional learning for Makwa Mountain staff will lead to the goal of creating a digital, online matrix that links land-based learning activities to the Ontario curriculum expectations across the subject areas, and from kindergarten through grade 12. This process demands participation from a variety of staff, including educators and school leadership teams. It would also require time for staff to gain high levels of mastery and understanding with both land-based practices and curriculum documents, be up to date with

provincial trends and shifting curricula and have a level of proficiency with online technology (such as spreadsheets and a basic website). By creating the matrix throughout the year and embedding the work into existing practices, educators would become leaders in their field, and student experiences would be documented, (with their input and consent), along the way.

The benefits of this strategy are outlined in Table 1. Noteworthy are the connections to all three guiding questions, the student-centred nature of the process, and the moderate demands for financial consideration and human resources. Additionally, OCAP considerations (CCL, 2007) are significant as the collection and processing of information would be driven almost entirely by the school community. Grand Council Treaty 3 education consultations in December 2023 confirm there is a need in several communities for this work to move other Indigenous run schools forward, and a great interest in both collaborating and consulting in language connections to this work as well. There is a need in the field that is not presently filled by existing research and resources and the implications for future sharing, growth and development across the province are significant.

The challenges associated with creating a matrix to align curriculum and land-based activities mostly involve time and logistics around the scope and sequence. For example, one area of need in our school is focus and attention to linear pathways for knowledge acquisition (staff survey, 2023). The dedication to prioritize the research, documentation, alignment, and professional learning are substantial. It would require other priorities to be realigned or postponed, an inch-wide-mile-deep approach would be essential. While interest in the topic is high presently potential for saturation is also a possibility.

While I have done my best to deeply dive into the logistics and change drivers and compare or contrast the three different possible strategies in the discussion and table above, the

alignment to the problem of practice and Calls to Action (2015) is most noteworthy. The problem of practice is student-centred and focuses on well-being, attendance, achievement, and graduation rates for our students. In each of the three possible strategies, there is a link to student outcomes. Growing educators who value relationships, reciprocity and respect for school and community wellbeing is good for students, and this in turn has great potential to inform our practices to meet student need (Absolon, 2010; Hattie, 2023). Possible opportunities to learn from and with another learning community on the land also has strong social and cross-curricular implications, as well as a decolonizing effect.

The community dialogue also provides direct links to the problem of practice with more of a macro approach outside of the school itself, but centres the discussion on the well-being, achievement, perceptions, and goals for education that is rooted in lifelong, holistic learning. This is at the heart of our problem of practice and would provide opportunity for action research at a higher, more diverse, and inclusive level to inform our practice. There is link to the focus on understanding where we have come from in education (residential schools, as referenced in the 62nd and 63rd Calls to Action), and great potential for growth in two-eyed seeing and embedding Indigenous knowledges, the medicine wheel teachings, celebrations, and ceremony. In *Land as Teacher: Understanding Indigenous Land-based Education,* Googoo (2021) states:

> Land-based education supports reconciliation by breathing new life into languages and cultures at risk of disappearing, teaching students about the history of residential schools, empowering them to develop their own connections to the land, and giving them the tools to protect and fight for it.

There is little separation between IK, language, and the land, and there is an opening at present to align with existing curriculum and pedagogy in our schools.

The creation of a matrix to align Ontario curriculum expectations is clearly aligned with the focus of this Dissertation-in-Practice and it is a more localized approach to reIndigenizing curriculum with a focus on Indigegogy. It is student-centred, would provide opportunity to highlight important aspects of Indigenous history and a vision for goal setting, and it takes educators and students on a journey to educational reform which are factors in direct alignment with the Calls to Action (2015).

Selected Strategy

Each of the three proposed strategies has been carefully crafted with the intention to provoke the reader with connections to the problem of practice specific to the organization, drivers for change, and ethical/ social justice considerations. While there are limitations with each, Table 1 indicates the third strategy is perhaps the most desirable with its links to key factors. The cultural matrix strategy is rich in potential, is practical and manageable in one change cycle, and has deep roots in holistic, lifelong learning. The Ontario curriculum serves as a framework and is a necessary component for measured student success with embedded assessment and evaluation (Growing Success, 2010). Aligning this with experiential, best practices in land-based learning not only provides a best-of-both-worlds scenario for our learning community but serves to not only honour Indigenous knowledges and ways of being, but also situates our students and educators and experts in their field. However, there is clearly potential for a yes/and approach rather than either/or, leaving the door open for ongoing shared learning opportunities with Forest Green is very plausible and full of potential. The framework and community dialogue resources are also pivotal tools for this DiP and will also be used in future school planning.

Chapter 2 Conclusion

I am reminded of our earliest days together in the school as a staff, planning and visioning what might be in the days and months ahead. A poster remains on my office door with notes from the days' discussions, and many of the comments are centred around culture, student learning, and land-based professional learning. Our educators are leaders. Our students are never far from our thoughts, usually front and centre in our planning, goals, and visions. In this chapter we have looked at leadership goals and the First Nation Lifelong Learning Model as a framework for leading change in a First Nation community.

In exploring change readiness, we were led into a discussion about ethical considerations and saw many connections to the previous sections. Finally, three possible strategies to address the problem of practice have been explored, from a partnership with a provincial school to broaden professional understanding and build relationships, to a tried-and-true community dialogue approach from the Canadian Council on Learning (2007) to deepen connections to community goals and a commitment to the future of education in the First Nation. In the end, with elements of each of these strategies open for consideration, it is the goal of aligning Ontario curriculum with our existing unique strengths in land-based learning that would lead to our preferred strategy of creating a meaningful matrix to help us move forward with the problem of practice and into the final chapter which will focus on methods for change implementation, communicating and measuring change within the organization.

Chapter 3: Implementation, Communication, and Evaluation

Winter is the time of storytelling, and as we move into this final chapter of the Dissertation-in-Practice it occurs to me that it is of profound significance that we will explore the sequence of implementing change during this time. In Indigenous ways of knowing and being, looking back is as important as looking forward (LaFever, 2017). As I write, I am blessed with the winter sun on my face, a blanket of white out the window, and sore muscles from the previous day's adventures skiing and snowshoeing with our students in the frosty forest. Indigenous story tellers such as Isaac Murdoch (2018) describe the magical power of the colour white, biboonіiwininii, (the spirit of snow), and the great white makwa (bear) who hibernates and collects the powers of medicines at this time. Jamie Sams (2014) also tells a powerful tale of the clan mother of the twelfth moon, (she is named *Gives Praise*), whose medicines are healing and gratitude.

It is said that winter is a powerful time for all Indigenous folk to rest and listen, to hear the stories of Elders, and that in education it is an important time as we slow our pace and take advantage of colder temperatures and fewer hours of daylight to shift our communicative practice. We listen, we learn, we reflect, which also is a beautiful model for the work ahead in this DiP as we explore plans for communicating, monitoring, and evaluating to determine our collective next steps.

Change Implementation Plan

The problem of practice being explored reflects on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) 62nd and 63rd Calls to Action (2015) which ask leaders to connect educators with age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, as well as the historical and contemporary contributions of Indigenous people. We have situated this with the goal of

addressing student well-being, attendance, achievement, and graduation rates with a holistic, lifelong learning model that is focused on the Indigenous learner. Next, we will look more deeply at change implementation through strategic alignment, strategies for implementation with timelines and transitions, and considerations for resistance to change.

Strategic Alignment

Makwa Mountain is situated in Treaty 3 territory and, as such, aligns with the traditional knowledges and ways of being of the Anishinaabek. As a leader in the school, I am an active member with treaty area's Education Committee. In this capacity, I am tasked with the responsibility of aligning goals for language revitalization, community and cultural connections, and planning for land-based learning in our K-12 school (Gardner, 2024). These goals are mirrored in our Makwa Mountain Organization Plan (MMOP, 2023) as well as those of the Elders Gathering (2023) for our school and First Nation. The plan to create an interactive, student-centred matrix for educators and learners to document land-based learning experiences and align these with Ontario curriculum expectations meets each of these goals as the teachings surrounding LBL are steeped in Anishinaabemowin and rely heavily on the experiences of traditional knowledge holders and community partners. Additionally, the academic achievement and success indicators of Makwa Mountain school are monitored and evaluated by Indigenous Services Canada as well as the Ontario Ministry of Education. As such, the Ontario curriculum is non-negotiable for certification, and the proposed matrix offers educators an opportunity to align our work with each of these pillars with an etuaptmunk (two-eyed seeing) approach.

Educators at Makwa Mountain, (which include all teachers, education assistants, Elders, and support staff), are encouraged to take a strength-based approach to exploring their gifts alongside our students. This aligns with a holistic, lifelong learning approach, our present

practice of approaching our planning through medicine wheel teachings, and a collaborative inquiry approach. Perreault et al. (2021) state “Indigenous knowledge has long known the importance of land-based experiences, and how these experiences change a person and the brain”. With this approach to curriculum and pedagogy, we enhance our existing strategies by adopting and integrating Indigenous knowledges to traditional (often colonial) practices (Battiste, 2013; Fiola, 2021).

In adopting this change implementation plan, I heed reminders to align my leadership approach to change as well as agency for implementing change. As a Métis transformative leader who serves my community, I understand that building and maintaining trusting relationships within and outside our community is paramount. This means not only aligning with community and school goals, but also being transparent and humble in my intentions and leadership within each context. A collaborative approach which seeks regular, ongoing input and reciprocal communication at all levels is essential. For example, I regularly check in with our education counsellor with progress reports and challenges in our practice, and our educators are given voice to do the same at our Monday morning check-ins. We align these conversations with our learning goals as an existing practice (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2021). However, taking time to clearly outline the need for change will prepare the learning community for transformative practice (Shields & Hesbol, 2020). Monitoring the receptivity and appreciation for this need will provide improved chances for successful implementation (which will be further explored in the Communication section). In each of the following strategies my leadership positionality and agency for leading change is also embedded.

Strategies for Implementation

The first step toward the desired goal (aligning land-based practices with Ontario curriculum expectations), is to set the stage with our community, educators, students, and families. As a scholarly practitioner, I am prepared to use not only existing school-based data as it connects to our goals, but also current and relevant community and regional data on systemic gaps such as the Chiefs of Ontario reports (2017, 2023), and examples of successful land-based implementation across the province and beyond. Invited to sit with Chief and Council in late-summer/early-fall, I will take the opportunity to listen first to their goals and the direction of the Elders, then share our goals as well.

Taking a layered approach which aligns with existing systems provides greater opportunity for successful change implementation in many circumstances (Capper, 2019; Deszca et al, 2020). As such, the professional learning days at the start of the year with our staff are another prioritized opportunity to set goals and envision the year ahead. Families and caregivers are invited to our fall feast where prayers and offerings are given, and this serves as an opportunity to connect with families and community members. Sharing our annual goals in anticipation of the year ahead in informal conversations as well as our fall newsletter and social media enables educators and the community multiple opportunities to grow and expand strategies for future collaborations.

Another strategy to implement effective change is to provide room for personalization and allow educators to self-select their professional learning community based on interest or division. McLure & Aldridge (2022) identify “18 studies where successful introduction to reform occurred where there was a process that allowed for differentiated plans and individualized school support” (p.420). Self-selected learning also improves cultural connections and ownership

of learning (Fullan, 2020; Harrison & Greenfield, 2011). Under the umbrella of the school improvement plan, educators will be offered time to explore a season, a land-based teaching, a learning team, and/or a topic on which their annual learning goals will be focused. An example of this might be a junior division teacher who has experience in the manoomin harvest continuing to be a resource for sharing that knowledge, but identifying fish netting as the area in which they would like to learn more and document student (and teacher) learning within the matrix. This provides authentic learning opportunities, encourages creative partnerships and community connections (Baskatawang, 2023), while also encouraging autonomy and shared ownership of learning opportunities.

Timelines and Transitions

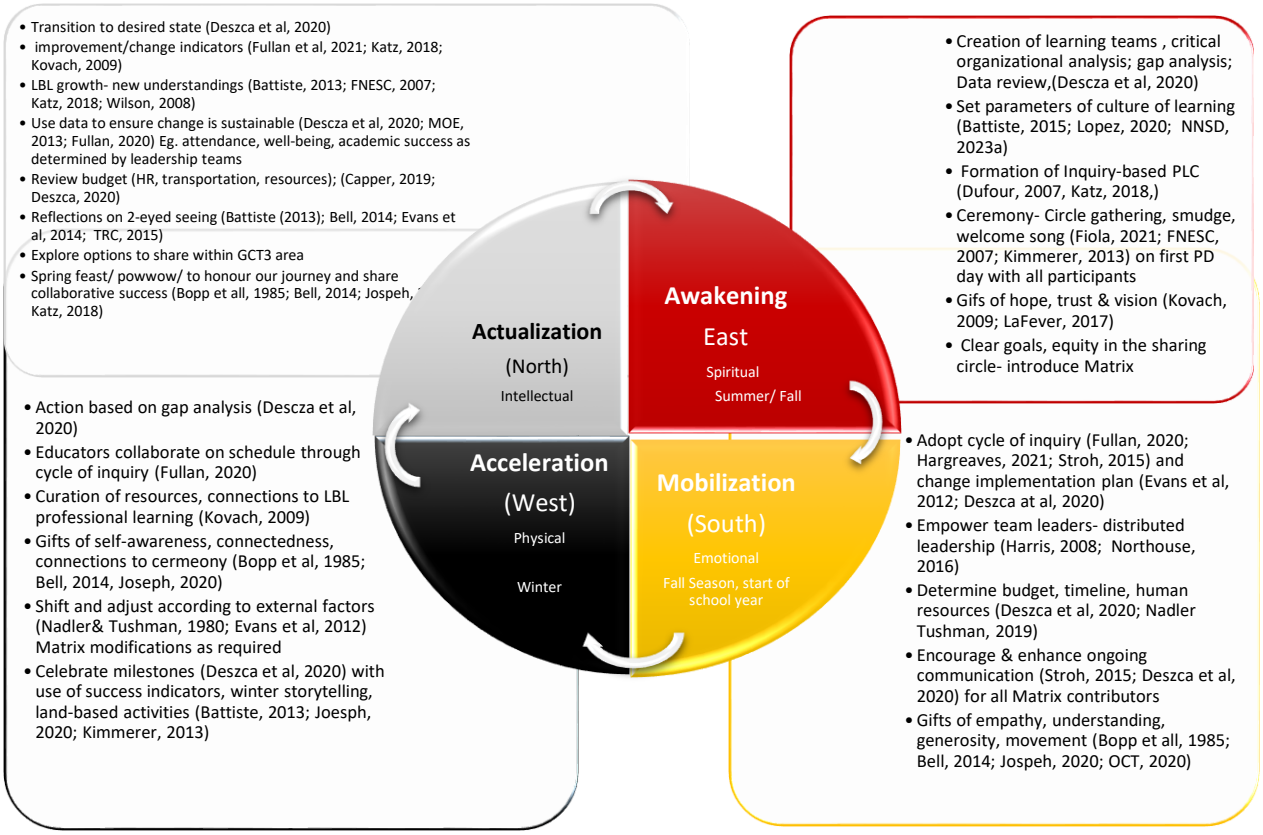
In our school context, it is requested that classroom teachers share long-range plans (in the form of an annual learning plan) which align with Ontario curriculum expectations. Additionally, Makwa Mountain is working toward a five-year- strategic plan which will align with community goals (from Elders and Chief & Council), recommendations from Indigenous Services Canada, (a two-year process), and current/ existing goals. This process is new to the First Nation with the school still in its early years, however, as a leader with extensive experience in school-based planning, I am familiar with the process at both the school and board level. Additionally, our five-year-plan will incorporate direction from Grand Council Treaty 3 and the education goals of both the public board's five year strategic plan (NNSD, 2023) as well as input from both Indigenous education advisory committees.

For this Dissertation-in-Practice, however, we will focus primarily on one change cycle to allow for optimal influence and measurable outcomes (Absolon, 2010; Deszca et al, 2020). Figure 5, below, outlines a seasonal approach to timeline considerations. The medicine wheel,

aligned with the change path model, further outlines the four seasons or stages of change implementation. Cyclical in nature and rooted in IK, this approach provides multiple and varied entry levels for all those who have a stake in change implementation

Figure 5

Change Path Model Aligned with Traditional Medicine Wheel



Note. A representation for building capacity for change implementation provides cyclical opportunities for educator professional learning through collaborative inquiry.

An ideal cycle of inquiry would align with the school calendar and this model suggests the awakening stage might not only be built upon the culture and systems of the school

community built in the previous year, but also recognizes that school leaders such as myself do planning for the coming year in the summer months. For the purpose of change implementation, short term goals (one year or cycle of inquiry) will set the stage for medium (3-year), and long-term goals (5 years).

In the awakening stage participants are welcomed into the collaborative process of transformative change with an invitation to envision the future state with evidence, experience, and expertise all being considered. Learning teams will be created at the school level, with additional knowledge holders, Elders, and community partners being considered as well. It is advisable to consider those whose voice might be missing at this stage especially with reconciliatory and social justice considerations (Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario, 2020; Wilson, 2008). For example, not all community members have connections to our school nor do they have family members who are present for planning and consultation. However, creative information sharing through the local health access centre, for example, might provide opportunities to expand the relationships with outlying community members (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; Lopez, 2020; Safir & Dugan, 2021).

Following the initial goal setting of the awakening stage where a proposed timeframe is set, mobilization occurs as the school year gets into motion and relationships begin to strengthen through shared experiences, planning, and open communication (Beatty, 2015). Leaving room for personal input and flexibility for partnerships, a suggested timeline for the mobilization stage might be late fall into winter as it aligns with Anishinaabek teachings of mental preparation as well as celebrating the fruits of harvest (Kimmerer, 2013). It is worth noting, in a land-based school there is a natural tendency to plan around the seasons as a great deal of our learning activities occur in the outdoors and are connected to the weather. Each year I have worked in a

provincial forest school or our Indigenous land-based school I have observed this phenomenon and have reverence for the innate tendency to connect with traditional practices.

If the goal of the mobilization stage is to establish goals, relationships, and clear communication with all members (Deszca et al., 2020), actionable goals surrounding creation of the curricular matrix will begin to come to fruition. As a lead learner in this process, I will aim to model my own learning, instructional leadership, and communication of such through active participation in the matrix. Leaders who lead from the middle creatively and collaboratively demonstrate personal experiences (of learning) while modeling desired outcomes for the team (Fullan, 2020). While educators are encouraged to do the same, it is the holistic and lifelong learning of our students that is centred in this problem of practice. At each grade level, students will be encouraged to reflect on and document the connections within 'traditional' subject areas (such as Language, Mathematics, Science), and the land-based learning before, during, and after it is experienced. Creative and diverse learning is captured through a variety of means (anecdotal, photo, conversation, observation, product) in alignment with Growing Success (2010) and developing instructional practice. It is important to plan for possible shifts as well, in technology platform, tools, expectations and timelines (Couros & Novak, 2019), and to follow the lead of our learners as well. By connecting not only to curriculum but also student interests, culture, worldview, and experiences, we capture learning in the moment and in authentic ways (Battiste, 2013; Hattie, 2023; Fullan, 2020).

As the school year progresses through the winter and spring, acceleration is expected to occur where student and educator ownership of the learning takes place. Through story telling and reflection, Indigenous learners and knowledge holders slow down with intention and purpose during the colder, darker months (Murdoch, 2022). However, it is often here that educators find

students have potential to accelerate learning with focus on goal setting, achievement, and credit accumulation (Hattie, 2023). This paradox of slowing down and accelerating can be approached with intention as learning teams focus on looking back (reflection and metacognition) and setting goals for the final stages of the first inquiry cycle as we move toward actualization. In the final stage, (presumably the completion of the first inquiry cycle, or the end of June), students will have an opportunity to showcase their own learning through personal portfolios and individual learning plans with a connection to the matrix. Educators will have had one school year to integrate land-based learning with curriculum, pedagogy, assessment & evaluation, and holistic, experiential learning. For certain, actualization is both a time for reflection as well as a time for celebration and planning forward.

Resistance and Redefining Pathways

The Problem of Practice explored is multi-layered, as is the proposed solution. Holistic teaching and learning require a look at the individual's physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual growth and development, and from an epistemological and ontological lens (Bujacki et al, 2022; Katz, 2018; Pidgeon, 2015; Wilson, 2008). It can be anticipated that educators will come with various degrees of acceptance or willingness to accept the challenge of organizational or systemic change, despite compelling data and shared goals. (Just as students have diverse needs and experiences, so too do our staff). However, past experiences have shown that relationship building must come first and remain a priority. We give voice to one another, despite (and often, especially when) we have differing points of view as a show of reciprocity and respect (MMOP, 2023). I can anticipate that there will be room for conversation with those who feel their plate is already full, and those who have most years of experience of working strictly through the provincial curriculum (for assessment and evaluation, in particular.)

A timeline is a challenge for school planning in an Indigenous school with many changes to a school calendar due to unexpected closures, community celebrations, and cultural ceremonies. In addition, the nature of our flattened organization and consultations often challenges me as a leader to *hurry up and wait* so to speak. Redefining timelines, land-based activities, connections with community members/ knowledge holders, budgetary factors, and shifts in foci can be anticipated, as is oft the case, and requires humility and patience. However, it is with honour and gratitude that I am trusted to lead the change implementation as an invited guest to the community and this more than off-sets the present and anticipated challenges.

The change implementation plan outlined here provides an initial overview of the prescribed recommendations to implement the creation of a land-based learning matrix for educators. The one-year plan represents one cycle of inquiry for one school community. In its second and third years, it is hoped to be expanded to other First Nation schools and communities within Grand Council Treaty 3 for further development, as well as within Makwa Mountain. Sharing beyond, collaborating within the region and across Turtle Island (both scholarly and for education purposes) are highlighted long-term goals. Through strategic alignment with community, school, and Treaty 3 goals, the problem of practice is addressed through transformative leadership. To our best understanding, and from work with the provincial school board's education advisory committee as well as Treaty 3's Education Advisory Committee, a matrix like this simply does not exist. The need, however, is widely shared, and through careful holistic planning and development through the medicine wheel and modified change path model, we are ready to explore ways to communicate the plan for change.

Communication for Change

Improved communication is often the first area of need or growth outlined by organizations, including that of Makwa Mountain according to staff and community surveys and goal setting conversations. The improvement plan is created in a manner that places communication in a reciprocal, respectful manner as embedded in the holistic lifelong learning model where the learning rings of the individual are represented in the trunk of the tree (Figure 2). Communication goals and strategies are outlined in every stage of the learning cycle as outlined in Figure 4 in alignment with proposed action items and connections to traditional teachings and practices. In the following communication plan, we will explore creation of awareness, mobilizing knowledge, ethical considerations and maintaining (communication) momentum throughout the change process.

The Communication Plan

Change leaders are tasked to oversee wide and broad elements of change implementation, however, as Beatty (2015) asserts, all the ownness for communications before, during, and after the process should not fall directly on the change leader. Rather, a steering committee will help ensure the multi-layered communication plan is understood and put into place. Communications vary- from school-based emails, memos, strategic plans & policies, to social media posts, newsletters, infographics, and reports. As a modern teaching lodge, Makwa Mountain embeds information technology in our practices, and as a traditional Indigenous land-based school, we also adhere to traditions of oral storytelling, ceremony, and teachings. As such, communication is varied and complex.

Communication by Season

The presentation of the Dissertation-in-Practice will occur in late summer/early fall as learning teams conclude the regular school year and reflect on practices, policy, and pedagogy. This will enable our team to embed the learning to our school improvement plan and goals for the coming year. As the principal I will first lead the discussion for reflection on wise practices and goal setting with school staff with the pillars of the school improvement plan and Elders' suggestions in mind: academic achievement, integration of language and culture, and community partnerships. All educators and support staff are present for these meetings and the goals of creating a cultural matrix will be shared. All staff will be encouraged to provide their thoughts and feedback through conversation and feedback forms, and this will be shared in the initial end-of-summer gathering with the community executive. Appendix B exemplifies the feedback form Chief and Council, including the education counsellor, will be asked to complete as they are offered a 'sneak peek' of the proposed cultural matrix.

In the fall, educators will use the goals set for the year with a focus on three goals of the action plan to begin to envision the land-based goals for the year. We will invite our community partners to join in the fall feast as is community practice. Ideally, this will include not only our neighbouring public-school staff and students, but also those from health and wellness, recreation partners and our local Elders, knowledge holders, drummers, families & caregivers, and community members who play an integral role in our educational and land-based activities in the year to come. This will serve not only as an invitation to these valuable players for land-based activities throughout the year, but also create an opening to establish future communications. While some of our partners prefer text messages or phone calls, others prefer a personal visit. Also, educators who are inviting self-selected community members will make

cultural considerations such as offering tobacco and following cultural protocols as we continue to update our Selected Elders document for the school and community. Figure 5 highlights the transition of communication and implementation goals related to cultural events as well as change implementation stages.

Regular, reciprocal communication among staff, students, families and caregivers occurs through newsletters and social media as well as school-based activities. As partners in the learning, students' home supports are a significant component at every stage of the change process (Katz, 2018). While the action plan must be iterative and co-created, the proposed change implementation plan includes landmark communication goals at each stage of the learning cycle. Staff and students will reflect on the process of developing a curricular land-based portal monthly as well as at the end of each academic term or inquiry cycle. As well, surveys and feedback forms will be used by our professional learning partners from both Makwa Mountain and our community partners. Keeping in mind that goals, data, and timelines are iterative and co-created, there is room for flexibility. However, the core principles of open, ongoing, reciprocal, and respectful communication (CCL, 2007; Kovach, 2009) will be identified and remain at the forefront of our collective goals.

Knowledge Mobilization

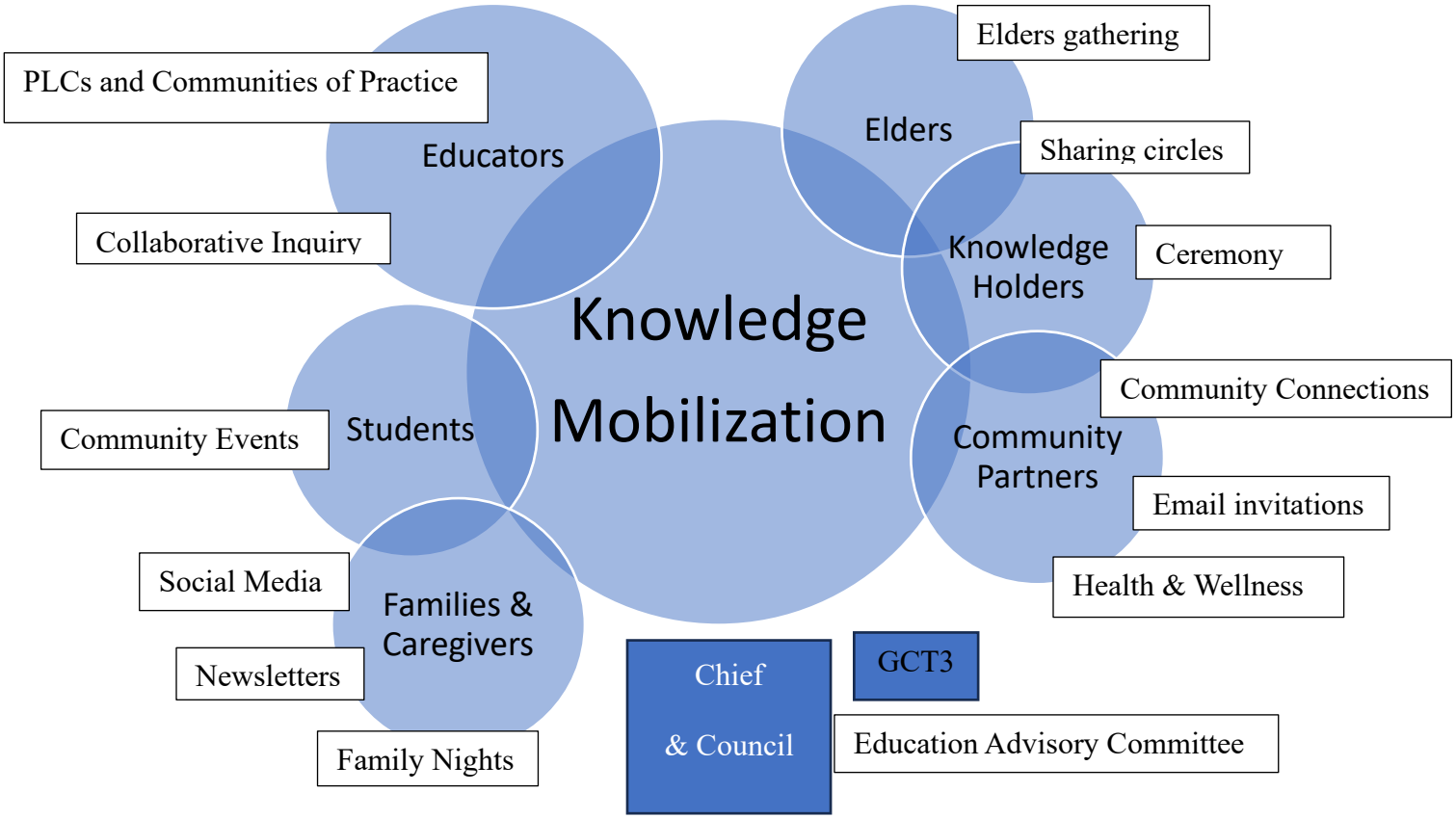
While effective communication plays a pivotal part in change implementation for the organization, the follow through of disseminating progress and results and beyond the school community enables the cultural matrix to continue to grow. Knowledge mobilization refers to networks and strategies which focus on translating research into practice (Campbell et al., 2014) and in this case, has potential to move beyond our Makwa Mountain educators and those who hold stake within the community. For example, while the work of documenting land-based

activities falls on educators and students with guidance from our Elders and knowledge holders, the responsibility to transfer this progress and results shifts back to the school leadership. Additionally, once approved and shared with Chief and Council and Treaty 3 Education, evidence continues to be collected and shared, with an invitation in phase 2 to extend to other Indigenous school communities and links to the provincial education system. All of this to say, the levels of communication are directly related to participants' role as well as the timing and purpose of communication (Beatty, 2015; Campbell et al., 2014; Lavis et al., 2003).

Mobilization of information might look different for some of our education partners. At the time of this writing, for example, I am in the process of presenting at a series of conferences with embedded technology and audio/video files, while referencing notes from teachings this week from knowledge holders who have visited and shared teachings verbally. Beatty (2015) emphasizes that knowledge mobilization and communication is multi-layered, and that the supervisor's role is paramount and should not be underestimated. Variety of entry points is key. While many professionals with whom we partner are comfortable and rely on digital communication (emails, voicemails, etc.), it is important to note that some of our knowledge holders and Elders do not share this experience and often require personal invitations as well as time to prepare, offer tobacco, and regularly reschedule visits for a variety of reasons (Wesley-Esquimaux & Callisou, 2010; Wilson, 2008). Flexibility and appreciation (or celebration) of these different considerations is integrated into the change implementation plan. Figure 6 demonstrates layered methods for subsequent knowledge mobilization for educators, students, families/caregivers, Elders, knowledge holders, community partners, and Chief & Council, each playing an integral role in reIndigenization and reconciliation.

Figure 6

Knowledge Mobilization Through and Beyond Makwa Mountain



Note. KMb of the work of this Dissertation-in-Practice to establish connections and engage communities of practice to augment and extend research-based practices.

Equity and Ethics

This problem of practice is situated specifically in Treaty 3 territory, and within the scope of Grand Council Treaty 3. As sharing of the work becomes prevalent, it can be expected that other Indigenous, land-based, or provincial schools may choose to collaborate and be part of the

process. Bidirectionality of knowledge exchange must be pursued through shared and accessible language (Perreault et al., 2022), and with shared goals. From an equity lens, and in line with Indigenous ways of knowing and being, knowledge and information is not to be held to oneself but rather to be broadly and widely shared (Wilson, 2008). While we are cognizant of this understanding, there remains the underlying issue that presents itself whether IK *should* in fact align with Ontario curriculum or continue to stand alone. As this has been addressed in the previous chapters, it comes into play once again as an equity issue and as a scholarly researcher I will be prepared to continue to acknowledge and defend through this problem of practice situated in the 2015 Calls to Action and a quest for bidirectional dialogue.

Embedding Indigenous knowledges into the Ontario curriculum expectations is a present and existing practice which is acknowledged by both Indigenous Services Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Education, the bodies which oversee, inspect, and certify Makwa Mountain as an Indigenous school. As noted, this is also in direct response to the TRC's Calls to Action (2015) for education. However, there remains a great deal of misunderstanding and interpretation of what a land-based school is, looks like, and feels like (Wildcat et al., 2014) for the vast majority of people who have had little or no experience in such an environment. We are protective of our surroundings, the land upon which we live and learn, and of the Indigenous culture and traditions that are embedded in our learning. As such, a special ethical consideration is that we do not accidentally appropriate by showcasing and celebrating the growth in our learning. Centring the work in our students' holistic, lifelong learning will help to remind our leaders, educators, and community partners that the work of creating a cultural matrix cannot and should not compromise this goal. ReIndigenization must be continually centred as well, as a reconciliatory act. Furthermore, ongoing clarifications must be made so that Indigenous

knowledges are at the core of LBL, and not be mistaken with a growing trend in outdoor learning (Bartlett et al, 2012).

Maintaining Momentum

As with all areas of this Dissertation-in-Practice, it is important to consider possible challenges to change implementation. Miscommunication and lack of communication have oft been cited as barriers in our learning community (MMOP, 2023). Beatty (2015) states, it is important to share not only the benefits of the new, desired state, but also what will remain the same. In this proposal, student attendance, achievement, and well-being are central goals, and this aligns with our school improvement plan as well. Educators are reminded of this through weekly check-ins, cycles of inquiry, assessment and evaluation, and long-range planning. These are the constants in education which will help to maintain the momentum of our work.

Strategies to keep the energy and momentum of the 'new', aligning LBL with Ontario curriculum, will come in the form of embedded check-ins, celebrations of learning, and varied social media posts. Our quarterly newsletter is an excellent showcase of the land-based learning by season, and in our regular, daily posts in our closed Facebook page, families and caregivers are given micro snippets of connections to the corresponding curriculum. While planting the seeds in the beginning of the process in such a manner is effective, it is important to also maintain goals for ongoing, effective communication throughout the process through varied and diverse processes (Deszca et al, 2020).

Communication will continue to be a high priority moving forward with this proposal for change implementation as it is the reason most change implementation plans fail. This leads us to the next most significant question- how will we know we are successful? If we have effectively

communicated with all key players the goals and roles of adopting this learning strategy, our next priority is monitoring and evaluating our progress.

Monitoring and Evaluation

A plan to implement change is only as effective as its ability to monitor and evaluate its success. Monitoring and evaluation play a critical role in guiding change and moving initiatives forward, specifically where issues of equity are involved (Deszca et al, 2020). In the following outline, examples of monitoring and evaluating the change implementation plan are highlighted through W. Edward Deming's plan, do, study, act (PDSA) model (1993).

Educators are called upon to be reflective and proactive practitioners, carefully crafting lessons and facilitating learning opportunities for and with students which are centred on curricular expectations, tailored to individual student need, and situated in research-based and pedagogically sound practice (ETFO, 2019; Growing Success, 2010). Monitoring means educators and school leaders are documenting, observing, and measuring efficiency of aligning curriculum and pedagogy, while connecting this to (school) policy, procedures, current initiatives, and a variety of data sources (Langford, 2015).

As an iterative, evolving, and relationship-based process, land-based learning is at the centre of this change implementation plan and the PDSA framework addresses this in a way that helps students thrive and grow while nurturing natural curiosity through experiential learning and provocations (Deming, 2023). It is ongoing and continuous work, in this case focused on reIndigenizing and decolonizing our practices and integrating Indigenous ways of knowing. At Makwa Mountain, monitoring is both intentional and systemic; monitoring often looks like collecting qualitative and quantitative evidence and using it to tweak, monitor and enhance our teaching and learning.

On the other hand, systemic evaluation is used at prescribed times to determine whether we have met our broader goals. Evaluation often goes beyond the educator and connects directly to broader governing policies and frameworks (Chen, 2015). An example of evaluation for educators' practice might be external monitoring such as a teacher performance appraisal, sight-based walk-throughs by the administration team, or the work of our equity team in analysing school- and district-based goals connected to a system's Indigenous Strategic Plan (NDSD, 2023c). Another form of school-based evaluation is the Ontario Ministry of Education's Private School Inspection process (MOE, 2022), which is a requirement of Makwa Mountain as a First Nation school. A focus for evaluation related to this problem of practice, however, is identifying outcomes and impact of our practices in relation to overall goals and using evaluative data to influence future policies, procedures, and transformative practices.

Connections to Change Implementation Plan

There is a need to address the compounding issues of wellbeing, achievement & engagement with students, a need to support educator professional learning in decolonization, as well as to address the colonial impact of residential schools in the Treaty 3 area specifically. Here we will continue a holistic approach based upon the framework of the traditional medicine wheel and the change path model outlined in Chapter 2, and we will approach monitoring and evaluation through the plan, do, study, act model (Deming, 1993; Moen, 2020).

The PDSA model (Deming, 1993; Moen, 2020) was selected for this change implementation plan because it not only aligns with a cycle of inquiry recommended for this collaborative learning opportunity. It is also situated in extensive research in many fields beyond education such as manufacturing, the health industry, and business (Moen, 2020). It is acclaimed for both its simplicity, adoptability, and ability to apply to a specific context, and it can be

applied in macro, meso and micro situations (Langford, 2015). Specific examples of its potential (recommended) applications are outlined below.

Plan

The plan stage aligns with awakening, (the eastern quadrant of the medicine wheel), where learning teams are established, existing data is analyzed, and a clear purpose for the change implementation is communicated (Deszca et al, 2020, Dufour, 2007, Fullan, 2020). Using the PDSA checklist (Langley et al, 2009), our leadership team will approach proposed implementation with a clear map for evaluation (see Appendix B). Data and driving factors used in this stage include, but are not limited to, staff survey for competency and confidence in Indigenous practices (NDSD, 2023c), Makwa Mountain Organizational Plan (2023), and Chiefs of Ontario Systemic Gaps (COO, 2023), as evidence-based data and research.

Do

Deming stresses the need to develop new knowledge from learning is always guided by theory (Deming Institute, 2020). In the do stage, action is taken with conscious attention paid to who, what, where, when, and why actions will take place. Evidence shows indicating small, measurable, documented, and analyzed collaborations are very effective for educators to meaningfully shift practices and align curriculum creation and delivery (Fullan, 2020, Hattie et al, 2021). Steps taken at a micro level might look like an invitation for Elders and knowledge holders from the Makwa Mountain community to lead the learning teams in a welcome song, or drumming and prayer in the initial stages of coming together as a professional learning community. Explaining the purpose of integrating ceremony in our learning is essential (First Nation Education Steering Committee, 2007; Katz, 2018; Kimmerer, 2013), as is observing

actions and reflecting in a timely manner its effectiveness as related to its intended purpose (Deming, 2022).

Educators will be asked through an informal check-in upon completion, or an end-of-day exit ticket for timely, meaningful feedback in the do stage. What surprised you? What did you feel? How might this practice impact our future practices or be used in your classroom?

Study

Whether in small, short timeframe activities, or in reflecting on a year-long cycle of collaborative inquiry outlined in the change implementation plan, the study stage plays an important role in connecting the reason for seeking change in policy, practice, and next steps. In this stage, participants work in the monitoring role to loop back to the plan stage to study results and investigate whether they connect to hopes and expectations, what new data collected (or needed), and what changes might be made for future iterations (Deming Institute, 2022). Specifically in this change plan, alignment with the acceleration phase focuses on shifting and adjusting internal and external factors (Nadler & Tushman, 1980) in an organic, responsive manner and facilitates further knowledge mobilization.

For example, learning teams will reflect on and adjust requirements for human resources such as community supports, financial needs (e.g., outdoor learning equipment or additional professional development), or time (plans for extending the learning cycle). At this stage, it is recommended that participants compare present results to predicted results, which in this case might align with teacher annual learning plans or school improvement plans for the organization. As reflective practitioners, this is also an opportunity to include additional opportunities to communicate with community partners, parents/caregivers, or in our case, other First Nation schools within the Treaty 3 area. Broadening the scope of the inquiry (Deming, 2000) is an

integral component in the study stage. In this iterative process, a timeline may be flexible for each stage, however the PDSA framework provides necessary structure and accountability to maintain integrity, continue to be research-based, and be the basis for evaluation at set times throughout the year.

Act

As with a cycle of inquiry and traditional Indigenous ways of knowing, there is no set end point for growth, teaching, and learning. In the act stage, focused reflection enables educators to determine whether to adapt, adopt, or abandon the practice (Deming, 2022), and articulate predictions for future next steps and results (Langford, 2015). As a micro reflection, this might look like asking how did our shared experiences learning about fall harvest impact our understanding and connections to sustainable hunting and traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) in our area? How might we adopt teachings next fall in the new school year? In the larger scale, a broad goal of extending and adopting two-eyed seeing through year-long (second phase) learning cycles with another community or provincial school may follow.

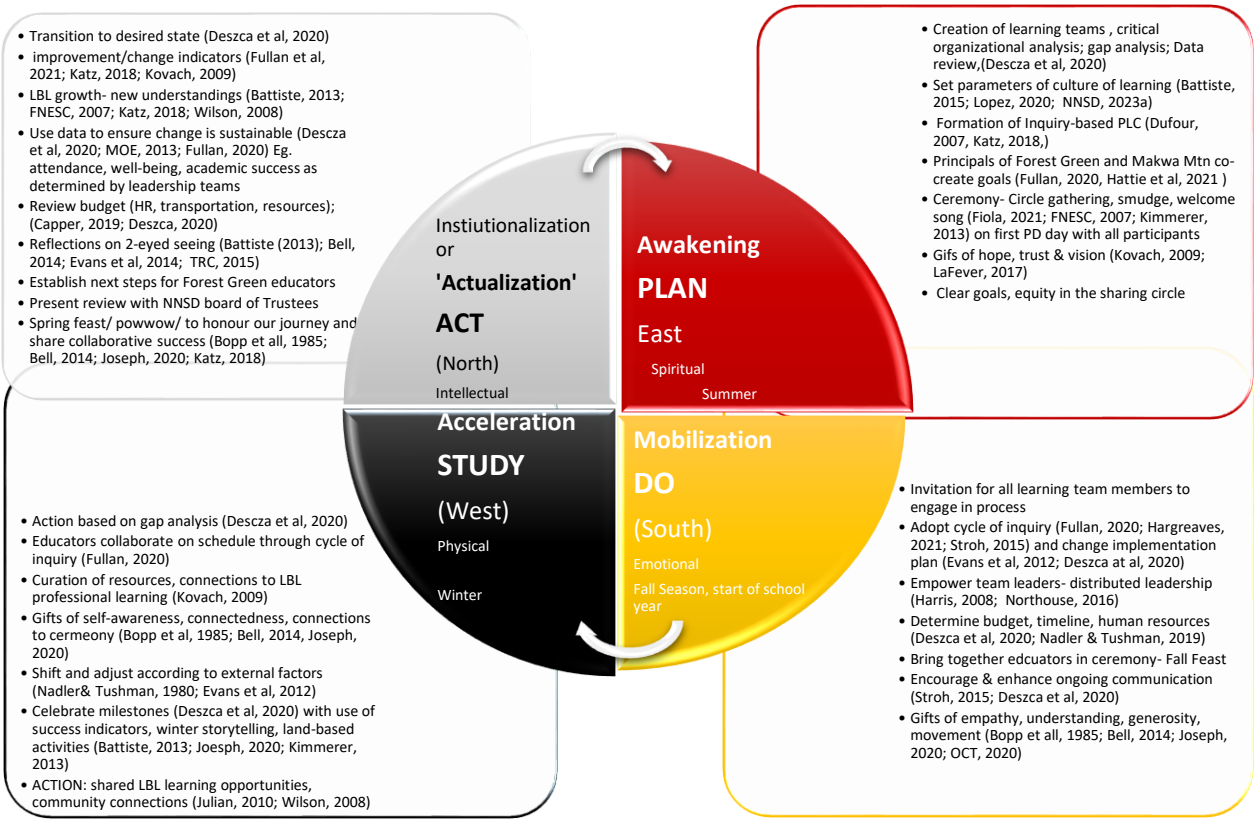
Analysis and evaluation of effectiveness will be communicated through site-based reporting, monthly blog posts, teacher satisfaction surveys, and scaled evaluations for connections to curriculum delivery and shift in pedagogy. The possibilities are vast and varied, a true benefit of the PDSA model, and provide opportunities to educators and leaders to run through the cycle again under different environmental conditions, a shift in resources, approach, or timing (Deming, 1993; Langford, 2015; Langley et al, 2009).

Figure 7 showcases the PDSA layer to our existing model situated around the traditional medicine wheel. Additional components to this complex figure include some specific markers for

planning, implementation, and monitoring progress, which is a beneficial tool when it comes to the work of reconciliation and reIndigenization.

Figure 7

PDSA Aligned with Traditional Medicine Wheel and Change Path Model



Note. The plan, do, study, act model (Deming, 1993) provides an evaluative structure for monitoring and evaluation that aligns with this change implementation plan.

Evaluative Connections

Data collection for monitoring progress is a responsibility of school administrators, lead instruction teams and educators. It must be regular, consistent, and adaptable (Deming, 2000). In the evaluation of the change model's effectiveness, however, we will require outside evaluators.

It is anticipated that a report will be made to our Chief and Council, as well both Grand Council and regional Indigenous Education Committees as a means of sharing and updating progress. Additionally, outside evaluators may be used to broaden perspective, provide feedback, and address bias (Deszca, 2020). These advisory committees serve to create open communication, hold education leaders and funding partners accountable, and create space for Indigenous-specific curriculum, pedagogy, and policy. By updating education committees on our progress with the cultural matrix, Makwa Mountain offers opportunities for reciprocity and collaboration, as well as feedback and suggestions to move forward. The fundamental building blocks of OCAP (engage, understand, appreciate, connect) are situated in monitoring and evaluation as we continue to consider who owns the research, the narrative, the data, the stories as they are collected (CCL, 2007; Chief & Smyth, 2017; Perreault et al, 2021).

One area of dissonance that exists presently is the struggle to balance quantitative (often academic) data such as attendance, literacy, and numeracy data with qualitative and non-traditional data sources, which will be addressed in both the monitoring and evaluation goals of the change plan as we focus on reaching students at the margins through personalized data collection (Safir & Dugan, 2021; Talaga, 2017). The PDSA model does require repetition and commitment, (is less effective as a single use tool), and while it has strong connections to the scientific method and cycle of inquiry, the model itself relies heavily on documentation, clear communication, accessibility, and buy-in for partners at all levels of the organization. Lastly, it is important to note that Indigenous research and ways of knowing rely heavily on story telling, experiential learning and qualitative research (Battiste, 2013; Kimmerer, 2013; Kovach, 2009; Leddy & Miller, 2024, Lopez, 2020; Wilson, 2008). In evaluating the partnerships, learning opportunities and effectiveness of the first year of this change implementation plan, educators

and leaders must be open to using structured tools (such as this PDSA cycle through existing policies and procedures), but also to creative ways of documenting experiences, knowledge, and pedagogical practices (Hopkins, 2020; Safir & Dugan, 2021; Wilson, 2008) that align with ethics of care, equity, and innovation. We will also need to be open to the methods and evaluative measures of our outside consultants.

Deming's PDSA model (1993) is a highly researched, widely used model which breaks down intentional practices, (large and small scale), and enables users to be action researchers with accountability and intention (Deming, 1993; Langford, 2015). This method reflects an inherent respect for the frontline people who are performing the work, because they (educators) have the best solutions for improving practice (The Deming Institute, 2023). With the focus in the first year-long cycle of inquiry, our team of educators will know we are successful and plan for moving forward by using the PDSA model to monitor our short-term goals and evaluate our progress with feedback from our community partners, families and caregivers, educators, and students (CCL, 2007). The PDSA is cyclical in nature, connects to a widely used, familiar practice of collaborative inquiry for our learning community, and offers a bridge for Indigenous knowledges through its iterative applications for educators to grow and improve our practice in a more personalized, responsive, and holistic manner. Monitoring and evaluating the cycle of inquiry provides a necessary framework not only for short- and long-term goals, but also for future considerations. Data-based decision-making practices as second order change (Hubers, 2020) have been highlighted here, which leads us to a discussion on future considerations.

Next Steps and Future Considerations

The work of this Dissertation-in-Practice is deeply rooted in a shared goal of reIndigenizing education by embedding Indigenous knowledges in our K-12 classrooms.

Providing students with opportunity and resources to find one's roots by making meaningful connections to curriculum, Indigegogy, the land, language, culture, and traditions is the primary strategy in light of this problem of practice. In the following section we will explore the possible next steps, implications, and future considerations for change implementation.

Learning is cyclical, as evidenced in the frameworks and figures of this DiP. Pamela Rose Toulouse (2018) reflects on the teachings of the Anishinaabek sacred circle as being "deeply rooted in land, culture, and language", and that these teachings come from "traditional places where we have lived for thousands of years" (p.59). Toulouse has produced several resources in line with the work outlined here, including *Truth and Reconciliation in Canadian Schools* (2018), a manual of sorts designed for educators as a hands-on resource in response to the Calls to Action (2015). The cultural matrix proposed here might be considered an extension of the seminal work of Toulouse and other Indigenous scholars, educators, and leaders who keep student learning and educator professional learning at the forefront of our work. Next steps, then, might include inviting an author such as Pamela Toulouse, an Anishinaabek educator and speaker, to explore the cultural matrix in the first five years, to continue to explore, research, and use existing research and resources that are specific to Treaty 3 communities and beyond. Additionally, as a transformative servant leader, I will encourage our learning team to make similar research a part of our embedded practice through the professional learning practice, and to keep an open mind and open invitation for other collaborators.

Approval and endorsement from Makwa's Chief and Council are paramount for next steps, and any work done beyond the community itself will have implications for our school community. As such, planning to expand in any form will flow through both the local Education Advisory Committees upon which I sit as an active member. We will look to expand the matrix

and share the learning beyond Treaty 3 (as outlined in the 3–5-year plan), and through scholarly publications and speaking engagements such as the Carnegie Project on the Educational Doctorate (the umbrella organization of this EdD program), and national organizations such as Indspire and the Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy (CJEAP). I have been reminded regularly by mentors and scholars that this work is focused on a small, Indigenous community, but that its impact can and should be shared broadly should opportunities present themselves. While it is a complete humble honour to do so, I am called to continue this leadership journey as both an educator and scholarly practitioner.

Implications

At the time of writing, a constitutional amendment has been signed by Grand Chief Francis Ogema of GCT3 which states that Anishinaabemowin shall be designated the official language in Treaty 3 territory (GCT3, 2023), and the Rideau Hall Foundation (2023) continues to receive and approve a number of grants to support Indigenous language educators across the country. The work of student-centred, holistic, lifelong learning is dependent on teaching and learning in the language by fluent language speakers. As we have seen, provincial and Indigenous education systems must continue to work together to embed Indigenous ways of knowing and being that are rooted in Indigenous languages (Baskatawang, 2023; Fiola, 2021, Joseph, 2018; Katz, 2018; Kimmerer, 2013; Lopez, 2020; Métisse-Redvers, 2020; TRC, 2015; UNDRIP, 2007). Our cultural matrix must contain Anishinaabemowin in its content, but also have language-speaking advisors involved throughout its creation, future iterations, and through teachings in the classroom and on the land. Additionally, as the work expands, language speakers can influence expansion to other dialects as well.

At the micro level, the existing state at Makwa Mountain and the future envisioned state through change implementation would indicate that a specialized Indigenous land-based coordinator should be sought out and employed in a permanent, full-time capacity. This person would work not only with the leadership team through land-based and cultural activities, but also ideally take a leadership role with the cultural matrix, community connections, and ceremonial activities connected to holistic teaching and learning for the school community.

Future Considerations

One of the goals shared with my doctoral colleagues is the open-ended question of *now what?* How might we, personally and professionally, continue the work of addressing the problem of practice once the formal EdD journey is complete? Buss (2019) suggests "EdD programs must provide affordances for students to apply skills…that can be transferred to subsequent professional practices as educators" (p.814). Indeed, there have been many conversations over the past few years about the research I am doing, its alignment to education, curriculum, and pedagogy, and not all have found audiences with the same drive and passion by which I have crafted this dissertation. However, it is my goal to use research and academic scholarship as a basis for not only my personal leadership, but to ignite the same passion in educators. Teacher education programs are always centred in my thinking and with the completion of this DiP I am driven by a *continuum of roles* (Wasserman & Kram, 2009) to seek out or create Indigenous-focused pre-service teacher programming that aligns with these core values. I am challenged to continue to honour my Métis heritage, support the Makwa Mountain community, and respond to my own leadership callings as an educator. Finally, I continue to hear the voices of scholars, Elders, community, and family members who encourage me to keep going, to consider the future of not only ourselves but all our relations. Craft (2019) reminds us

"Anishinaabe inaakonigewin requires that we orient our decision making and actions toward mino-bimaadiiziwin. This foundational principle is aimed at the well-being of all parts of Creation, including those generations that come next."

Chapter 3 Conclusion

The change implementation plan addresses the challenge of how to implement the proposed change and leads into a discussion on communication and monitoring & evaluating the change process. With the traditional medicine wheel as an underlying framework to ensure the work is rooted in holistic, Indigenous knowledges, the change path model is used to align change implementation strategies through research and theory. Communication and knowledge mobilization play a key role in transformative change (Beatty, 2015; Campbell et al, 2014), and a plan for both was also shared where Deming's (1993) PDSA framework serves as a final layer to the medicine wheel model. Indigenous ways of knowing and being are cyclical, circular, and based on intergenerational teaching and learning (Battiste, 2013) and should be approached by educational leaders with this understanding in all contexts (Lopez, 2020). As such, next steps and future considerations at the personal, organizational, and global levels remain iterative in nature for this author with some considerations being outlined beyond this Dissertation-in-Practice.

Narrative Epilogue

As the writing and researching process appears to be wrapping up, I find myself in a reflective state of mind as I consolidate my thinking as a scholarly practitioner. Spring is in the air, the view from my office window has been the canvas of my narrative as I have sat through many long hours of contemplation, invigoration, (occasional frustration), and many, many conversations. Zoom and What's App have connected me to colleagues and instructors, those who have carried me along the way on this three-year journey. On my desk, photos of my nana, daughters, sister, aunts, and my mom… the faces who kept me going… as well as all four medicines, a smudge bowl, sash, feather, plants, and water in my copper cup. While the DiP may not fully represent this personal side of the journey, this space, the land, the stories, and all of these beautiful faces reinforce my *why.*

Having had the opportunity to share this work in a public lecture both tied a bow on the entire project, and simultaneously unravelled the braid a little as I humbly shared I still have more questions than answers. However, my dining room counter tops begin to fill with seedlings that will find their way into my gardens. I watch with wonder the sun winking in my bedroom window a little earlier each day, the hope of spring and promise of longer days are an ancestral hug for the work that's been done, and encouragement for that to come.

The work of decolonization, reconciliation, and reIndigenization is so much more than a daily land acknowledgement, and yet it is in our daily acts that we will make meaningful change. While the answers are not fully known, we will continue to learn when we listen to the whispers of the ancestors, our children, and all our relations.

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Appendix A:

Diagnostic Checklist: How Learning Occurs in my Community

PLACE WHERE LEARNIG OCCURS (SOURCES OF LEARNING)

	Home	School	Community	Land	Workplace
LIFE STAGES (RINGS OF TRUNK) YOUTH (6-18)	**What exists in our community?**	**What exists in our community?** Example: K-12 School	**What exists in our community?** Example: Pow Wows and Healing Ceremonies	**What exists in our community?**	**What exists in our community?**
	What do we need in our community?	**What do we need in our community?** Example: Anishinaabemowin language classes	**What do we need in our community?**	**What do we need in our community?** Example: Land school sacred fire	**What do we need in our community?** Example: Work placements
	How do we support this?	**How do we support this?**	**How do we support this?**	**How do we support this?**	**How do we support this?**

Appendix B:

Cultural Matrix Feedback Form

Role/ Position What is your role within the organization? (Student, Educator, Elder, Knowledge Holder, Community Partner, etc.		(additional comments)
Matrix Use What is the main purpose for using the Cultural Matrix?		
Effectiveness/ Usability Please rate the usefulness of the CM. (Was it user-friendly?)	**1 2 3 4 5**	
Cultural Connections Please rate the cultural connections of the CM.	**1 2 3 4 5**	
Next Steps/ Recommendations Your feedback is important. Please add additional comments here.		