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Improving Educational Opportunities for Indigenous Students in Alberta

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Abstract

This Dissertation-in-Practice (DiP) seeks to address the underachievement of Indigenous students in a K-9 school in the province of Alberta. Using critical theory and Indigenous knowledge as guidelines, the DiP recognizes a number of significant barriers (the perpetuation of the status quo, racism, colonization, limited relevant pedagogy in classrooms, teacher biases, and a general lack of connection to Indigenous people and culture) that create an achievement-gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Creating equitable learning opportunities for Indigenous students in a faith-based environment, that protects the institution of the Catholic church as its first priority, presents a significant challenge for educators and leadership within the organizational context. Democratic and transformative leadership practices are employed to utilize the collective expertise of community partners in order to distribute leadership roles to complete tasks, and to scrutinize existing policies, procedures, and practices hindering the success of Indigenous students in classrooms. Kotter's Eight Step Change Model is identified as the framework needed for the desired structuring for the change implementation process due to its focus on collaboration and communication. PDSA cycles are also incorporated for the purposes of monitoring and evaluation. Removing obstacles to promote collaboration and relationship opportunities, utilizing Indigenous Elder wisdom through storytelling and counternarratives, and permeating culturally relevant pedagogy in classrooms have been identified as possible change solutions based on Indigenous Elder recommendations. Solutions have been selected due to their participatory nature, their connections to Indigenous people and culture, and their focus on Indigenous perspectives. The resulting changes that occur will result in increased achievement from Indigenous students through improved teaching and learning.

Keywords: democratic, transformative leadership, equity, Indigenous, agency, Kotter.

Executive Summary

This Dissertation-in Practice (DiP) seeks to identify and mitigate the inequitable challenges that Indigenous students at Mission Possible School (MPS, a pseudonym) experience on a daily basis. MPS is an Alberta urban school with approximately 350 students in grades K-9. The problem of practice (PoP) identifies the need for equitable learning opportunities for Indigenous students due to an ongoing achievement-gap. Current data reveals that Indigenous students are achieving 10-20% lower in their core courses and on provincial achievement tests (MPS, 2023). Due to their alignment with social justice and Indigenous knowledge (Capper, 2019) the DiP uses critical theory and Indigenous knowledge epistemologies to identify barriers impacting Indigenous student achievement within the MPS context. Teacher stereotypes and biases, protection of the status quo, limited culturally relevant pedagogy, the impact of colonization, and a lack of connections to Indigenous people and culture continue to undermine Indigenous student success in classrooms (Jaramillo, 2023). As the title of the DiP suggests, improving educational learning opportunities for Indigenous students is a critical foundational piece in dismantling inequitable learning conditions at MPS.

The DiP proposes that democratic leadership approaches will motivate faculty and community partners to get involved with the change initiative by giving each individual a role that values their knowledge and expertise and makes everyone part of the decision-making process (Barthold et al., 2022). Furthermore, transformative leadership focuses on inclusion, equity, social justice, and challenges existing policies and procedures mired in the status quo (Shields, 2019). As such, this DiP prioritizes the mobilization of MPS faculty and community partners to collaborate, in order to identify and mitigate existing barriers negatively impacting Indigenous student achievement. This DiP also looks to facilitate connections between Indigenous perspectives and the teachings of the Catholic church so that beliefs and values are

honoured and respected. A significant challenge, however, is that in a faith-based environment like MPS, faith comes first and everything else is secondary. Furthermore, there is a long history of mistrust by Indigenous people toward the Catholic church due to its participation in residential schools (Gillies, 2021). Therefore, creating a collaborative culture at the local and district levels is an important strategy for accountability purposes and in support of Indigenous students who are disengaged with current teaching methodologies that are not reflective of their cultural identities (Datta, 2020). While the preferred vision of the future is improving educational opportunities within the MPS context, this cannot be accomplished without cultivating a collaborative culture with MPS faculty and Indigenous community partners. In doing do, strategies are incorporated by MPS faculty that focus on listening, professional development, connections to Indigenous people, and commitment not only to the change process, but also to the preferred future. As such, Kotter's Eight Stage Change Model (Deszca, 2020) is selected as the desired framework due to its focus on collaboration, communication, and its sequential stage by stage process to bring about change and transformation to the organization (Pollack & Pollack, 2015).

The chosen solutions to address the PoP focuses on removing obstacles to promote collaboration and relationship opportunities, utilizing Indigenous Elder wisdom through storytelling and counternarratives, and infusing culturally relevant pedagogy in classrooms. Indigenous perspectives told from Indigenous people are a primary focus of the DiP as they provide the foundational knowledge educators need to incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing and being into meaningful curricular objectives for students. When Indigenous perspectives are told from the viewpoint of non-Indigenous people, Indigenous voices are not heard the way they need to be to support teachers and Indigenous students within classrooms at MPS (Battiste &

Henderson, 2009). The aim of these particular solutions requires MPS faculty and community partners to do a lot of listening to understand and respect Indigenous knowledge (Hare, 2004; Littlechild et al., 2021; Masta, 2022).

Kotter's Eight Stage Change Model is critical to the change implementation plan. Recognizing that collaboration and communication are essential components of the change process, Kotter's model is significant in community partner participation and engagement. Utilizing elements of urgency, guiding coalitions, creating vision, empowering others, generating short-term wins, consolidating gains, engraining new change into the culture of the organization, and ensuring ongoing communication is sustained throughout the change process are all keys to the success of the DiP (Kotter, 2014). Lastly, monitoring and evaluation strategies developed through PDSA cycles are described to ensure the success of the change implementation plan.

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I also want dedicate this DiP to all the Indigenous students and Elders both past and present that I have had the pleasure to work with. Truly, those relationships have made me the educator I am today. Thank you all for your support, friendship, and guidance over the years.

Lastly, I dedicate this work to the memories of my father Donald McIsaac who passed away on January 27th, 2023 and my father-in-law, Bruce Pahl who passed away on July 13th, 2022. You may be gone, but you are not forgotten. May you find peace in God's loving embrace.

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Acronyms

DiP	Dissertation-in-Practice
LQS	Leadership Quality Standard
MPS	Mission Possible School
PoP	Problem of Practice
SHSD	Sacred Heart School Division
SQS	Superintendent Quality Standard
TQS	Teaching Quality Standard
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Definitions

Colonization: Is the process of controlling people, particularly Indigenous people for the purpose of exploitation (Mullen, 2021).

Community Partner: Alternative term for stakeholder. Refers to those individuals outside the organization (Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, parents, parish priests, etc.).

Critical Theory: Refers to the approach that seeks to confront forces and structures that promote the status quo. Critical theory aims to scrutinize and critique society as a whole (Sabnis & Proctor, 2022).

Decolonization: The process of elevating Indigenous voice, culture, and the inclusion of Indigenous ways of knowing and being to create new opportunities for teaching and learning (Masta, 2022).

Democratic Leadership: A type of leadership focused on group participation to achieve goals. Leaders encourage cooperation and ideas from group members to help group members be involved in the decision-making process (Moneva & Pedrano, 2019).

Plan-Do-Study-Act Cycle: A continuous loop of planning, doing, checking, and acting. It is a simple and effective approach to solving problems and monitoring and evaluating change within organizations (Chen et al., 2021).

Transformative Leadership: A leadership theory focused primarily on inclusion, equity, and social justice. The goal of this type of leadership is to create environments that are welcoming and inclusive for those who are minoritized (Shields, 2019).

Chapter 1: Improving Educational Opportunities for Indigenous Students in Alberta

Indigenous students continuously struggle in traditional learning environments in Alberta and across Canada as Indigenous epistemologies that honour students' culturally identities are noticeably absent in most classrooms (Cherubini, 2020). Furthermore, racism, colonization, and a lack of acknowledgment that current educational systems are inequitable toward Indigenous students have a dramatic impact on learning, creating a pronounced achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Jaramillo, 2023). Improving Indigenous education has always meant a lot to me as working on reserve to start my career was one of the best experiences of my life. As someone who is Indigenous, for the first time in my life, I found something I could connect with being immersed in the culture. Once I got into administration and my career took me to other schools, I always had the opportunity to work with Indigenous students and families. One of the commonalities, that always seemed to be there both in the past and present schools I have been in, is an existing achievement gap for Indigenous students. In my current school, where I am principal, that gap that is approximately 10-20% lower than non-Indigenous students based on provincial achievement exams and Mission Possible School (MPS, a pseudonym) report card data (MPS, 2023).

Positionality and Lens Statement

Positionality, leadership approaches, and lens are critical components in driving meaningful change in organizational settings. Incorporating these elements in an effective manner can assist my leadership as principal in implementing positive change that leads to better organizational performance, a sense of belonging, the achievement of common goals, and in the case of my problem of practice (PoP), better educational outcomes for Indigenous students (Shay & Miller, 2021). It also allows leaders to identify power relations and gives authentic voice to

both the researcher and research participants (Corlett & Mavin, 2018). Furthermore, as an Indigenous man and school principal, it is my responsibility to create a better future for the Indigenous students that MPS serves and to address an ever-present achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Jaramillo, 2023; Khalifa, 2019). Additionally, section 197 of the Education Act makes it clear that my role and the role of my vice-principal at MPS is to provide a safe and caring environment for all students, provide instructional leadership, evaluate programs, promote co-operation between the school and the community that it serves, and supervise the evaluation and advancement of students (Alberta Education, 2019). Appendix A outlines administrative responsibilities as per the Alberta Education Act in section 197.

It is my sincerest hope that the work I am doing with my PoP will not only address this achievement gap by making trusting meaningful connections with Indigenous people and assist teachers in bringing relevant cultural pedagogy to classrooms, but that my Dissertation-in-Practice also encourages the next generation of educators to continue to do this work and to challenge the status-quo (Plazek, 2012).

Positionality

For the first twenty-two years of my existence, I identified as a Caucasian male born in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia. I was raised by a single mother who worked three jobs to make ends meet for our family. I am now married with two daughters, living in the province of Alberta. I have been an educator for twenty-three years with the last nineteen of those years as a principal. My ancestral roots trace back to French and Irish heritage. Growing up in Catholic school as a Caucasian male meant that I reaped the benefits of my skin color. However, in the summer 1999, a significant revelation was made when applying for summer job with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. It was during this process that I found out I had Indigenous ancestry. It was also

during this process that I encountered my first experience with racism when I was told I that was over qualified for the position because I was an “Indian”.

It is of the utmost importance that I reflect on things that have impacted my life to this point and be able to show that vulnerability (Wang et al., 2021). For a long time, I had been protecting myself from past experiences as I had been masking some of the factors that certainly influenced my positionality. However, to ignore them and not acknowledge their existence would not appropriate. As I reflect on those elements, I need to acknowledge how my own experiences of racism, student deaths while working on reserve, my privilege, my family upbringing, and the fact that I now have two daughters of my own, all significantly affect the work I am embarking on. The importance of positionality and reflexivity cannot be underestimated in the research process (Folkes, 2023), and in organizational change planning.

Agency

I have always been a defender of educators, not recognizing how personal biases and stereotypes, including my own, were impacting teaching, learning, and leading (Van de Ven, 2020; Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021). Through self-reflexivity, I recognize that I have to be cognizant of this and identify how the work that I am doing to improve educational opportunities for Indigenous students is being impacted (Reese, 2020). As principal, I would have to examine and reflect on my own practices to adequately determine if my decision-making processes are contributing to educational and social inequities for all students within my organization (Green, 2016; Corlett & Mavin, 2018).

As I reflect on the potential impact of my leadership on my PoP, I recognize that I cannot do this work alone. It is imperative that multiple perspectives be considered on critical issues with race being put at the forefront of the discussion (Santamaría, 2014). Change at MPS and in

classrooms across Alberta and Canada means embracing all people and creating trusting relationships to provide equitable opportunities (Sun & Leithwood, 2015). As principal of MPS, it also means eliminating harassment and discrimination in all forms (Rocco et al., 2014).

Democratic and Transformational Leadership

As my PoP involves fundamental cultural change and paradigmatic shifting across the spectrum to foster the best opportunities for Indigenous students, I have elected to focus on democratic and transformative leadership to create those outcomes (Crosby, 2021; Shields, 2019). As a principal who believes that everyone has something to contribute to the greater collective good, there is significant alignment with these two leadership approaches and my own personal values and beliefs as a leader. Democratic leadership, for instance, is characterized by open dialogue with a team approach to decision-making (Barthold et al., 2022). This type of leadership style fosters a more cohesive proposition to achieving goals. Democratic leadership also creates a significant morale boost and high degree of performance when tackling the many challenges of the organization (Crosby, 2021). Maximizing the expertise of each individual to build capacity and complete tasks are key factors that I appreciate about this particular leadership approach (Harris, 2013).

While I still believe in many of the characteristics of democratic and distributed leadership, I cannot help but acknowledge that there are attributes of transformative leadership in alignment with my personal leadership style. Transformative leadership focuses on inclusion, equity, excellence, and social justice (Shields, 2019). Similar to democratic leadership, I appreciate how this type of leadership involves a process where leaders and followers help each other advance to higher levels of morale and motivation in order to accomplish desired outcomes (Vermeulen et al., 2017; Grin et al., 2018). Furthermore, transformative leadership commits

people to action, converts followers into leaders, and potentially allows staff to become change agents (Caldwell et al., 2012). As a school principal, with a dedicated focus on social justice, collaboration, and ultimately improving educational opportunities for Indigenous students within the classrooms of my organization, democratic and transformative leadership approaches offer an intriguing probability of being able to do just that.

Indigenous Knowledge and Critical Theory

Indigenous knowledge is often shared by Indigenous people through storytelling. This medium of communication is important as it connects Indigenous students to both their histories and authentic identities (Friskie, 2020). Storytelling also provides an element of hope for Indigenous people as a way to mitigate past traumatic experiences (Wexler, 2009). As an Indigenous leader that has had the opportunity to listen to Elders share Indigenous knowledge about the land, residential schools, and history, the experience is not only informative, but also powerful. For example, learning about Indigenous culture from Indigenous community leaders is an important strategy for the faculty of MPS to build relationships and make connections with Indigenous culture and people (Friskie, 2020). Furthermore, the sharing of Indigenous knowledge is similar to democratic and transformative leadership approaches as collaboration allows experiences from different viewpoints to be recognized (Masta, 2022). This would involve a lot of listening from all community partners linked to MPS. From an Indigenous perspective, the goal of decolonization efforts would involve improving education by having different cultural perspectives working together to preserve Indigenous culture, language, ways of knowing, and ensuring that those same perspectives are honored and respected (Hare, 2004; Littlechild et al., 2021; Masta, 2022). Furthermore, as principal of MPS, it would be important to pay significant attention to Indigenous storytelling as a method of teaching and learning, told

from the vantage point of Elders (Iseke & Brennus, 2011). For example, Elders are a critical link to Indigenous epistemology through storytelling and language, making this an important strategy for the faculty at MPS to connect Indigenous students to their culture (Hansen, 2018).

As a respected and capable learner who believes that every student needs to be treated justly, I lean toward critical theory to create equitable learning opportunities for students in classrooms at MPS. From a critical theory perspective there would be a significant focus on social justice, power dynamics, emancipation, economic equality, and human rights (Apple, 2016; Sabnis & Proctor, 2022). For example, the faculty of MPS and community partners would be obligated to not only be aware of and witness to negativity in its various forms, but rather be called upon to improve the inequalities that have always plagued Indigenous education (Apple, 2017). I firmly believe that educators in the MPS context need to recognize that every Indigenous student has the right to experience quality teaching and learning that affirms their culture and identity (Shay & Miller, 2021). This would be paramount through the Indigenous and critical paradigms. In reflecting on my PoP, I am reminded of how important it is to ensure Indigenous voice is being represented in the work that I am doing. This would pave the way for trust, connection, and meaningful relationships between all community partners (Capper, 2015).

Organizational Context

Two of the most protected institutions that exist in society are the institutions of church and education (Pazek, 2012). As a result, the status quo repeats itself and little to no change is able to penetrate long standing traditions, beliefs, and values that have stood the test of time (Gianesin & Bonaker, 2003). While the Catholic church and the educational system in the province of Alberta consider themselves progressive, the reality is that change is moderate at best, resulting in the same inequities that have plagued Indigenous students for years (Munroe et. al, 2013). With MPS being set in a faith-based environment, it is not surprising, that traditional

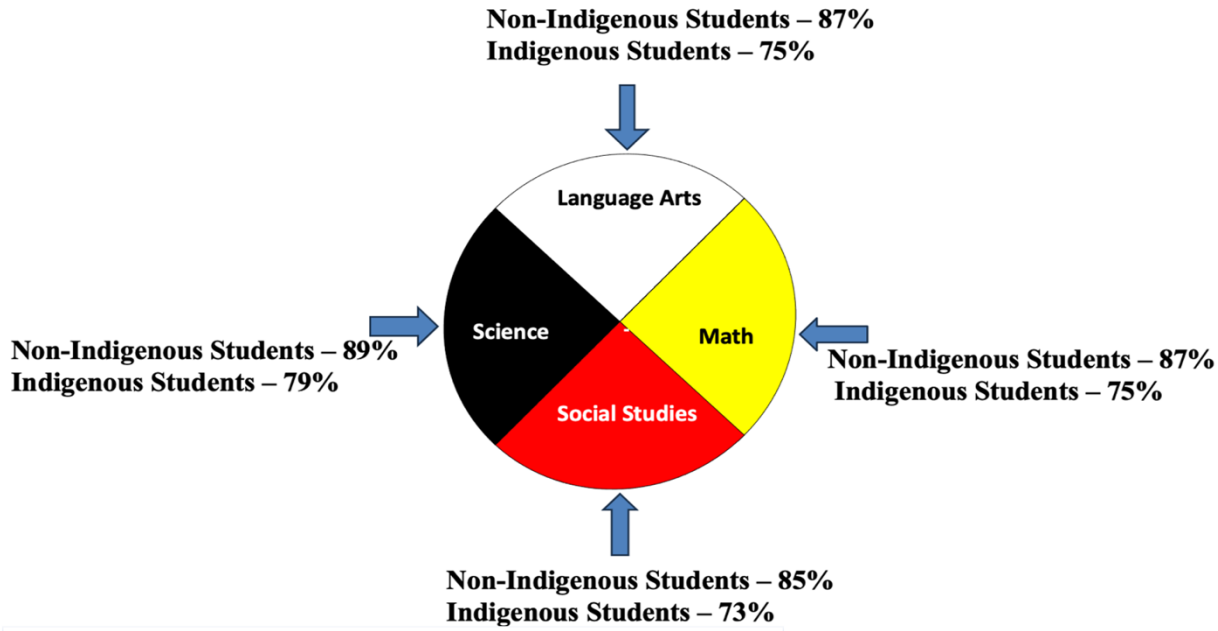
values and beliefs take priority above everything else, making learning for Indigenous students a constant struggle in everyday classrooms.

Mission Possible School Context

MPS opened in 2018 with a staff compliment of ten, a student population of less than one hundred students, and a grade configuration of K-7. Today, MPS has a K-9 grade configuration of approximately 350 students with a staff compliment of twenty-five. The school is situated in an affluent community in northern Alberta, and there is a strong sense of entitlement from parents on how the school should operate. In regards to MPS school faculty, there is a limited connection to Indigenous culture, Elders, or Knowledge Keepers. At present, I am the only Indigenous staff member. Additionally, most teachers living in urban centres have been teaching in the same school for the bulk of their careers, resulting in teachers continuing to teach Indigenous students the way they always have, with minimal knowledge of their culture. As of 2023, approximately eight percent of the total student population is comprised of Indigenous students at MPS. There are Indigenous settlements and reserves on the outskirts of where MPS is located, but Indigenous families move into the area as the school has a reputation of being academically strong. Within the past two years, there has been a more concerted effort by the district to participate in Truth and Reconciliation initiatives, however the conservative nature of Sacred Heart School Division (SHSD, a pseudonym) has prevented meaningful and relevant change to take place. With change being virtually non-existent (or gradual at best) due to the conservative jurisdiction in which I work, the achievement gap continues to negatively impact Indigenous students (Torrance et al., 2021). Figure 1 reflects the achievement gap in core programming which is approximately 10-20% in my current context (MPS, 2023).

Figure 1

Current Achievement Gap



Note: Adapted from Mission Possible School report card results (MPS, 2023).

Division Context

With MPS being deeply rooted in traditional values and beliefs, it is not surprising that the dominant ideological approach of SHSD is conservatism. This results in an opposition and a resistance to change (Ongel et al., 2022). The expectation from this type of system is a focus on a safe and caring learning environment, the teaching of basic skills, and a continued reinforcement of traditional values and beliefs (Gianesin & Bonaker, 2003). While there is value in this type of ideological approach, there are limitations associated with it as well. Decisions at the school and division level are grounded in tradition (Apple, 2016), as conservative leadership looks to preserve those institutions that are functioning according to their primary purpose (Gutek, 2013). Consequently, due to current division administrative procedures that focus on faith first, as principal, I have to determine who gets what, when, and how, resulting in students and teachers

being affected in different ways (Winston & Pollock, 2015). Therefore, the impact on understanding Indigenous students' culture and implementing it in meaningful ways within school-based policy, procedures, and ultimately daily teaching practices would be greatly influenced due to the protection of Catholic teachings. While conservatives may advocate for diversity, the most common characteristic of this lens is the support of the status quo, which means there is a powerful dislike and discomfort in change (Plazek, 2012).

Provincially however, Alberta Education has made significant changes (see Appendix B) to the Teaching Quality Standard (TQS), the Leadership Quality Standard (LQS), and the Superintendent Quality Standard (SQS). These specifications ensure that teachers are applying Foundational Knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit in classrooms, that school leaders support the application of such Foundational Knowledge, and that superintendents ensure all students have access to Indigenous education (Alberta Education, 2023a, 2023c, 2023d). Despite that push from the province, SHSD schools are experiencing varying degrees of success. When reports are made at administrator meetings, very little is shared about what schools are doing with this provincial mandate. The status quo therefore is maintained, and education structures that have been functioning the way they have for years continue to execute primary functions with an obvious disregard toward equity (Hopkins, 2018; Capper, 2019; Pomeroy, 2020).

In 2022, a degree of hope was offered when SHSD hired its first Indigenous Education Consultant. This position provided administrators and teachers within the jurisdiction access to resources, information, professional development, and connections to Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers perspectives. Unfortunately, due to budget cuts, the position was terminated at the end of the year and with it a devastating loss for educators, and of course, Indigenous

students throughout the division. The only thing that remains is a single administrative procedure on the process of smudging (SHSD, 2023).

Leadership Styles Prevalent in Organization

Upon arriving at MPS, there was very much a top-down approach to leadership. Previous administration disseminated information to faculty that needed to be carried out with little collaboration. This was also consistent with senior leadership at the division. With senior leadership firmly entrenched in ensuring faith permeation was front and center as per expectations/direction from the Bishops of Alberta, this certainly impacted how decisions were made at the school level. This autocratic type of leadership was very different from my leadership perspective as I decided to lead with a democratic and distributed approach. This leadership style fostered a more cohesive proposition to achieving goals (Harris, 2013). Building many positive relationships with staff resulted in faculty entering a relationship of interdependence and interaction (DeFlaminis et al., 2016). At various times, MPS staff would assume leadership roles, and they would be responsible for directing, influencing, and motivating others (Tandon, 2022). It was through these social interactions that faculty were able to find their voice and share their perspectives on how MPS should operate (Bolden, 2011).

While significant change has happened at MPS, there continues to be resistance from experienced teachers with change. Despite improvements in a variety of areas, there remains a hesitancy from staff to teach students differently and incorporate various teaching methodologies into their practice (Nebel, 2015). While staff are well-intentioned and participation in Truth and Reconciliation initiatives are honoured, there is limited follow-up with teachers wanting to do professional development around Indigenous culture. Teachers find themselves unsure and reluctant to take the next steps to foster Indigenous student growth, but rather continue to

maintain the status quo (Capper, 2019). Indigenous students school focus groups at MPS, comprised of students in grade four nine indicated that while they liked their teachers, not enough was being done to promote cultural awareness in classrooms (MPS, 2023). As expected by the provincial Leadership Quality Standard, I established this group as a way to not only bring Indigenous cultural awareness to MPS but also have students come up with strategies on how this could be done. It needs to be remembered that Indigenous students continuously struggle in traditional educational settings as Indigenous perspectives are absent in classrooms. By bringing a greater sense of cultural awareness to MPS classrooms, it was my hope that it would mitigate the biases on the part of teachers and help improve connections to Indigenous culture (Dion & Dion, 2009). I knew that continuing current practices would only perpetuate misrepresentation of Indigenous people, and I wanted to try something different (Wasyliw et al., 2020).

Equity Considerations

Like many marginalized groups, Indigenous students constantly face difficulties in traditional educational organizations, including MPS. When Indigenous students' needs are not met, the most logical assumption is that they are being disadvantaged. If that is indeed the case and teachers are not incorporating Indigenous knowledge into teaching practices, students are not being educated the way they need to be (Battiste & Henderson, 2009). For example, students at MPS struggle with conflicting values as learning opportunities are mired in traditional Western methodologies, which creates a significantly lower level of engagement from Indigenous students (Cherubini, 2020).

It is important to remember that leaders and educators hold powerful positions at MPS, and it is their collective responsibility to ensure that the needs of all students are being considered. It is even more important to keep Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and

community members at the heart of the work being done to advance Truth and Reconciliation properly (Capper, 2019). Furthermore, having faculty and community partners reflecting upon policies and procedures that continue to misrepresent, marginalize, and perpetuate inequities and racism would be paramount, but so too is reflecting on personal biases and creating reflexive spaces for leaders and educators to do that work (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). Two significant aspirations of my PoP are advancing opportunities to give voice to the voiceless and challenging the status quo that continually create inequities for Indigenous students within the MPS context (Hodler & Maddux, 2021; Wasyliw et al., 2020; Moorosi, 2021). Reflexivity and connection to Indigenous culture and people are principal components in that journey.

Leadership Problem of Practice

Indigenous students within my educational context struggle daily with teaching methodologies that are not representative of Indigenous culture and teachers who view Indigenous ways of knowing from a deficit lens (Ali et al., 2022). As a result, the status quo is maintained as Indigenous students are disengaged in classrooms, exacerbating the achievement gap that exists because of the lack of understanding of who Indigenous students truly are (Zhu & Peng, 2020). MPS educators need to clearly comprehend what challenges students experience in their daily lives, reflect on and examine their own personal biases, and be willing to make positive connections with Indigenous people. It is through these ideals that educators can collectively begin to mitigate the impact of colonization by developing promising practices that foster hope, well-being, and engagement throughout classrooms (Iseke & Brennus, 2011).

Mission Possible School Current Context

Understanding the complexities of Indigenous students is a difficult process for K-12 educators in Western public schools with limited understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing. Whether that is due to a lack of knowledge, religious beliefs, or a deficit mindset toward

Indigenous students, for many educators at MPS the Indigenous way of life, the hardships that students go through, as well as the rich histories of Indigenous people are relatively unknown. As a result of being in a conservative school jurisdiction where the institution of the Catholic church is protected above all else, Indigenous students at MPS are achieving 10-20% lower than their non-Indigenous peers on provincial achievement exams and in their core courses (MPS, 2023). Additionally, students at MPS are often disengaged and continue to be stereotyped and educated like every other student (Battiste & Henderson, 2009; Martin & Garrett, 2010). McGregor (2017) found that current classroom experiences by Indigenous students are a result from a lack of student connection to Indigenous culture and people, an insufficient number of Indigenous faculty members, and the absence of culturally relevant pedagogy in classrooms. Complicating things even further, when educators are not collaborating to incorporate Indigenous knowledge, students' voices are not being heard the way they need to be (Battiste & Henderson, 2009). However, ministry policy and standards clearly articulate that school principals and educators in the province of Alberta are responsible for ensuring the needs of all students are being met in classrooms (Khalifa et al., 2019; Alberta Education, 2023d). The PoP will address the gap between Indigenous students' needs and school capacity to minimize inequities and barriers that negatively influence Indigenous students' success.

Preferred Future

To adequately address the challenges and get to the desired future needed for Indigenous students to be successful in classrooms at MPS, a multitude of strategies can be imparted. Through community engagement and self-reflection, for instance, much can be learned from listening to the lived experiences of Indigenous people (Banwo et al., 2021). For example, providing meaningful data and disseminating findings to relevant audiences is vital to ensure that

current teaching practices at MPS can be evaluated for their effectiveness and their biases toward marginalized groups of people (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2023). Additionally, students would feel more a part of the MPS context as their culture would be distributed more equitably in classrooms and through the learning activities prepared by teachers (Doan & Jaber, 2021). Developing alternative modes of thinking related to social inequities, power dynamics, and social justice would be a critical strategy to improve the engagement levels of Indigenous students at MPS and improve achievement (Alexander et al., 2020). To get to the preferred future, educators at MPS have to be committed to lifelong work through a variety of mediums such as professional development, scholarly readings, and creating authentic relationships with individuals from marginalized groups (Capper, 2015). For example, Indigenous students not only need to be respected for who they are, but just as important they need to feel that MPS is their school and that they belong there. Creating that feeling for them would certainly create a more positive atmosphere where all are welcomed and all are valued.

Transformative and democratic leadership approaches allow all community partners to become leaders and contribute equally in the decision-making processes -- and that includes students (Banwo et al., 2022). Committing people to action through collaboration is a monumental step in removing barriers and creating opportunities for Indigenous perspectives to be present in MPS classrooms. For example, through the social justice elements of critical theory and Indigenous knowledge, the lived experiences of Indigenous people can provide educational support to MPS faculty and community partners charged with making learning opportunities equitable for all students (Manitowabi, 2022; Kohl & Hopkins, 2019). Indigenous storytelling, for instance, is a significant link to the past, helping Indigenous students connect to their cultural identities, and provide experiences from a variety of viewpoints to be heard, respected and

honoured (Masta, 2022). These kinds of connections would result in MPS teachers looking at Indigenous culture from a place of strength rather than through a deficit lens (Gillies, 2023). The ultimate goal of this Dissertation-in-Practice (DiP) is to improve learning opportunities for Indigenous students. The above outlined strategies give faculty a variety of skills and tools to make this come to fruition and make MPS the school it needs to be for the Indigenous students that it serves.

Framing The Problem of Practice: Colonization in the Canadian Context

Colonization and its impact on Indigenous people have been a deeply rooted problem in Canada's history (Mullen, 2021). In its simplest form, colonization is using power and position to justify exploiting people and territories to benefit those who hold such power (Regmi, 2022). In education systems across Canada, the perspectives of Indigenous culture are noticeably absent, allowing the impact of colonization and discrimination to persist in current polices and curriculum (Mignolo, 2021). Colonization has played a significant role in the misunderstanding of Indigenous ways of knowing for leaders and educators who have a rudimentary understanding of Indigenous culture at best (Hare, 2004). Indigenous students, therefore, continue to struggle in traditional educational contexts, the achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students continues to persist, and graduating from high school becomes that much more difficult for Indigenous learners (Louie & Prince, 2023).

The history of colonization has impacted Indigenous students negatively for generations. In today's educational contexts, the power of that trauma continues to reverberate and affect the well-being of Indigenous students that schools serve (Gillies, 2021). Current curricula and textbooks for instance only have tokenized integration of pedagogies from Indigenous epistemologies (Cummins & Chang 2020). It has to be pointed out that most textbooks and curriculum have been told from the viewpoint of White people rather than the perspectives of

Indigenous people. As a result, in schools across Canada, Indigenous students' educational needs are not being met due to a lack of culturally responsive material, as well as culturally insensitive testing they are forced to participate in (Mayor & Suarez, 2019; Kempf, 2016). While it is important to note that decolonial interventions are taking place in schools across Canada to dismantle racism and promote equity, most of that work being undertaken is by non-Indigenous people (Pinto & Blue, 2016). It is not surprising that most of this work has had negligible educational impact for Indigenous students and the normalized way in which Indigenous students have always been educated reproduces itself (Louie, 2020). Colonization has and continues to attack the cultural identity of Indigenous people (Lavallee & Poole, 2010).

Colonization Impact Within Mission Possible School

The impact of colonization on Indigenous people is largely unexplored by the majority of educators at MPS. For example, MPS teachers do not realize that the historical facts presented about Indigenous people in textbooks, curriculum, and in the media are at times degrading and issues of racism are often ignored (Capper, 2019). While having this awareness is essential in the educational context of teaching Indigenous students, staff also lack an understanding of the complexities that Indigenous students experience in their daily lives (Khushal, 2021). Furthermore, student voices, who need to be empowered, are noticeably absent from policy, procedures, and school planning documents (Louie & Gereluk, 2021). For example, students are a direct communication line in classrooms -- not only at MPS, but also around the division as well. Yet, the only input students have the opportunity to give is through an annual SHSD anonymous satisfaction survey. Students have not been asked to participate in live conversations where they can express themselves openly rather than through a general survey with multiple choice answers.

SHSD does consider Indigenous Elder perspectives when creating new policies for schools to adhere to. Input is received through monthly Indigenous Advisory Committee meetings where policies are shared by senior leadership for feedback. However, those perspectives have to be in alignment with Catholic teachings to be implemented. Furthermore, there are no school principals, Indigenous parents, or students who sit on this committee, leaving many voices needed to promote change absent from policy making. Finally, foundational knowledge of Indigenous ways of knowing is currently a significant priority in the province of Alberta. This is seen in curriculum, textbooks, land acknowledgements, the TQS, LQS, SQS, and professional development opportunities with Indigenous people. It needs to be remembered that creating meaningful connections and harnessing Indigenous voices is critical to building momentum toward a system that empowers the historically oppressed (Louie & Prince, 2023).

In reflection upon the MPS context and the desperate need to improve educational opportunities for Indigenous students, SHSD has established a First Nations, Metis, and Inuit committee that meets monthly with Indigenous community members and teacher leads. Elder representation is also present at these meetings and wisdom is shared with the collective group about Indigenous culture. Furthermore, professional development opportunities surrounding Indigenous education are encouraged both at the school and division levels. Principals also have the autonomy to use staff meeting days as they see fit to address the needs of their schools. To be clear, while all of these things are important, true hope lies with those MPS faculty members committed to making the necessary changes to improve Indigenous education in their classrooms. For example, changes to current teaching methodologies, connections to Indigenous people, and culture are critical components in creating equitable classrooms for students at MPS. It needs to be remembered however, that colonization has impacted Indigenous people on

multiple levels including culturally, spiritually, economically, and educationally (Smallwood et al., 2020). Additionally, because of colonialism, Indigenous people are vastly underrepresented in leadership positions in educational institutions (Johnson & Fournillier, 2023: Cukier et al., 2021). This is certainly the case in SHSD.

External Data

Data, both at the external and internal levels, present how desperately change is needed to provide equitable learning opportunities for Indigenous students. There are long-standing inequities in Indigenous education even though The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms prides itself on valuing diversity and having educational outcomes that are equitable for all students (Campbell, 2021). In actual fact, Canada's history tells a story of an oppressive education system for Indigenous learners (Wagner et al., 2022). As of June 21st, 2023, just over 70% of Indigenous youth in Canada completed high school compared to 91% of the non-Indigenous population (Statistics Canada, 2023). The legacy of colonialism, lack of adequate funding, culturally relevant curricula, the intergenerational trauma in the form of residential schools, and its impact on Indigenous learners cannot be ignored (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015; Gillies, 2021). Furthermore, Indigenous students across Canada continue to battle racism and have to confront stereotypes that stipulate that they are inferior to White students (Park & Bahia, 2022).

Internal Data

SHSD's annual satisfaction survey results demonstrate that approximately 90% of students feel safe at MPS (MPS, 2023). MPS's Indigenous student focus group consisting of students in grades 4-9, however, indicate that experiences of racism, difficulty fitting in, lack of culturally relevant pedagogy, and lack of connection to Indigenous culture are prominent factors

that are stifling engagement, achievement, and well-being (MPS, 2023). Lack of engagement and achievement by Indigenous students is portrayed even more with Indigenous students at MPS achieving 10-20% lower than non-Indigenous students in core subject areas (MPS, 2023).

SHSD also requires each school to administer a Bridging-the-Gap Indigenous survey that identifies factors inhibiting student success. The survey itself was created by senior leadership to identify factors inhibiting the success of Indigenous students in classrooms throughout the division. Only those Indigenous students experiencing learning difficulties are subject to the survey. Additionally, it is school principals or learning support facilitators doing the survey and not Indigenous students themselves. The issue that reveals itself from the survey is that no results have been made available from a district level. The survey has existed for well over a decade, but as of April 2024, nothing has been shared with principals or educators. This is my third district that I have worked for in the province of Alberta, and this is the only survey I have seen of this nature.

PEST Analysis

In an educational landscape that is continually changing, there are many external factors that impact how an organization operates (Deszeca et al., 2020). In this section a PEST analysis will explore the political and economic elements that can both positively and negatively impact progress in relation to improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

Political

External political factors include policies, procedures, and regulations put forth by the Alberta UCP government and Alberta Education have a significant impact on Indigenous education in the province. While the aim of policy and procedures are to ensure equitable opportunities for all students, there has been much controversy in recent years to the extent in

which Indigenous content is incorporated into curricular objectives. Unfortunately, research shows that little attention has been given to the role of racism and its impact on Indigenous students in their daily lives (Prete, 2022). In fact, it has been recommended that Alberta Education improve current curriculum and include antiracist components to make it more equitable toward Indigenous students (Darling-Hammond, 2017). The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms makes it clear that all Canadians have the right to be free from discrimination. Current provincial policies and procedures related to Alberta curriculum however, are still strewn with inaccuracies of Indigenous people causing their culture to be viewed from a deficit lens (Prete, 2022).

Economic

Economic factors include the analysis of the economic impacts of racism from educators toward Indigenous people. Research demonstrates that educators cling to marginalizations such as socio-economic and geography that view Indigenous culture in a negative capacity (Goode et al., 2021). It is also not uncommon for racial microaggressions to take place due to the socio-economic status of Indigenous people (Lui & Quezada, 2019). These negative stereotypes negatively impact Indigenous student achievement which has an impact on level of school attainment and income (Steketee et al., 2021). On an even broader scale, inaccurate media portrayals of Indigenous people living in poor conditions promote these same biases and stereotypes for educators at MPS (Steketee et al., 2021). Even media attention that maybe sympathetic in nature toward Indigenous people can characterize a narrative of deficiency and disempowerment (Carlson & Frazer, 2020). MPS does get an allotment of $1100 per Indigenous student and a base amount of $2000 per school to help raise cultural awareness and support Indigenous students in classrooms (MPS, 2023). The issue however, is that this dollar amount

from the government and division is not enough to bring about the necessary equitable conditions needed for Indigenous students to succeed in MPS classrooms.

Guiding Questions

Several key questions need to be answered regarding this Dissertation-in-Practice:

1. What is contributing to the problem and preventing Indigenous students from achieving a sense of belonging and academic success at MPS?
2. What are the best strategies for mobilizing community partners and Indigenous knowledge in MPS and SHSD?
3. How can a conservative education system like SHSD that protects the institution of the church above all else be motivated to change the status quo and improve educational opportunities for Indigenous students?

An analysis needs to be done to identify the gaps that exist within the MPS context regarding ethically responsive pedagogy for students within MPS classrooms. As Question 1 outlines, the first priority is to distinguish the factors associated with the inhibitors negatively impacting Indigenous student success. Direct conversations with Indigenous students and staff are one way this could be accomplished (Eaton, 2022). Additionally, SHSD survey results would be significant indicators of what current the successes and deficits are. Once I can ascertain what those particular issues are, strategies can be developed to alleviate barriers impeding Indigenous student achievement.

While collecting data may seem like a relatively easy task to accomplish to gain an understanding of the current state of education for Indigenous students at MPS, the reality is that having conversations and gaining an audience with Indigenous people is a difficult task. This relates to Question 2 as collaboration among community partners is one of the most significant strategies related to the work needed to be done a bridge the achievement-gap between

Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Hernandez, 2022). I realize that I have to rely on my connections with Elders with whom I have worked in the past to seek out information on how to eliminate barriers that constrain Indigenous participation in the MPS change process. It would also be imperative to identify the processes and resources needed to respectfully gather Indigenous knowledge.

Finally, Question 3 is exceptionally important because there is a need to connect current Indigenous knowledge to the values and beliefs of the Catholic church. Failure to do so would result in minimal change if any due to the conservative nature of SHSD (Plazek, 2012). That common understanding between MPS faculty and community partners where perspectives are valued and respected would be critical in MPS being able to take the next step toward meaningful change for Indigenous students. However, finding ways to reconcile years of mistrust due to residential schools led by the Catholic church is one of the biggest obstacles needed to be overcome (Gillies, 2021).

Uncovering Barriers

With a PoP that focuses on Indigenous education and improving inequitable conditions in classrooms, there is much to be to be learned about what contributes to the problem as a whole. Other than colonization, the most persistent issue that exists is the fact that SHSD and MPS are conservative faith-based environments that place significant value on traditional beliefs and values which suppress the growth of Indigenous learners (Plazek, 2012). Because tradition and protection of the Catholic church are the cornerstones of this particular education system, most educators do not have the cultural knowledge and competency, nor the necessary professional development, resources, or training to create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment that respects and values Indigenous cultures and identities (Douglas et al., 2020).

When leaders and educators do not have access to resources or expertise to combat an existing problem contributing to a significantly noticeable achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, it is difficult for them to become advocates to make meaningful changes to existing practices (Chitpin, 2021).

Furthermore, making connections with Indigenous communities, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers to engage in authentic collaboration is currently absent, hindering the progress of Indigenous learners (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2020). With opportunities to connect with Indigenous Elders through monthly committee meetings to have conversations about new policies around ceremonial Indigenous events and participation in Truth and Reconciliation initiatives, SHSD and MPS have the capacity to deeply embrace Indigenous ways of knowing. Entering into a collaborative relationship that takes into account new ideas put equitable teaching and learning practices at the forefront of educational conversations (Eaton, 2022).

Leadership Connections

As the principal at MPS, working directly with educators in the current educational setting allows the opportunity to investigate the problem on both a professional and personal level as relationships have been positively established. Additionally, SHSD has monthly district administrator meetings where information between schools, administrators, and senior leadership can be shared and examined. There are also opportunities to participate in monthly Indigenous committee meetings at the district level to discuss challenges students are experiencing in classrooms. It is important to remember that my previous experiences in varying schools and school divisions, as well as connections to leaders, educators, and Indigenous members of past communities present a unique possibility to discuss the problem on both a local and broader

scale. It should be emphasized that this PoP is not specific to MPS or SHSD, but is part of a macroscale problem throughout the province of Alberta and across Canada (Mullen, 2021).

Current Inequities

There are several factors that contribute to the main problem. The impact of colonization, insufficient teaching methodologies, and traditional beliefs and values that perpetuate status quo are significant barriers for Indigenous students in classrooms at MPS. Additionally, there is a lack of proper training for MPS faculty, insufficient resources, and minimal connection to Indigenous culture inhibiting Indigenous learner success. Furthermore, Canada's policies and laws have sought to wipe out Indigenous perspectives (Douglas et al., 2020). While Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has brought the many injustices that have happened to Indigenous people to the forefront of the conversation, the path forward still remains unclear (Miles, 2018). Even though Indigenous content is no longer absent from curriculum and textbooks, perspectives and knowledge are often ignored and not incorporated into daily teaching practices (Douglas et al., 2020). Due to colonization, Indigenous learners today still suffer the effects of colonial practices in the form of systemic racism, stereotypes, and a relationship of dependency (Skelton, 2023). It is imperative that leaders and educators at MPS and SHSD not only address the inequities caused by colonial practices, but also tell the truth about them, and implement transformative practices that build trust and mend turbulent relationships that have suffocated the chance of a positive trajectory for Indigenous students in classrooms (Czyzewski, 2011).

Vision For Change

Change can be challenging, especially when dealing with systems like MPS that are deeply rooted in traditional values and beliefs (Gutek, 2013). In educational settings, encountering resistance to change is commonplace, particularly from those comfortable with

existing structures and frameworks (Plazek, 2012). Leadership, I believe, is a lifelong process where leaders look for continuous improvement through both the assistance of others and self-reflection to create equity and social justice for those whom they serve (Shields, 2019). Therefore, effective leadership at MPS has to be inclusive of everyone and be cognizant of the importance of culture including family, religion, traditions, values, and beliefs of the Indigenous students that the school serves (Shaked & Schechter, 2018; Archibald, 2023). Leadership also requires an in-depth understanding of diverse communities and the contributions members are responsible for (Galvez, 2020; Hare, 2004). Through decolonization practices, democratic and transformative leadership approaches as well as Indigenous knowledge and critical theory epistemologies, this knowledge permits all community partners to build partnerships that facilitate collaboration, empower people to capitalize on expertise and strengths of the broader community, and embrace other ways of knowing (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). For example, utilizing these processes by MPS community partners would ensure respect for Indigenous people by focusing on Indigenous knowledge and making it a collaborative practice through active listening and honouring respective skillsets of individuals (Menzies & Butler, 2021). Similarly, leadership and decision-making are shared responsibilities even if not all members hold formal leadership positions (Harris, 2013). Acknowledging that Indigenous views are sacred is a fundamental responsibility that MPS faculty and community partners must honour (Battiste & Henderson, 2009). Through collaboration, community partners can mitigate an existing achievement gap and create learning opportunities using culturally relevant pedagogy that Indigenous students can connect with and engage in (Hernandez, 2022).

Mission Possible School Current Gap and Desired State

Research indicates that much work is needed with teacher professional learning to implement Indigenous content into the regular classroom to take meaningful steps toward the envisioned future that MPS must reach for its Indigenous students (Hare, 2004). It is well-documented that culturally responsive teaching positively impacts student achievement and engagement (Hernandez, 2022). Because many teachers at MPS do not share the same cultural background as their students, making connections to their values and beliefs can impact the performance of students in positive ways (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). It also needs to be acknowledged that there are not enough Indigenous teachers available to lend their expertise in classroom settings. While Indigenous resources are becoming more plentiful, most educators across Canada do not have the training or credentials to teach Indigenous ways of knowing. Therefore, approaching leadership through critical and Indigenous lenses, authentic professional development, and respectful connections to Indigenous culture would assist MPS educators in implementing culturally responsive pedagogy strategies in diverse learning environments and create equity in classrooms (Byrd, 2016). For example, when MPS educators can connect students to their daily lived cultural experiences, they support their Indigenous heritage, build trusting relationships, and positively impact social and emotional development (Larson et al., 2018). To get to the desired state, there has to be a lot of listening so the voices of Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, parents and students within the MPS context can be heard. The process requires significant focus on patience and humility as well as an understanding that this learning takes place gradually over time to gain the necessary knowledge to influence change (Gibson et al., 2020; Robinson et al., 2021). MPS and SHSD need to move away from a culture of tokenism and bring Indigenous knowledge to the forefront, told from the perspective of

Indigenous people (Robinson et al., 2021). If Indigenous people are considered to be community partners in the education of students, they need be given the same rights and responsibilities as everyone else and be considered key members in the decision-making process (Latulippe & Klenk, 2020).

Improvement In the Future State

The future state will improve MPS significantly as it will allow Indigenous perspectives to be shared openly, honestly, and respectfully through a process of collaboration (Kennedy et al., 2020). It will also allow MPS faculty and community partners to engage in the process of reflection to examine their positions as well as knowledge development toward Indigenous ways of knowing and being (Shields, 2019). Critical reflection supports decolonization efforts where multiple worldviews are recognized (Kennedy, 2020). To counter the harm colonization has done to Indigenous people, Elders and Indigenous community members will be able to share important knowledge in a space that supports ethically safe collaboration between all community partners (Curtis et al., 2019). This approach allows for positive relationship building, respectful engagement, and the broadening of perspectives for those members of MPS who do not have the background knowledge to incorporate into regular daily teaching practices (Ray, 2012). Those educators who can embrace this type of process will have the necessary skills to build a community of support for Indigenous students and advance teaching and learning to a level that disrupts the reinforcement of traditional methodologies that are unresponsive to the needs of Indigenous students (Khalifa et al., 2019).

Leveraging Existing Initiatives

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada makes it abundantly clear that connections with Indigenous people can help pave a positive path forward for Indigenous

students through improved teaching and learning practices (TRC, 2015). When it comes to education there are a number of calls to action that the document outlines to support Indigenous students across Canada, including the MPS context. Some of those include education about the impact and legacy of residential schools, improving education attainment levels, and success rates, enabling parental and community control and accountability, and ensuring organizational cultures reflect the diverse perspectives of Indigenous peoples (TRC, 2015). The Calls to Action provide a reference to MPS faculty that outlines a vision for a positive way forward for Indigenous education by identifying the impact of residential schooling and unjust policies set out to eradicate Indigenous culture (Wothersppoon & Milne, 2020). Appendix C identifies those Calls to Action that MPS will use as a guideline to get to the preferred future.

Similarly, Alberta Education's professional practice standards dictate that leaders and educators in the province of Alberta apply Indigenous foundational knowledge and create inclusive classrooms representative of all students (Alberta Education, 2023a, 2023c, 2023d). Looking at an even broader scope, leveraging the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People would help move educators within the MPS context from a state of lip service to a genuine commitment to be change agents (Borrows et al., 2023). This is a significant document as it recognizes the need to respect Indigenous culture and have it appropriately reflected in educations settings. These two key documents provide an alternative to existing structures that promote inequities and offer a paradigm shift that addresses Indigenous students' needs in classrooms to improve achievement (Parekh et al., 2021).

The Need for Decolonization

Colonization is a practice of using authority for the justification in exploiting people to benefit a particular group of people (Mullen, 2021). In schools across Canada, colonization takes

the form of the misrepresentation or omission of Indigenous culture in curriculum, allowing stereotypes and discrimination to persist in educational settings (Kim, 2015). Decolonization on the other hand, develops a wide spread understanding of Indigenous cultural values and seeks to start from a position of strength instead of weakness (Martin et al., 2020). Decolonization also allows for stronger relationships with Indigenous learners and MPS faculty, helps mitigate the impact of bias, and promotes equity in education (Louie & Prince, 2023; Mayor & Suarez, 2019). Similar to critical and Indigenous leadership theory, decolonization sets out to dismantle settler colonialism and advocate for social justice (Hanson, 2020). It also enables MPS community partners to become allies to stand together against oppressive forces and systems that hinder the progression of Indigenous learners and promote Indigenous epistemologies as well as ways of knowing and being (Barkaskas & Gladwin, 2021).

Leadership Considerations

For the purposes of this DiP, all levels of leadership will have to be taken into consideration to help move MPS forward in improving learning opportunities for Indigenous students. At the macro level, Alberta Education and the administrative procedures of SHSD guide the work being done. Working closely with senior leadership and district trustees to solicit support for the goals of this DiP is exceptionally important. At this particular level, it would be paramount to demonstrate that Catholic social teachings would be protected -- but also just as important to acknowledge how the goals of Alberta Education and SHSD together can root out inequities and promote the inclusion of all students.

At the meso level, MPS school leadership would ensure collaboration is a common occurrence with community partners as it would serve as a model for addressing the needs of students with a focus on quality classroom instruction. This team approach fits the democratic

and distributed leadership model, where members of the learning community take lead roles and everyone is given a voice (Houghton et al., 2022). Additionally, SHSD embarked on anti-racism training from 2021-2023 which can be leveraged to improve collaborative leadership and accentuate resources that have the ability to discuss how existing power structures continue to facilitate inequities for marginalized groups of people (Le Grange, 2023).

Micro-level leadership includes teacher leadership and the MPS in-house measures that educators will assimilate to create inclusivity for Indigenous students. Focusing on cultural identities, these practices will encompass engaging teaching methodologies and foster positive relationships with students (Datta, 2020). Culturally relevant pedagogy and trusting relationships will help educators take meaningful action toward reconciliation in their everyday practices (Barkaskas et al., 2020).

Chapter 1 Conclusion

Chapter One outlined my positionality in relation to the PoP through the lens of a school principal at MPS. Democratic and transformative leadership approaches are explored along with Indigenous knowledge and critical theory in relation to addressing the need to improve an ongoing achievement-gap that exists between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Additionally, the MPS and SHSD contexts are examined regarding how each organization is impacting Indigenous students at the local and jurisdictional levels. Finally, a preferred state is explored by leveraging existing resources that have potential to improve educational opportunities for Indigenous students within classrooms at MPS.

Chapter 2: Understanding Leadership

The second chapter of this Dissertation-in-Practice (DiP) provides a deeper overview of the selected leadership approaches and how they will assist in the change process. A framework for leading change will be explored along with organizational change readiness and three potential solutions to the problem of practice (PoP). Finally, solutions will be weighed, assessed, and selected to assist in creating equitable outcomes for Indigenous students.

Leadership Approach to Change

Educators in the province of Alberta are responsible for ensuring that all students have access to quality learning experiences that help students thrive and succeed. This means the diversity of students, including Indigenous students, need to be respected and that educators are working in collaboration with community partners to ensure that everyone is cared for and safe (Alberta Education, 2023d). Yet, due to previously discussed factors such as a lack of cultural connection to Indigenous culture, teacher bias, and the absence of relevant cultural pedagogy in classrooms, educators are failing to adhere to their responsibilities put forward by Alberta Education through the Teaching Quality Standard (TQS). However, through the perspectives of Indigenous knowledge and critical theory and the leadership approaches of democratic and transformative leadership opportunities exist to create collaborative change and disrupt the status quo.

Making the Case for Democratic and Transformative Leadership Approaches

Research clearly indicates that both democratic and transformative leadership approaches can positively move change forward (Kotamena et al., 2020; Alsayyed et al., 2020). An integral part of this DiP is ensuring the perspectives and apprehensions of educational partners are taken seriously. Democratic leadership fosters this commitment and shifts power from traditional leadership dynamics and disperses it to all members of the organization, both inside and out

(Moneva & Pedrano, 2019). This participation creates a dedication to change as voices are being heard, allowing pertinent information to be shared, recognized, and validated (Liggett, 2020). Furthermore, a democratic leadership style generates collective accountability and ownership as all members are involved in the decision-making process resulting in enhanced strategy development toward the shared vision (Moneva & Pedrano, 2019). The collective wisdom of the group, rather than an individual leader's insight is a striking factor for this DiP as the experiences of all community partners at Mission Possible School (MPS) regardless of positional designations are incorporated and maneuvered in a strategic manner (Kotamena et al., 2020). When done in an authentic way, democratic leadership uses an egalitarian approach that promotes transparency, engagement, trust, and increased motivation to not only make the necessary adjustments to combat systemic issues that preserve the status quo, but also provide the latitude to create an optimistic future for the Indigenous students that MPS serves (Caillier, 2020).

Transformative leadership aligns with democratic leadership approaches due to their participatory nature, as well as their focus on social justice and democracy (Gelinas-Proulx & Shields, 2022). When leadership approaches are centred on respect, inclusion, and value placed on individuals for their skills, tasks can be accomplished more easily (Shields, 2019). In regards to this DiP, MPS needs to establish a new vision to support its approach to teacher leadership as the Alberta Teaching Quality Standard (TQS) outlines. This also creates ownership for followers as the transformative process looks to empower them and invites partaking in decision-making opportunities that are centered on ethical values (Khan et al., 2020). This would certainly help build capacity with community partners to support Indigenous students at MPS that have been misrepresented and misunderstood through traditional educational experiences. By leaders

expanding the horizons of followers through growth and education, transformative techniques challenge existing practices that circumvent constructive change efforts (Busari et al., 2019). When followers have a vested interest in the change making process, sustaining change is permissible and becomes embedded into the organization's culture (Peng et al., 2021). With a focus on equitable and inclusive practices that promote educational success and well-being of all students, the benefits of transformative leadership practices cannot be ignored (Gelinas-Proulx & Shields, 2022).

Foundations of Democratic and Transformative Leadership

Democratic and transformative leadership approaches engage followers to support new ideas through participation, communication, and risk-taking (Gelinas-Proulx & Shields, 2022). The shift to move the organization to a more advantageous state is one of the most desirable characteristics of these particular leadership practices (Olafsen et al., 2020). Despite the fact that democratic leadership practices can be time-consuming (Dyczkowski & Dyczkowski, 2018) and transformative leadership requires leaders to extensively know community partners (Sondaite & Keidonaite, 2020), various research indicates their effectiveness in creating meaningful change due to their focus on equity, inclusion, collaboration and social justice (Shields & Hesbol, 2020). As principal of MPS, using democratic processes that guide these leadership approaches, inequitable practices are critiqued by community partners to pursue the benefits of all students and staff (Shields, 2011). While the work of this DiP presents a problem that has existed for a long time with minimal improvement, when leadership focuses on the elements of justice and democracy, it begins the transitioning from unjust to just classroom environments for Indigenous students (Shields, 2019; Callier, 2020).

Role and Agency

As principal of MPS, I have the authority to manage education in the way that best meets needs of Indigenous students. I have the ability as principal to maneuver resources and people to support students in achieving success with their education experiences at MPS. Appendix B outlines the LQS and the responsibilities principals within the province of Alberta are to adhere to make this a reality. However, it needs to be recognized that I am still an agent of the board working with Sacred Heart School Division (SHSD). As such, I need to demonstrate how Catholic social teachings are being permeated in all aspects of educational outcomes. These expectations present a powerful conundrum. On one hand, I am expected to adhere to the TQS put forth by Alberta Education; and on the other hand, I still have to adhere to what the Alberta Bishops put forth on what we can and can't do as a jurisdiction and ultimately as a school. Complicating things even further, the Catholic Church has also been part of one of the most egregious efforts to eradicate Indigenous ways of knowing and being through residential schools (Black Elk, 2023). In looking at the bigger picture, however, coupling the role of principal with democratic and transformative leadership practices presents an interesting opportunity to create a partnership between both worlds in order to help improve classroom opportunities for Indigenous students. Through democratic leadership approaches for instance, people are brought together on equal footing to address complex and challenging issues of the organization (Woods, 2021). These kinds of collegial models promote relationship building and shared power amongst all people (Shields, 2019). Building community across cultures would be essential in this particular framework (Leithwood, 2021) as those who were marginalized are now authentically included in building plans and strategies to eliminate traditional power structures that promote racial inequities (Capper, 2015). Bringing people together is the first step, but transformative

perspectives help create a common vision through synergistic interactions (Halim & Rofiki, 2022). In the MPS context, this would equate to faculty working with Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers to not only listen to learn about Indigenous ways of knowing and being, but also being able to implement the learning to support Indigenous students in classrooms.

Leadership Approach Considerations

As an Indigenous principal, living through my own experiences of racism, I have a strong understanding of oppression. Transformative leadership, within the sphere of critical theory, and with its focus on social justice, turns the attention to those students who have traditionally been forgotten in an education system strewn with inequities (Shields & Hesbol, 2020). This naturally fits with my PoP, as disrupting the fabric of the status quo and oppressive structures that seek to diminish Indigenous culture, is a fundamental element of my DiP (Khalifa et al., 2019).

Within the MPS context, recently there has been significant time and effort dedicated to building trust with faculty. This has proven to be very beneficial for moving change forward. Much of the credit of what has been established is due to both democratic and transformative leadership approaches. With my familiarity with these leadership practices in previous schools and their alignment with my own personal views and beliefs, it was a natural fit to employ them within MPS. The fact that both leadership frameworks empower others builds capacity within educators to become change agents and increases their desire to improve inequitable conditions for marginalized groups of people (Harris, 2013; Shields, 2019). Through these leadership lenses, multiple perspectives must be considered on critical issues with race being put at the forefront of the discussion (Santamaría, 2014). Change means embracing all people and providing equivalent opportunities (Gelinas-Proulx & Shields, 2022). Democratic and transformative leadership processes have the potential to make that happen. Being cognizant

however, that these leadership approaches take time, that it can be difficult to come to consensus on certain things, that a lack of shared vision can hinder progress, and that conflict can arise among people, would be important considerations to be aware of when implementing democratic and transformative leadership processes (Barthold et al., 2022; Shields & Hesbol, 2020).

Leading Change

Leading change can be challenging, especially when dealing with people and systems that are mired in traditional Western values and beliefs (Gutek, 2013). In educational settings, encountering resistance to change is commonplace, particularly from those who are comfortable with existing structures and frameworks (Plazek, 2012). Kotter's change model however, provides a structured framework to help leaders navigate change toward preferred futures that alter the status quo (El-Amin & George, 2020).

Kotter's Eight Stage Change Model

In the research I have done thus far, Kotter's change model is considered one of the leading frameworks that can bring about organizational change and transformation (Pollack & Pollack, 2015). I appreciate this model as it is one of the few frameworks that outline the steps to begin, manage, and sustain change over time (Joseph, 2018). Furthermore, by creating urgency, Kotter's model demonstrates that challenging the status quo is possible by bringing community partners together to execute the eight stages (McLaren et al., 2023). The fact that the PoP, Indigenous knowledge, and Kotter's change model focus on engagement of people is a primary determinant in my selection of such processes. In the current context of MPS and with Indigenous student achievement being 10-20% lower than non-Indigenous students (MPS, 2023), Kotter's model advances individuals out of their comfort zones because the model involves risk-taking (Petersen & Bartel, 2020). Kotter's model demonstrates that, if community partners can gain an in-depth understanding of school culture and if significant evidence is showing a need

for change, leaders can alter the trajectory and effectively implement strategies that challenge the status quo (Buller, 2015).

One of the biggest challenges that leaders face when trying to implement change is getting faculty on board with the transformation (Kotter, 2014). Kotter's change model focuses on urgency first as a means to get people to take notice that there is a significant need for transformation (Kotter, 2008). Behaviour has a tendency to change when emotions and feelings are influenced. Getting people out of their comfort zones is a difficult task, but creating the necessary urgency is crucial as it can help motivate people to collaborate with each other (Kotter, 2008). It is no understatement in saying that Indigenous students need equitable learning opportunities to bridge the existing achievement gap. Kotter's framework can certainly provide assistance with that.

Lastly, there is significant congruence between my PoP and Kotter's Eight Stage Change Model. There is strong emphasis on social justice and improving inequitable conditions for marginalized groups of people, which is paramount to the work I am doing at MPS (Galvez, 2020; Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021). Furthermore, honouring diversity, reflecting on policy, implementing culturally responsive pedagogy, recognizing personal biases, and their impact on marginalized groups, are all significant factors as to why there is such strong connection for me with this particular change model (Banwo et al., 2021; Alexander et. al., 2020). With Indigenous students disengaged in current teaching practices, the lack of connection to members of the Indigenous community, and Indigenous students achieving lower than their non-Indigenous counterparts (MPS, 2023), Kotter's model offers a degree of hope that the aforementioned issues can be rectified.

Democratic and Transformative Leadership with Kotter's Eight Stage Change Model

The alignment of transformative and democratic leadership practices with Kotter's Eight Stage Change Model provides a blueprint in promoting equity for the Indigenous students that MPS serves. The significance of honouring the skills and talents of each collaborating member and assisting followers to become leaders are fundamental responsibilities to which my work must adhere (Ghamrawi, 2023). When these leadership approaches are working in conjunction with Kotter's change model, focusing on student success, empowering others making decisions based on data, and liaising continuously with the wider community, are significant factors that can make a compelling difference in bridging the achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Leithwood, 2021; Mayger & Provinzano, 2022). Additionally, there is also support for strategies that promote positive change through the tenets of mutual collaboration and creativity to break away from traditional methods that do not have the desired impact to new emergent frameworks that improve conditions for everyone (Montuori & Donnelly, 2017). By making the invisible, visible and building capacity with community partners, these leadership frameworks can improve inequitable circumstances and reshape them into possibilities that significantly contribute to better learning opportunities for Indigenous students at MPS (Liu et al., 2018). Furthermore, these leadership approaches and Kotter's Eight Stage Change Theory creates a strategic and collaborative vision, as well as a clearly defined model to implement the desired change by having people come together on equal footing (Asirifi et. al., 2022). This is certainly important as my PoP looks to dismantle traditional organizational theories or frameworks that have systematically created inequities for Indigenous students. Creating that culture change provides greater engagement from community partners, allowing for the construction of better educational opportunities for Indigenous students (Kang et al., 2022).

First, Second, and Third Order Change

Kotter's change model provides an in-depth framework on how change can be implemented and sustained over time through collaboration, vision, and by creating urgency (Kotter, 2008). It also allows democratic and transformative leadership approaches to promote collaboration, creativity, and decision-making to work in unison with each other to create the desired change (Liu et al., 2018). This allows for first, second, and third order change to be accomplished within the change model. Research indicates that first order change involves correcting errors of choice within a certain organizational context (Bartunek & Moch, 1985; Hall, 2011). Second order change refers to how the experiences within the organization can be amended through the alteration of current thinking practices and patterns (Batunek & Moch, 1985; Hall, 2011). Third order change specifically looks at a larger paradigm shift by addressing larger cultural practices that inhibit the organization or the people within it to thrive or achieve (McDowell et al., 2017; Bartunek & Moch; Hall, 2011).

Democratic and transformative leadership approaches allow first, second, and third order change to coexist with one another. Transformative leadership for example focuses explicitly on equity, social justice and inclusion for the benefit of all MPS students and staff through the reconstruction of policies and procedures that are inequitable (Shields & Hesbol, 2020; Shields, 2010). Democratic leadership also allows criticism, suggestions, and opinions to be heard by community partners so organizational goals can be established and carried out by its members (Meydita et al., 2021; Liggett, 2020). Within MPS, first order change would be identifying the administrative procedures that promote inequities and making adjustments within the parameters of current policy. Second order change would be altering those same procedures while altering existing policy. And third order change would be collaboratively developing and implementing

new policies beyond current frameworks and mindsets to produce positive outcomes for Indigenous students.

Limitations of Kotter's Eight Stage Change Model

The most glaring limitation of Kotter's change model is that it is expected to be followed in a sequential order without deviating from any of the eight stages (Laig & Abocejo, 2021; Deszca, 2020; Pollack & Pollack, 2015). This of course can be problematic if not every step is relevant to the organization or multiple stages of the model need to be implemented at once (Appelbaum, 2012; Pollack & Pollack, 2015). At MPS, for example, if creating the vision for change is not successful, revisiting who is on the guiding coalition in Stage Two or even re-examine the need for urgency in Stage One, would be a critical action needed to move change to the next level.

A second criticism of the model is that not all stages have enough detail to overcome all scenarios that the organization may face as it advances from stage to stage (Jaros, 2010). For instance, if community partners to MPS are resistant to change and want to preserve the status quo, Kotter's framework might not provide enough information to overcome this resistance and therefore cannot always guarantee success (Applebaum, 2012).

Kotter's Model and the Mission Possible School Context

Appendix E provides a detailed overview of Kotter's eight stages that can support MPS to overcome issues associated with the existing achievement gap and plunging engagement levels that Indigenous students are experiencing. Communication and collaboration among community partners are key components of the model as it provides the opportunity to keep everyone informed (Kang et al., 2020). Creating positive momentum is critical so that progress can be seen and celebrated. The initial work that has taken place at MPS certainly aligns with

Kotter's model as collaboration and communication happens consistently. At this point however, information has only been communicated to the faculty of MPS and Elders outside of SHSD. While urgency has been outlined to staff for the need for change, guiding coalitions have not been explored. Once those are constructed, more information will be disseminated with senior leadership at the division level to gauge interest levels of moving the PoP forward as well as participation in guiding coalitions.

Organizational Change Readiness

MPS has had a short history as it was only built in 2018. In that time, Indigenous students have been succeeding as provincial achievement exams have indicated that the acceptable standard is being attained. Additionally, year-end report cards indicate that Indigenous students are passing academic subjects (MPS, 2023). When the data is closely scrutinized however, the story told is much different. SHSD survey data clearly shows Indigenous students are achieving 10-20% lower in regular core courses than their non-Indigenous classmates. Indeed, Indigenous students are passing, but settling for mediocrity is not something that, as principal, I am willing to support. The principal, vice-principal and teachers of MPS have a responsibility to analyze the data and develop an action plan that takes into account the learning needs of all students. With MPS being a feeder school to the high school, current academic results could potentially mean that Indigenous students get streamed into lower academic courses hindering their ability to get into programs of choice when entering post-secondary.

Before considering solutions, it is important to evaluate the organizational readiness level at MPS, especially when addressing needs of equity, anti-racism and decolonization. Organizational change generally refers to the modifications that an organization goes through to get from the present state to the desired state with achieved outcomes (Weiner et al., 2008). Because organizational change is multifaceted and multidimensional, readiness is identified as

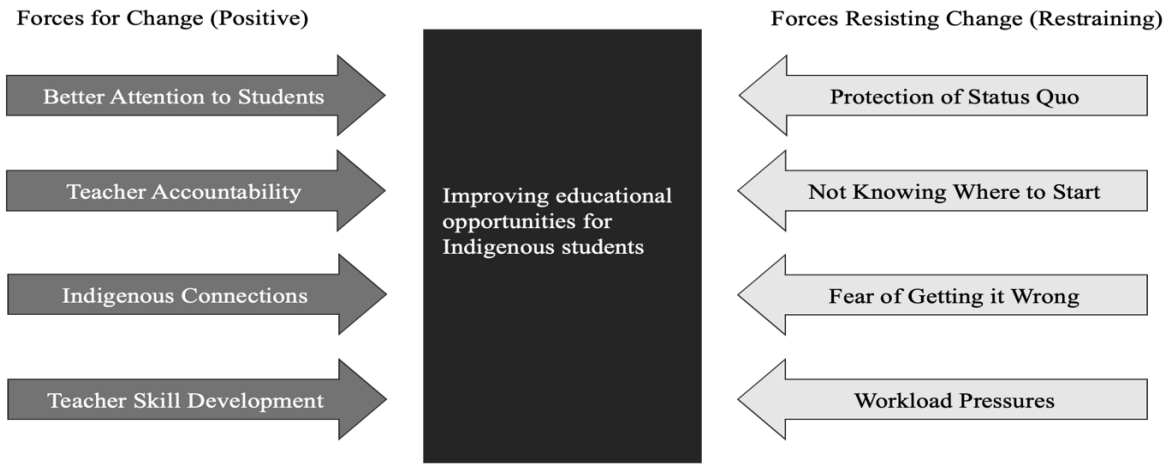
being one of the most influential factors in an individual's ability to support change (Wang et al., 2020). This DiP will employ Lewin's Force Field Analysis and a SWOT assessment to understand where MPS is currently positioned.

Force Field Analysis

Research demonstrates that the Force Field Analysis assessment tool is an effective instrument to illustrate the relationship between the positive forces that embrace change and the negative factors that inhibit it (Swanson & Creed, 2014). To create change within the MPS context, adding components that upset the balance between positive and negative forces that support change, reducing pressures against change, and converting restraining forces into driving forces are all critical factors in being able to bring about sustainable change (Deszca et al., 2020; Hussein et al., 2023). It is important for the faculty of MPS to examine external driving forces such as jurisdictional/Alberta Education survey data and leverage them to become potential growth opportunities for students. Using a Force Field Analysis can help mitigate the barriers that discourage change implementation (Toves et al., 2016). Additionally, internal norms, beliefs, and values of a faith-based organization such as MPS have the capability to align with the change implementation plan (Deszca et al., 2020). Catholic social teachings for instance highlight the caring of the individual and the importance of human dignity as two of its essential principles (Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2017). Applying all of these elements would be beneficial in making the case to enhance culturally relevant pedagogy in classrooms to improve education outcome for Indigenous students. Figure 2 outlines both the positive and restraining forces impacting the PoP.

Figure 2

Force Field Analysis



Note. Force Field Analysis adapted from *"Organizational Culture and Change,"* by Deszca, G., Ingols, C., & Cawsey, T. F. (2020), *Organizational Change: An Action Oriented Toolkit.* Copyright 2020 by SAGE Publications.

The above Force Field Analysis emphasizes forces which work in favor and against change implementation. When looking at these factors it would be exceptionally important for MPS leadership to outline as many factors as possible that would influence the change and have a multitude of community partners involved in the discussion (Sakib, 2021). When using the Force Field analysis assessment tool, it would also be critical for me as principal to ask questions such as: What benefit will this change have on MPS? Who supports the change at MPS? Who is against it and why? Are resources available to implement change? And what policies and procedures will be affected? (Burnes, 2020). It needs to be remembered that as the leader at MPS, I have a direct impact on how the people in the organization respond to change, and I need to provide as much information as I can to support it (Roşca, 2020).

Analysis and Application of Force Field Model

In looking at the analysis of Lewin's Force Field Model, MPS has a number of effective change forces that can support a positive future. Therefore, moving forward with the plan to improve educational opportunities for Indigenous students, despite individuals and other forces attempting to obstruct it, is feasible. Strengthening attention to students, increasing teacher accountability, improving Indigenous connections, and ultimately enhancing teacher skill development is something that Alberta Education and SHSD supports (Alberta Education, 2023d; SHSD, 2023). Because the staff of MPS are considered agents of the board, they too are expected to adhere to these standards. As a result, using these existing parameters would only reinforce positive change elements and weaken the forces resisting change such as protecting the status quo, not knowing where to start, fear of getting it wrong, and workload pressures (Hussein et al., 2023). Additionally, helping MPS staff understand the need for change and the benefits associated in creating equitable learning opportunities through decolonization practices would be a strategy that could sway support toward the common purpose of improving Indigenous student experiences and achievement. Just as important, an argument can be made that the lack of engagement by Indigenous students is impacting their sense of belonging and self-esteem due to the absence of culturally relevant pedagogy in classrooms (Tus, 2020). As mentioned before, with achievement already being noticeably discrepant between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in core courses, Lewin's Force Field Analysis certainly suggests that MPS is ready for a new path forward to help its Indigenous students.

Additionally, providing staff members and community partners with this Force Field Analysis and with complementary research and documentation related to the proposed change can help MPS get to the desired future. From there a strategic plan can be formulated with

community partners outlining the people that are involved in the change, identifying who is accountable for what, and which resources are available to reach designated timelines (Pavloudakis et al., 2023). Much like democratic leadership, the Force Field Analysis requires the involvement of all community partners (Woods, 2021). It is also a straightforward tool to use and provides partners a comprehensive overview of the existing problems so that informed decision-making can be made. A final factor that would be pertinent to the MPS context is that it would make visible those who are advocates for change and those who are opposing it (Kump, 2023).

In reflecting on the Force Field Analysis specifically, it is important to be cognizant that this process will take time as it involves a number viewpoints from variety of people (Woods, 2021). Additionally, giving scores to different forces is completely subjective and varies from person to person. A Force Field Analysis is considered to be a simplistic model, therefore additional models may have to be implemented to support the work needed to be carried out.

SWOT Analysis

In determining organizational readiness, employing a SWOT analysis to assess the needs of MPS was an important tool to utilize in conjunction with the Force Field Analysis. A SWOT analysis for instance evaluates the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to the school (Benzaghta et al., 2021). This is significant because a SWOT analysis looks at both the internal and external factors impacting goals of the organization (David et al., 2017; Satria & Shahbana, 2020). Appendix D outlines those factors at MPS that are both helpful and harmful to achieving desired outcomes.

In relation to the MPS context, people are considered a strength as they have the capacity to evoke change. However, a weakness of the context is not having enough access to Elders and

Knowledge Keepers to teach faculty Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Similarly, the opportunity that exists for MPS to solicit the knowledge of Indigenous students learned at home is significant. MPS educators could turn that into learning possibilities for students. This could potentially mitigate the threat to MPS with those staff members who are comfortable with the status quo.

A second reason why a SWOT analysis is important is that it also identifies the factors that the school is in control of and the factors that the organization has no control over (Bull et al., 2016). As principal, I have a certain amount of autonomy within the MPS context and am able to influence the direction of the school. For example, budgetary spending is my sole reasonability, and I can allocate dollars to particular areas such as Indigenous resources. What I cannot control however, are the decisions made by school trustees and senior leadership. I can certainly provide data to potentially influence decision-making, but final decisions are made by those who hold higher designations than myself. Based on the information from the SWOT analysis, the leadership team at MPS can create alternative options to improve organizational outcomes for Indigenous students and create learning opportunities for teachers that connect them to the culture and people in positive way (David et al., 2017). The SWOT analysis is an excellent reminder that focusing on what can be controlled in the context is a more effective strategy than focusing on uncontrollable factors that may not produce any results (Bull et al., 2016).

Ethical Considerations

Educational ethics refers to the consistent dilemmas that are associated with curriculum, assessment, grading, standardization, religious views, and culturally responsive and inclusive practices (Buchanan et al., 2022). From an ethics lens, educators need to understand the relationship of how these components work together and how they interact with the broader

context. Educators can then find a way to meet these expectations in the educational settings in which they work (Nakar, 2019). When taking a social justice approach to professional ethics, leaders and teachers have to deepen their understanding of lived experiences and understand the diverse needs of the students that they teach (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2011).

Ethic of Care

The most crucial element for any student in school is to have a connection to a caring adult (Anderson & Avneet, 2020). An ethic of care generally refers to meeting the needs of others, where emotions are valued and decisions are carried out with less bias (Li & Li, 2021). Ethic of care as an educator means being responsible with the protection and welfare of others (Noddings, 2013; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). This is even more applicable with the diverse populations that educators serve on a daily basis (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). Students need to be appreciated for their individual differences and MPS faculty are at the heart of making that happen.

According to the Alberta Teacher's Professional Code of Conduct, the faculty of MPS are charged with respecting the dignity and rights of all people without prejudice in regards to race, colour, religion, disability, gender, or background (ATA, 2023). In the MPS context, faculty do a fantastic job of caring for students. I have witnessed first-hand the level of commitment and dedication that the staff have to the school, the community, the students, and each other. This can be seen in daily interactions with students and the fact that each and every staff member is involved in some form of extra-curricular activity. Despite that fact, however, there are still challenges that educators are experiencing when making meaningful change in classrooms for Indigenous students. Teachers struggle with making relevant connections to Indigenous culture in classrooms and are still using traditional teaching practices. Even though regulatory

documents such as Alberta Teacher Code of Conduct, The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the administrative procedures of SHSD make it abundantly clear that the dignity of each and every person needs to be respected, Indigenous students continue to be disengaged and achieve lower results than other students. It needs to be stated that the ethics of care is directly linked to inclusion, which also requires educators to be responsive and attentive to the needs and concerns of students (Joorst, 2021). Additionally, listening to students and prioritizing their socioemotional and academic needs allows teachers at MPS to act in the best interests of their students (Anderson & Avneet, 2020; Gholami, 2011).

Organizational and Faculty Responsibilities

A significant organizational and faculty responsibility is ensuring responsive educators proactively make efforts to address the needs of students so they can be successful in school (Joorst, 2021). Additionally, culturally responsive educators have to be respectful of those students who come from different cultural backgrounds and be open to understanding the world from different perspectives (Maluleka, 2020). For example, with thirty Indigenous families at MPS, utilizing family knowledge would be an incredible way to help all students understand Indigenous ways of knowing by connecting it to curricular objectives (Alberta Education, 2023d). It would also help Indigenous students at MPS feel proud and connected to their culture and identity. When education is provided from a place of caring, it requires leaders both at the jurisdictional and school-based level to acknowledge that there is a difference in being right and being just (Joorst, 2021). In the case of MPS and SHSD, that could equate to more funding being filtered into Indigenous resources and manpower, instead of cuts being made in that particular area. In order for faculty to truly understand Indigenous students, educators need to disrupt both the status quo and take the time to learn more about Indigenous culture and what students need to

be successful (Waghid, 2019). MPS teachers need to move from just delivering curriculum to thinking critically about what they are teaching and how it can enhance the lives of the students through cultural diversity and social justice (Cherrington, 2017).

Commitments of Mission Possible School Faculty

The leadership team of MPS is certainly committed to making the school the best it can be for all students. My vice-principal and I are in constant communication and support each other. Having the support of my vice-principal certainly makes a significant difference when trying to bring about meaningful change to the organization. With respect to my own leadership, I know I have to be committed to being authentic. That means sharing my own experiences of racism and sharing my knowledge of Indigenous culture. As for teaching staff, I know they are committed to fostering positive relationships with students as well as creating a positive school culture where all feel welcome. It is important to note, however, that teaching staff can feel isolated and vulnerable when working with student diversity (Sider, et al., 2021). It would be imperative for the leadership team of MPS to not only honour that anxiety, but to also make staff aware that everyone is "in this together." From an ethical perspective the faculty of MPS have to be cognizant of the human dignity, the systematic inequality and oppression that Indigenous students are currently experiencing in classrooms, and commit to a taking the necessary steps in creating a brighter future (Kozleski & Choi, 2018).

Leadership Approaches and Organizational Responsibilities

Through democratic and transformative leadership approaches much can be accomplished in creating equitable learning opportunities for Indigenous students. Democratic leadership in the MPS context utilizes the gifts and talents of each contributing member, gives all community partners a voice, and allows them to be part of the decision-making process

(Barthold et al., 2022). Transformative leadership is strongly grounded in equity and social justice (Shields, 2019). It also calls people to take action to mitigate injustices toward marginalized groups of people through allowing everyone to contribute equally in the decision-making process (Banwo et al., 2022). By putting team members in the appropriate places where their skills can be maximized to address outstanding issues, a framework is created to achieve success (Harris, 2013). For example, Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers would be able to pass along critical information about Indigenous ways of knowing through storytelling (Masta, 2022). An important ethical consideration for MPS staff is to listen carefully to absorb this knowledge and then collaborate with each other to determine how to incorporate this information into meaningful learning opportunities for Indigenous students (Crosby, 2021). It needs to be pointed out, that everyone has something to contribute and by letting those talents come forward, everyone gets to benefit from each other's strengths. This is significant in the MPS context because when there is a fear of getting Indigenous knowledge wrong, school faculty and community partners can become a valuable support system encouraging each other to push forward for the betterment of the organization and those within it (Woods & Roberta, 2018).

Strategies and Solutions to Address the Problem of Practice

Existing structures and power dynamics are perpetuating the status quo within the context of MPS and SHSD. These organizations are largely based on Western worldviews that reinforce inequality and present a hierarchy where decision-making power is held by a select few (Bastien et al., 2023). As a result, Indigenous knowledge is marginalized due to the values and norms of Western society continuing to dominate policies and procedures that do little to promote Indigenous ways of knowing or being (Filatotchev et al., 2022). For example, SHSD has a recruitment policy for administrators that is based on talent, knowledge, skills, and fit for the

position (SHSD, 2023). The problem however, is there is no mention of diversity. After almost a decade with SHSD, I remain the only Indigenous principal in the division.

It is imperative that the educators at MPS break down the barriers that marginalize Indigenous people and understand how impactful Indigenous knowledge can be to not only reduce systematic discrimination, but to also counteract colonial practices that continually harm Indigenous students in classrooms (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Therefore, the proposed strategies and solutions create a positive vision of the future that will impact the well-being of all students, Indigenous students in particular, and create meaningful educational opportunities in classrooms.

When exploring potential solutions, it is important to determine if the organization has the necessary resources to promote social justice, as well as eradicate policies and processes that hinder it (Gandolfi & Mills, 2023). It is also important to note that I have had the honour and privilege of working with two Indigenous Elders before I embarked on this doctoral educational journey. They have assisted me in the past with the writing process by not only reading my work, but also offering strategies and solutions that would assist faculty in taking the necessary steps to promote equity in the schools I have been in. Based on my past experiences working on reserve, I have settled on three strategies that are simple in nature, but still very important in moving change forward. The three potential solutions are (a) Removing obstacles to create collaboration and relationship building; (b) Using Elder's wisdom through storytelling to promote Indigenous ways of knowing and being; and (c) Bringing culturally relevant pedagogy to classrooms. These solutions are closely linked the Guiding Questions in chapter one.

Solution 1: Removing Obstacles to Create Collaboration and Relationship Opportunities

A significant solution is ensuring I am able to bring people together in collaboration to build positive relationships. I also need to make certain that topics are relevant to community

partners pertinent to the MPS context, allowing for open dialogue among everyone. These are important factors that need to be taken into consideration to keep conversation flowing and meaningful (Hollingsworth, 2001). An important piece of advice given to me from Elders in the past is that when bringing people together to converse is to ensure childcare is available, food is on hand, that there is a set time limit, and transportation is available for those Indigenous people who might not have access to a vehicle. I have been told that if these barriers can be removed, the potential of Indigenous people attending collaboration opportunities, significantly increases. Essential components to this particular strategy, therefore, are making sure funding is allotted, space is available to converse, and child care is available. In addition, proper Elder protocols and honorariums for their time and wisdom are important to consider. When educators do not look at the perspectives of the school community, the voices of the oppressed are not heard the way they need to be. I want to ensure that I have as many Indigenous people as possible in attendance so positive relationships can be established (Battiste & Henderson, 2009). Additionally, when people have a collective moral purpose and are able to engage in meaningful work that they feel is making a difference, the result is recognizing diversity as a strength, promoting acceptance, and increasing achievement for students with educational outcomes (Banwo et al., 2021; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2017). Successful leaders do not avoid racial issues, but rather talk to their community partners often and openly (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). Giving voice to those who have been historically oppressed and underrepresented promotes social justice and educational change, further challenging the status quo and traditional ways in which Indigenous culture and ways of knowing are viewed (Santamaría, 2014). Finally, I would strive to create as an authentic experience as I possibly can. The last thing I want to do is to tokenize Indigenous members of the community who are coming together for the betterment of students (Pidgeon, 2016).

Listening to the lived experiences of Indigenous people is an important step in building reciprocal and responsive relationships and critical to the work that needs to be done for students (Nielsen et al., 2022).

Solution 2: Elder's Wisdom (Storytelling/Counternarratives)

Indigenous culture is grounded closely in oral tradition making storytelling and hearing counternarratives a critical part of learning for the faculty at MPS. Indigenous storytelling, for instance, shares information with everyone about the land, family, community, traditions, values, and beliefs over the course of history (Wilson & Yellow Bird, 2005). By the same token, Indigenous counternarratives talk about their experiences with racism and colonization which is extremely significant, as historically, racism has not been talked about in the way it needs to be as an oppressive force has belittled Indigenous people (Fong et al., 2021). Through listening to Elder's wisdom, not only are MPS educators learning about the rich histories of Indigenous people, but there is a truth-telling in which community partners are hearing about the impact of colonization, racism, and assimilation in a way that people haven't experienced it before (Wilson & Yellow Bird, 2005). Indigenous people need to be at the forefront of the conversation, and all community partners need to be supporters in that effort (Brayboy, 2005). To be the moral change agents that faculty need to be, MPS educators must take a step back before positive steps forward can be actually made. Having spaces for Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers to share this invaluable information would be a momentous advancement in the right direction in attaining viewpoints from the Indigenous people they were meant to come from. Respectful engagement with Elders is a key factor in dismantling personal biases and stereotypes of Indigenous people as well as making positive progress toward decolonization efforts (Kennedy et al. 2023).

Solution 3: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Implementing culturally responsive pedagogy within classrooms is a significant solution in creating equitable educational opportunities for Indigenous students. Educators need to move away from how Indigenous people are perceived in the media and other digital platforms, instead replacing those sources of information with the wisdom of Indigenous Elders (Howe et al., 2021). Effective educators not only do a lot of listening to absorb the knowledge of others, but they also take it upon themselves to consistently participate in relevant professional development opportunities pertinent to the students in their classrooms (Howe, 2008). This deep knowledge assists educators in developing learning strategies that are designed to be relevant and authentic, which allows students to see themselves in the daily learning that is taking place (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Research indicates that those students who are culturally diverse will struggle in traditional Western school settings because their distinctive cultural backgrounds are not being recognized (Battiste, 2013). Therefore, when educators teach with Indigenous perspectives, education takes on a very different form (Preston & Claypool, 2013). Acknowledgment of the physical environment, for instance, is a critical element that every educator needs to be cognizant of regarding Indigenous perspectives. That in itself, transforms a regular classroom of desks being in rows to a classroom where the physical space can accommodate a diversity of learning styles, and students can choose the parameters of the learning environment that work best for them (Preston & Claypool, 2013).

Finally, culturally responsive pedagogy allows students to make positive connections with teachers. Meaningful relationship building that focuses on the diverse backgrounds of students promote educational contexts that are safe and respectful (Egbo, 2009). Therefore, it is integral in this particular strategy that I explore not only creating spaces and opportunities for

educators to do this, but also enable them to have access to the necessary resources and people to make this happen. Additionally, teachers in all contexts need to be cognizant of their own biases and stereotypes of Indigenous students. When educators can see that Indigenous knowledge and perspectives are the key to empowering students as well as the remedy to a preferred future that is reflective, reflexive, relationship-based, and focused on connectedness, only then can a system-wide community approach to teaching and learning take place (Preston & Claypool, 2013). Figure 3 outlines each solution along with its purpose, domains, and potential barriers.

Figure 3

Solution Overview

Solutions	Purpose	Domains	Solution Barriers
1. Removing Obstacles	• Collaboration • Relationship Building • Learning • Trust • Listening	• Planning • Collegiality • Professionalism • Communication	• Funding
2. Elder's Wisdom	• Indigenous Perspectives • Listening • Learning	• Classroom Environment • Planning and Preparation • Instruction	• Elder Availability • Impact of Colonization and Residential Schools • Lack of Trust
3. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	• Learning • Risk-Taking • Enhanced Teaching Practices • Listening	• Instructional Delivery • Assessment of and for Learning • Professional Responsibilities • Achievement	• Fear of Taking Risks • Personal Bias and Stereotypes • Protection of the Status Quo

Note: Adapted from the work of Hunt et al., (2016). *"Teacher Evaluation: Done to You or With You?"* Copyright 2016 by Hunt et al.

Change Drivers

Within my organizational context there are a number of change drivers, with the most influential being Indigenous people. Elders, for instance, have a significant influence on the way educational policy is developed through the division's Truth and Reconciliation Committee. That information is then disseminated to schools through division administrative procedures as a way

to improve foundational knowledge of Indigenous ways of knowing. Elders are critical actors because they can be positioned to enrich student learning by adding culture to academic experiences (Ray et al., 2017; Khalifa et al., 2019; Young et al., 2014). Leaders must seek the perspectives of Elders to bring Indigenous stories to light, while addressing how current systems are not working for them (Knaus, 2014; Shields, 2019). Students are also significant change drivers to my PoP. They are important in change efforts in Indigenous education to help shape their lives and the lives of their peers (Mitra et al., 2012). Through Indigenous focus groups at MPS, students would provide valuable insight on how to address the problems of the school as well as feedback on policy at the jurisdictional and school levels (Mitra, 2007). Furthermore, the importance of parents as change drivers in education is paramount, as their impact on affecting decisions to provide quality education to students cannot be overstated (Huat See & Gorard, 2015). Additionally, the involvement of parents means there is a collective effort to learn more about Indigenous culture and history (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2020). Parents already have a vested interest in the school with their children being in attendance. Listening to what they have to say in improving learning conditions for Indigenous students is significant, as parents know their children best. Students, parents, and Elders have powerful stories to tell, and it is of the utmost importance that perspectives are told from their point of view (Gerlach et al., 2017). These stories cannot be replicated by anyone else which is why their impact as change drivers is so significant.

While community partners are significant to my PoP, it is important that I recognize the impacts of funding, safe meeting places where information can be shared, and existing data that blatantly identifies the existing achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Taking these change drivers into account would be important factors in collectively

beginning to improve a system that has been negatively impacting Indigenous students for years. If the proper funding and safe meeting places are not properly established, this could impact the proposed change negatively. Furthermore, if existing data is not presented in such a way that clearly outlines the urgency needed to change existing permeators of education, the status quo repeats itself and minimal change takes place (Plazek, 2012).

Preferred Solution: Collaboration and Relationships

As I reflect on the three potential solutions, I value the collaboration and relationship solution most of all. While storytelling, counternarratives and enhancing culturally relevant pedagogy are all key pieces to the work being doing, none of that can happen if the spaces for collaboration and relationship building are not properly implemented to bring the necessary people forward to have critical conversations (Battiste & Henderson, 2009). The end goal, of course, is to get to a place where educators are implementing culturally responsive pedagogy into daily teaching practices to improve educational opportunities for students (Preston & Claypool, 2013). However, if those connections are not established early on, getting to this point would be difficult. Additionally, the biggest strength that I see with this particular strategy is the fact that Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, families, educators, administration, senior leadership, and trustees are all brought together on equal footing to work together to help provide solutions to enhance teaching and learning for students. Just as important, this strategy puts Indigenous people at the forefront of the conversation and taking the lead, with other community partners participating more through listening and taking a supportive stance (Burgess et al., 2023). By committing to these connections and meeting spaces, educators can get a deeper understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing and help teachers bring culturally relevant pedagogy to classrooms (Trimmer et al., 2021).

Like many marginalized groups, Indigenous students continuously struggle in traditional educational settings, and the MPS context is no different. If teachers are not collaborating and incorporating Indigenous knowledge while teaching multiple perspective from multiple viewpoints, students' voices are not being heard the way they need to be (Battiste & Henderson, 2009). Within the MPS context, it is imperative that I use my designation as school principal and do everything in my purview to ensure that Indigenous voices are heard. Collaboration and relationship building are strategies that can help do that (Corntassle & T'lakwadzi, 2009).

Change Planning Barriers and Challenges

Jurisdictionally, there exists a top-down approach which means power is firmly entrenched at that level with information being disseminated to school leadership in order to be followed (Salokhiddinovich, 2022). Leadership and educators within MPS would have to follow what has been put forth by the jurisdiction due to contractual obligations. It needs to be recognized that faith comes first in SHSD, and everything else second. The long-term impact of this type of decision-making means educators in classrooms continue to stereotype Indigenous students which negatively impacts their mental health and wellness thus maintaining the academic achievement gap (Nielsen et al., 2022).

Furthermore, it is imperative that issues must be named and understood before actions for change can take place (Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021). While there is some semblance of this currently going on within the jurisdiction, the impact of residential schools and the genuine lack of trust that Indigenous people have because of the church is not to be underestimated (Barter, 2023). Therefore, it is exceptionally important to challenge beliefs which have been learned over time (Shields, 2019). It cannot be overstated that students' sense of belonging requires collaboration and relationship building that is built on the foundation of humility and service

(Banwo et al., 2021). However, decades of mistrust are not easily undone (Wilson, 2021). Just as significant, is the fact that Indigenous viewpoints are not recognized in classrooms as fear of misrepresentation of Indigenous perspectives is a legitimate concern of educators who are not Indigenous (Scott & Gani, 2018). Until educators can truly understand the impact of colonialism and how it still replicated in the present through power dynamics and entitlement, it will keep teachers from fully comprehending Indigenous perspectives and challenges (Gebhard, 2018).

Chapter Two Summary

The second chapter in the DiP provides a rational for using democratic and transformative leadership approaches in support of organizational change. It then outlines how Kotter's eight stage change model will guide that change by providing sequential steps to not only support change, but also sustain it. An organizational readiness examination of MPS was conducted using elements of a Force Field and SWOT analysis tools. Results show that despite the many barriers that challenge MPS in its current reality, that change is possible. Three solutions were explored with collaboration and relationship building being selected as the most significant options to bring change to the MPS context.

Chapter 3: Implementation, Communication, Monitoring and Evaluation

Chapter three discusses an implementation plan that supports Indigenous students in the Mission Possible school (MPS) context. If community partners are able to come together to learn from each other in support of creating equitable learning opportunities that are representative of Indigenous students' culture and identities, current ineffective practices will be altered and lead to increased engagement and achievement in MPS classrooms. Chapter three also outlines a communication strategy designed to help educators understand Indigenous ways of knowing and being by utilizing the knowledge and expertise of Elders and Knowledge Keepers. Monitoring and evaluation strategies are then discussed with chapter three being closed with what next steps and future considerations will be.

Change Implementation Plan

The primary purpose of this Dissertation-in-Practice (DiP) is to ensure that educators are implementing Indigenous culture into current teaching methodologies to provide equitable learning opportunities for the Indigenous students that MPS serves. Through meaningful collaboration, positive connections can be fostered and trust established between educators and Indigenous members of the community. Change is reliant on relationships, responsibility, and accountability between community partners (Barlo et al., 2020). Other factors identified that assist the change process include constant communication during the change, engagement of community partners, and the motivation of the change agents within MPS and Sacred Heart School Division (SHSD) (Errida & Lotfi, 2021). As a result, this DiP uses the elements of Kotter's Eight Stage Change Model as a sequential guide and means of leading change (Kotter, 2014). Appendix E outlines the eight stages to evoke the necessary changes at MPS to improve inequitable conditions that Indigenous students are currently experiencing.

Stage 1: Establishing a Sense of Urgency

With Indigenous students achieving lower than their non-Indigenous counterparts, I feel urgency is something I can easily create as it relates to Indigenous students. Currently within the MPS context, as part of my work as an Alberta school principal, I have communicated with faculty that Indigenous students are achieving 10-20% lower than non-Indigenous students (MPS, 2023). Also, as is expected of principals in our district, I have shared that district satisfaction survey and Indigenous student focus group feedback data shows that Indigenous students and parents are frustrated and disengaged with current teaching practices that are not reflective of their cultural identities (MPS; 2023; SHSD, 2023). Failure to create this urgency would be a huge error and create a barrier that would not only be difficult to overcome, but also would prohibit progress to Kotter's second stage (Libby, 2017). Kotter suggests that cooperation would be difficult to garner due the level of urgency considered by key members of the organization as being low (Hackman, 2017).

Using my designation as principal of MPS has been a critical first step to promote a better future for the Indigenous students that the school serves. In addition to creating urgency, vulnerability is a significant component of the work being done within the school (Deszca et al, 2020). As an Indigenous leader, I have been able to communicate to staff the importance of creating a future that challenges the status quo by sharing authentic stories of racism and inequities that I have personally gone through or witnessed. While this process is just in its initial stages, this has led to a willingness for faculty to consider on a new direction forward for teaching and learning. Without the supporting research or the vulnerability, faculty would not have been compelled to change or at least consider a new path forward unless they didn't see the

need to do so (Applebaum et al., 2012). The personalization of the data has made a significant difference in creating urgency at MPS.

Evidence clearly suggests that there is contentment with the way things have been in at MPS in its short history (Plazek, 2012). With social justice being a monumental component of the work being done with this DiP, Indigenous knowledge and critical theory will be combined with democratic and transformative leadership practices to engage employees in not only maintaining a sense of urgency throughout the change process, but also to challenge traditional and ineffective teaching methodologies that have been so prevalent in classrooms at MPS. Potential threats to be aware of in this stage include a lack of resources to create the urgency and a culture that avoids confrontation (Boff & Caldwell, 2020).

Stage 2: Creating the Guiding Coalition

Leveraging the skills and talents of well-respected people is a critical step in moving my problem of practice (PoP) along and making change (Applebaum, 2012). Not being able to get the right personnel positioned in the appropriate places could result in progress being stifled with minimal, if any, change to improved educational opportunities for Indigenous students (Pollack & Pollack, 2015). The guiding coalition in this instance would consist of approximately 20-30 people and involve not only the faculty of MPS, but also Elders, Knowledge Keepers, parents, school council members, one of SHSD's superintendents, the religious education consultant, and the school's local parish priest. Ideally, coalition members would be the identified individuals who could change teaching and learning in order to impact the decision-making processes that can revamp policy on a jurisdictional scale. Additionally, I will lead through a distributed and transformative leadership approach where everyone is included, has a role, and followers become leaders so that outcomes can be achieved (Grin et al., 2018; Calegari et al., 2015).

Once the guiding coalition is formed, it would be the responsibility of the team to create a change vision for the work that needs to be done (Kaufman et al., 2020). The proposed vision in this particular case is having leaders and educators pursue excellence in achievement and equitable conditions for Indigenous students in culturally responsive classroom settings. Creating Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at the school level to address below average achievement from Indigenous students in core subject areas is an example of how this can be attained. The PLC process can also identify which faculty members at MPS that are already addressing some of the needs within classrooms for Indigenous students and which staff members who are still struggling to create meaningful learning opportunities that were representative of Indigenous students' cultures. Through the PLC process, educators can share positive progress with other MPS faculty that through professional development, and more importantly through relationships with Indigenous students and families, that critical knowledge can be gained to plan meaningful educational opportunities for students. These conversations can lead to mentorship opportunities to assist those teachers who needed support addressing the needs of the Indigenous students in their classrooms. This would be a significant step getting MPS faculty members engaged in implementing different methodologies reflective of Indigenous students and their identities.

Even though PLC development is in its preliminary creation stages, it is apparent to me that a transformative leadership approach would help faculty see the need for their involvement in the change process. Through PLC work, it can also be established that there is a need for capacity building and sharing best practices to support teachers and students in classrooms. MPS faculty need to realize that this is not a process that can be achieved by one person and that collective wisdom is needed to bring about necessary change (Appelbaum et al., 2012). Moving

forward ensuring the guiding coalition knows that everyone is in this process together is a critical step to foster effective relationships and build trust among community partners (Kaufman et al., 2020). It needs to be remembered that implementing the change vision involves training, communication tools, and face-to-face conversations in order to build awareness, mutual respect, and trust (Liu et al., 2018). Threats to be aware of during this stage of the process are a potential lack of trust, no common goals, people with big egos, and people remaining mired in the status quo due to their comfort with the way things are (Boff & Caldwell, 2020).

Stage 3: Develop A Vision and a Strategy

Developing a vision and strategies is a critical part to Kotter's change model as it applies to my PoP (Kotter, 2014). When people can see that vision and at the same time envision how the changes are being made for the overall improvement of the organization, next steps can be taken to get to that brighter future for the Indigenous students that educators serve (Pfeifer, 2005). Because this change process is heavily reliant on collaboration among community partners, creating a vision is a central component of effective leadership (Kotter, 2014). MPS staff will have a clearer vision of what the desirable future looks like; and, as the school moves forward it will be imperative to include other community partners such as Elders, students, parents, trustees, and senior leadership in creating the vision and helping them see the preferred future. Kotter (2014) makes it clear that the vision needs to be attainable, reflect the interests of community partners, is communicable to others, and can be explained within five minutes. Potential threats to be aware of in this stage are impatience, complacency, and lack of team building (Boff & Caldwell, 2020).

Stage 4: Communicate the Change Vision

Consistent and frequent communication of the change vision is a critical step in capturing the hearts and minds of educators to move forward for change (Deszca et al., 2020). Underestimating the importance of effective communication can seriously impact how educators within the MPS context see the vision and could stall change implementation (Pollack & Pollack, 2015). Communication also involves more than just mere repetition, but also focuses on relationship building, using different leaders to help communicate the vision, and employing various modes of communication to keep people engaged with change processes (Sidorko, 2008). MPS will include communication strategies with community partners in mind to ensure the change vision is understood. This will take the form of face-to-face meetings, presentations to community partners, as well as newsletter and email updates. A previous suggestion from Elders was ensuring that hard copies of updates exist as not all Indigenous people have access to internet or are able to attend face to face presentations. During this stage, focusing on the future as opposed to past failures is a worthwhile consideration to keep momentum moving in the right direction (Hackman, 2017). Potential threats to be aware of in Stage 4 include under communicating, the vision being too complicated for community partners to understand, and the guiding coalition not being on the same page (Boff & Caldwell, 2020).

Stage 5: Empowerment

Getting as many people involved to be able to embrace the vision is another critical step in bringing about meaningful change to the Indigenous students that I serve. Removing obstacles, revamping systems that undermine the vision, and encouraging innovative ideas of people is an excellent way to foster relationships and improve communication (Hackman, 2017; Libby, 2017). Letting people within MPS know they are valued, have something to contribute,

and positioning them in leadership capacities are important strategies to implement change (Pollack & Pollack, 2015; Sittrop & Crosthwaite, 2021). It would be the duty of the members of the guiding coalition to provide support for community partners to overcome barriers such as burnout, frustration, reluctance, anxiety, and low morale (Kotter, 2014). Through communication, clarity can be provided to help individuals make sense of the change strategies and impacts of the processes. This would perhaps require more meetings where people come together, transportation required to get Elders to meetings, and childcare set up in order to support Indigenous families to receive information from the school and to also share their perspectives. As a result, a budget would have to be constructed that would be reflective of the expenses to be incurred during the change process. Additionally, it would also be important to make sure funding is set aside for honorariums to pay Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers for sharing their wisdom with the larger group. This is a customary practice in the province of Alberta. While the MPS school budget allows for funds to use for Indigenous learning and guest speakers, school budgets are small and taxed with the day-to-day operations of the school. Further assistance would be required, and I would have to apply to the division for additional funds to alleviate barriers hindering the goals of the change implementation plan. Also recognizing that this process cannot be accomplished within a year, annual applications will have to be made to garner further financial support. If this is not a possibility, there are Indigenous grants that the MPS can apply for to support the goals outlined in the change model. Additional threats during this stage of the change process include ineffective leadership, staff not having the necessary skill sets to execute tasks, and community partners not caring about the vision (Boff & Caldwell, 2020).

Stage 6: Generate Short-Term Wins

This stage of the Kotter model involves demonstrating the viability of the change that is taking place and helps keep momentum moving forward in a positive manner (Applebaum, 2012). Seeing that success within my context would be a critical step and would help community partners to see that the progress being made is not only significant, but meaningful, for our Indigenous students. I also appreciate how Kotter suggests that storytelling and the power of good stories influence behaviour over time (Hackman, 2017; Libby, 2017). Because much of Indigenous tradition is grounded in oral tradition (Hansen, 2018), I feel this is a very positive connection between my PoP and Kotter's change model. There are two important strategies which will help MPS communicate short-term wins over time. The first strategy is having monthly meetings that describe what has happened in the change process and its impact on the school and students. The second strategy is utilizing the school's communication manager to be able to communicate through email and social media platforms. This person would also be responsible for creating hard copies of updates to deliver to homes either in person or through students to share the positive progress being made. Not only will success and achievement be communicated, so too will the contributions of those involved with the change. It is important for short-term wins to be highly visible to community partners and that they are specifically related to the change effort (Kotter, 2014). Potential threats in this stage include short-terms wins being perceived as gimmicks and progress not being made in a timely fashion to generate short-term wins (Boff & Caldwell, 2020).

Stage 7: Consolidate Gains and Produce More Change

Continued effort during all stages of Kotter's change model is required to sustain momentum as MPS continues to grow with its change strategies (Pollack & Pollack, 2015). It is

also important to remember that large scale change can take a long time to complete. Furthermore, perseverance is extremely significant as an organization moves through each stage of Kotter's change model. Using the credibility of short-term wins that have been established previously, disseminating information consistently to share in these successes, providing clarity, and maintaining urgency are all critical components in keeping the change process going within the MPS context (Kotter, 2014). It cannot be underestimated how the threat of complacency can creep into the change process and undermine progress (Calegari et al., 2015). It would be integral in this particular stage to be both reflective and to keep focused on the task at hand rather than being distracted by past successes. One of the worst possible scenarios that could happen during this process is losing that sense of urgency and allowing tendencies from the old culture to reappear (Boff & Caldwell, 2020).

Strategies to ensure progress continues as well as potentially mitigate relapses are having the leadership team at MPS increase classroom visitations, provide feedback to teachers, and sharing progress not only through the PLC process to evaluate best practices, but also using social media platforms, newsletters, and monthly community partner meetings to demonstrate progress and successes. This would also keep faculty accountable and focused on goals created by the guiding coalition (Kotter, 2014).

Stage 8: Anchoring New Approaches in The Culture

It is not uncommon for organizations to lose momentum at different stages of the change process. MPS faculty will have to remain focused until changed teaching practices are engrained in the cultural norms and values of the organization as change can be very fragile and difficult to attain (Hackman, 2017). Using Kotter's change theory provides a strong foundation for the guiding coalition on how to execute change, build and sustain momentum, celebrate progress,

and stay the course during what can be an arduous process at times. Change within the culture at MPS will only be successful when the actions of educators are altered and the new behaviour produces a benefit to Indigenous students (Kotter, 2014). Evidence of MPS faculty engaging in continuous professional development, training, and collaboration would be excellent indicators that the new approaches are being anchored in the desired culture to support Indigenous students in classrooms (Boff & Caldwell, 2020). Even more significant would be seeing increasing engagement levels from Indigenous students in classrooms, the achievement-gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous narrowing, and strong participation from Indigenous community partners within the MPS context.

Communicating the Need for Change and the Change Process

In this section of the DiP, communication strategies are discussed to support the change process. Effective communication makes a significant difference when bringing people together in collaboration to achieve desired goals (Gomez-Leal, 2022). Research indicates that communicating the vision of the change is an important factor in helping people understand why change needs to happen within the organization (Leithwood, 2021). By doing so, communication helps build trusting relationships among people and reduces the uncertainly that they may have about the perceived change taking place to resolve issues that the organization is experiencing (Grissom & Condon, 2021).

Building the Awareness for the Need for Change

MPS has developed a collaborative culture in the last two years that is consistent with democratic leadership where open dialogue has become the norm and there is a team-based approach to decision-making processes (Barthold et al., 2022). In a recent January 2024 survey, which was completed as part of the district assurance process, students, parents and staff indicated that communication was one of the greatest strengths of MPS (MPS, 2024). Building

on this momentum is a critical strategy in constructing awareness for the need for change within the organization. Every community partner whether professional or non-professional holds an important designation that is integral to the change process. Those who are in leadership positions, however, such as school or senior leadership at the district level need to be supportive of and responsive to all community partners so that everyone feels their contributions to the change process are valued and respected (Calegari et al., 2015).

In the first two chapters I have outlined the need for change due to an ongoing achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Existing provincial and district survey and focus group data, specifically involving the Indigenous student body at MPS, indicate a lack of engagement and a displeasure for Indigenous students with current teaching methodologies (MPS, 2023). This evidence demonstrates the need for change and how the status quo has perpetuated inequitable conditions for the Indigenous students that MPS serves (MPS, 2023; Kotter, 2014). The following subsections will demonstrate the importance of the guiding coalition and how it will impact change communication processes and the achievement of goals through genuine collaboration of community partners.

The Knowledge Mobilization Plan

In formulating the knowledge mobilization plan, it was important to use the five components of the message, the audience, the messenger, the method, and the evaluation to provide awareness of the problem, to disseminate findings, and to evaluate what impact the new knowledge will have on Indigenous learning (Lavis et al., 2003). Figure 4 outlines the path that the knowledge mobilization will take within the context of MPS to ultimately improve educational opportunities for Indigenous students.

Table 1

The Knowledge Mobilization Plan

The Message	The Audience	The Messenger	The Method	The Evaluation
***What information should be transferred to decision makers/Change agents?**	**To whom should research knowledge be transferred?**	**By whom should the knowledge be transferred?**	**How should the research knowledge be transferred?**	**With what effect should research knowledge be transferred?**
• Data that outlines the problem. • Student focus group information • Truth and Reconciliation document • What the preferred future looks like • Alberta TQS/LQS/SQS (Assurance measures) • Research on PoP	• Educators • Senior leadership • Local parish priests • Parents • MPS families • Community organizations • School council • Students • Elders/Knowledge-Keepers	• Elders • Knowledge-Keepers • Indigenous students • Indigenous parents • Indigenous Community Members • Indigenous principal of MPS	• In person meetings as much as possible (1 per month) • Social media platforms • Online platforms (Google Meets, School Website) • Hard copies of reports • Emails • Phone calls • Focus groups • Interviews	• Participation and retention of Indigenous community members • Impact in classrooms • Policy changes at local and division levels • Culture shift within the MPS context • Improved knowledge base for educators of Indigenous culture

Note: The figure above is adapted from Lavis et al., 2003 and outlines the five main components in the development of an effective knowledge mobilization plan.

Communicating the Path for Change, Timelines of Change, and Milestones

Change is a complex process, and leaders who see the world in a simple linear way will have difficulty in creating meaningful change (Deszca et al., 2019). However, by providing a comprehensive vision of the change in a way that can be understood and with realistic expectations to followers, the likelihood that change initiatives will be sustained will be greatly increased (Deszca et al., 2019). Initially, in my role as school principal, I have the greatest influence at MPS with students and staff because of the relationship building and trust that has been established through our daily interactions. In my two years at MPS, however, as the guiding coalition continues to grow and as Elders are being brought in to share Indigenous wisdom with community partners, messaging needs to be concise, clear, and respectful of the many diverse audiences impacted by this change. Perspectives, therefore, must be told from Indigenous

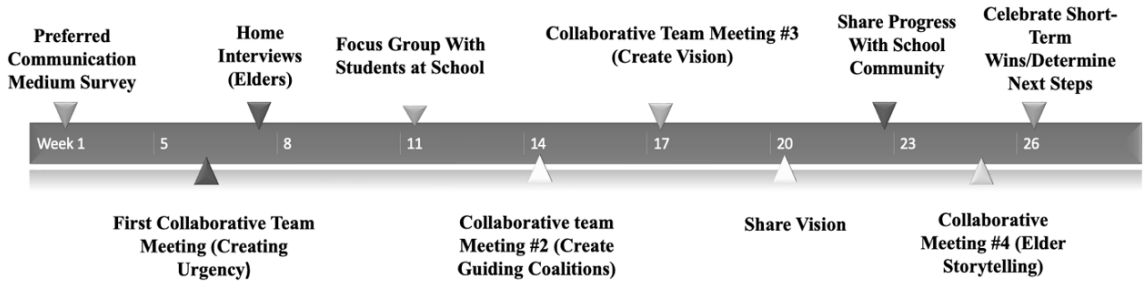
partners thorough storytelling so that the history and lived experiences of inequities can be shared and a positive path forward can be forged (Ali et al., 2021). As key messages, milestones, and wins become apparent, repetition of these components through communication mediums such as newsletters, social media platforms, emails, school website, electronic messaging boards within MPS, Google meet recordings, and hardcopies of reports for those who need them, would be an integral part of the change communication process. Repetition of key messages, milestones, and wins would ensure that the change vision is revisited frequently and that change messaging becomes synonymous with everyday language in MPS and with community partners (Dimbleby & Burton, 2020). Additionally, with each school in SHSD having a communications manager to communicate important messaging from the school, there exists a real opportunity to utilize this expertise to not only share the work being done, but also celebrate the work and contributions of everyone. All of which can be done in a very timely and consistent manner.

Reflecting on communication strategies, being cognizant of who is on the guiding coalition, and how data will be gathered are important steps in the change process (Kotter, 2014). A survey sent out by the communications manager at MPS, for instance, to gather data on what communication mediums work best for community partners would be an effective leadership practice that would be responsive to individual needs and increase participation (Katz et al., 2018; Popovska et al., 2021). Furthermore, focus groups, Q&A sessions, monthly meetings, survey, interviews, and emails (Dempster & Robbins, 2017), would be important information gathering tools. An established timeline for this would be over a twenty-six-week period to start. Elders have suggested in the past that the best time to consult with Indigenous people would be in the second half of the school year potentially commencing in February. Elders have indicated that the fall and winter months are used primarily for hunting and fishing and that the likelihood

of Indigenous people being in attendance to share knowledge would be unlikely for many. The timeframe from February to June would honor traditions of Indigenous people and would also ensure more Indigenous people participate in the change initiative by sharing their knowledge. Figure 5 demonstrates the initial proposed twenty-six-week timeline.

Figure 4

Communication Strategies



Note: Figure 5 outlines the communication strategies and timeline constructed with Indigenous Elders.

Framing Issues, Questions and Responses

The most significant way I can frame issues from various audiences is ensuring that the urgency created by the existing data is the forefront of the discussion (Kotter, 2014). Framing issues properly through existing evidence and presenting them in a way that everyone can understand would help those who have questions about the validity of the work being done to embrace the very real concerns that this DiP outlines (Kotter, 2014). Furthermore, prioritizing the need for collaboration and teamwork would not only keep community partners engaged, but it would also permit constant communication so that questions can be easily responded to (Leithwood, 2021). Collaboration and teamwork could also potentially limit the need for questions and responses as community partners would be working closely with each other during the change process. One of the biggest things that needs to be done is showing people why

improving inequitable conditions for Indigenous students matters. In doing that, there is a level of vulnerability that must be showed where personal experiences of racism and inequity are shared by Indigenous people (Shrivastava et al., 2022).

Why this work is being done? Why are we adding more work to an already busy profession? and Why is this change initiative is different than past change initiatives? are examples of anticipated inquiries from community partners. However, being transparent, honest, ensuring community partners have the right information, communicating proactively, and sharing important information the whole way through the process will potentially mitigate some of that deficit thinking. If that can be achieved, foundational pieces of trust and connection will be fostered and genuine change is possible for Indigenous students within classrooms at MPS.

Giving Voice to the Voiceless

The most significant thing that needs to happen within the MPS context is having Elders sharing their histories through storytelling (Fernández-Llamazares & Cabeza, 2017). Through these narratives, Elders are challenging current beliefs of MPS educators and community partners by communicating personal, vulnerable examples of racism (Shrivastava et al., 2022; Brantmeier & McKenna, 2020). This would be a huge paradigm shift as it is not uncommon for non-Indigenous community partners to assume leadership roles and dominate conversations. In the model I am proposing and with the assistance of the guiding coalition as well as democratic and transformative leadership approaches, Elders and Knowledge Keepers would lead the conversations while non-Indigenous leaders would contribute in a supportive role by listening (Robinson et al., 2021). Kotter suggests that seventy-five percent of people need to believe that change is essential when urgency is created (Kotter, 2008). If that is indeed the case, creating a team comprised of those who believe in that urgency will be extremely significant. As important

as it is to have a coalition at the school level, it is not uncommon to have multiple coalitions (Farris et al., 2009). Fortunately, two coalitions have already been established within the MPS context with faculty and with the school's Indigenous student focus group. The third coalition that needs to be established would be made up of Indigenous and non-Indigenous members of the community, faculty, senior leadership, parents, and students. This would certainly give everyone a voice, promote collaboration, garner trust, and foster positive relationships between people (Hackman, 2017).

Finally, students have one of the most powerful voices in education. They are important in change efforts to Indigenous education as students help shape their lives and the lives of their peers (Mitra et al., 2012). Students also provide valuable insight on how to address the problems of the school, as well as provide feedback on policy at the jurisdictional and school levels (Mitra, 2007). With MPS having an Indigenous focus group coalition in place for students in grades 4-9, leveraging ideas and solutions to existing problems through the perspectives of Indigenous students could be just as important of a communication strategy as having Indigenous sharing wisdom through storytelling and counternarratives.

Moving Research to Knowledge

Knowledge mobilization represents the multidirectional processes that moves research to action (Ziam et al., 2024). The purpose of the change improvement plan is to improve Indigenous educational opportunities for students, but in doing so, the mobilization of community partners to determine the future vision of the work that needs to be done is of paramount importance (Kotter, 2014; Reano, 2020). Members of the guiding coalition, specifically the communications manager, would be responsible for transmitting information through communication platforms outlined earlier in this chapter. The information shared,

however, would be decided by the members of the coalition so the team remains in sync, a part of the process, and keeps democratic and transformative leadership approaches intact (Gunter, 2013). Additionally, the messages shared would be tailored to the audiences receiving them as well as bring credibility to the guiding coalition for the work being done (Hess et al., 2020; Viscogliosi et al., 2020).

A four-stage four-phase plan to take the necessary steps to get to the preferred future is described below. These phases include a call-to-action phase, the development of a knowledge mobilization strategy phase, the design and implementation of knowledge mobilization capabilities, and an evolve and sustain phase. Appendix F outlines the Knowledge Mobilization plan and each of the phases.

Phase 1: Call to Action

The call-to-action phase includes identifying the current state of Indigenous education within the MPS context and the province of Alberta. This fits with Kotter's first stage of his change model where urgency is created to move people to action (Kotter, 2014). In this phase, organizational resources are examined to see how MPS can move to the preferred future for Indigenous students. From here, Kotter's second stage is employed and a larger guiding coalition is enlisted to help foster the change that needs to take place (Kotter, 2014). As the title of phase one implies, the call to action requires community partners to come together in collaboration to help mitigate the inequities that exist for Indigenous student in MPS classrooms to get to the desired future.

Phase 2: Develop A Knowledge Mobilization Strategy

Once urgency and a guiding coalition has been established, Kotter's third stage of creating vision for the desired change for Indigenous students is developed with community

partners. Democratic and transformative leadership approaches are employed with a focus on the contribution of everyone participating and being respected for their knowledge and wisdom. A particular emphasis is on ensuring Indigenous perspectives are shared by Indigenous people to help community partners understand Indigenous ways of knowing and being. A twenty-six-week timeline has been developed at a particular time of the year that would potentially solicit greater Indigenous people involvement. Once information has been disseminated and a collective vision established by community partners, using preferred communication mediums such as social media platforms, websites, school newsletter, and emails would be utilized to share the vision with the broader community. This would be in alignment with Kotter's fourth stage of the change process. Finally, communication barriers will be identified and removed to ensure communication is concise, clear, and consistent throughout the entire process (Kotter, 2014). An important consideration that needs to be recognized is the fact that Indigenous people have to be respected for the mediums of communication that they want to use to communicate and receive information. Identifying current communication mediums as potential barriers would be an essential step in this particular phase.

Phase 3: Design and Implement Knowledge Mobilization Capabilities

Utilizing the communications manager at MPS as well as leveraging available communication mediums that exist such will be used to communicate key messages in the change process. Presentations, research reports, and survey data will be presented in plain-language summaries so that all community partners are able to comprehend what the key messages are. Similarly, short-term wins will be identified by the guiding coalition to be shared with the broader community. Sharing successes is a critical aspect to keep momentum moving in a positive direction when it comes to the change process (Kotter, 2014).

Phase 4: Evolve and Sustain

Evaluating current communications mediums for their effectiveness is exceptionally important and so to is exploring other mediums that might be a better fit for the change that needs to take place. Additionally, aligning priorities from an Indigenous perspective with those of the division and school would be paramount in building and sustaining momentum as Kotter's stage seven of the change model suggests (Kotter, 2014). Through the alignment priorities, a more harmonious future can be imagined. With all community partners being part of decision-making processes, permanent change can take place and become engrained in the culture of MPS. The end result would not only the mean the completion of Kotter's eight stage change process, but more importantly, improved teacher pedagogy from teachers in MPS classrooms, and ultimately enhanced educational opportunities for Indigenous students as a result of the knowledge mobilization process.

It needs to be remembered that knowledge must be shared and mobilized from all positions that have any kind of influence on MPS so that decision-making processes are informed and collaborative (Reano, 2020). By doing so, the amplification of typically quiet voices will be greatly enhanced especially from the vantage point of Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, students, and parents. Furthermore, being in a Catholic context as MPS is, it also permits senior leadership, parish priests, and the bishops of Alberta to connect Indigenous knowledge with that of the church where a symbiotic relationship can be formed to work in tandem with each other to repair a deep pain that has long existed between the Catholic Church and Indigenous peoples (Black Elk, 2023). Linking new ideas with existing ideas would help build a bridge between community partners and foster a collaborative atmosphere.

Change Process Monitoring and Evaluation

Communication needs to be an ongoing process and as stage four of Kotter's change model suggests, consistent and constant communication of the change vision is a critical step in capturing the hearts and minds of educators to move forward for change (Deszca et al., 2020). This is reflected in the monitoring and evaluation processes as leadership at MPS would be responsible for ensuring communication strategies are ongoing and representative of the community partners. My vice-principal and I will monitor progress through ongoing observations, discussions, and feedback to the guiding coalition. Monitoring will focus on both on what is being done and how it is done so that corrective action can be taken if necessary. This will support management and promote accountability with the work being completed (Markiewicz & Patrick, 2016). Furthermore, even though it is periodic and less regular than the monitoring process, evaluation is important in the achievement of goals, effective decision-making, and identifies how program resources are used (Markiewicz & Patrick, 2016). As data is collected and analyzed, decisions at MPS can be made in order to direct or redirect the change process so desired outcomes that have been agreed upon by community partners can come to fruition (Markiewicz & Patrick, 2016). For evaluation, the feedback component is significant to MPS as meaningful participation by community partners incorporates much needed Indigenous perspectives in the change process. It needs to be pointed out that the evaluation process will determine the quality of the work being done so that conclusions and recommendations for the future can be made (Markiewicz & Patrick, 2016). Monitoring and evaluation also allow MPS community partners to assess strategies for their effectiveness to see if they are working or if new strategies need to be incorporated as alternatives to unproductive ones (Markiewicz & Patrick, 2016).

This section of the DiP will identify monitoring and evaluation processes with the goals of collaboration with community partners through distributed leadership, delivering Indigenous perspectives from Indigenous people, improving teacher pedagogy, and the overarching goal of improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students within classrooms in the MPS context. Monitoring and evaluation processes are important to keep track of progress, achievements, milestones, and targets (Fui-Hoon Nah, 2001). Furthermore, monitoring and evaluation strategies will also highlight the gaps that still exist in the MPS change process and create additional dialogue between community partners to improve current processes (Karimi et al., 2021). For example, communication strategies will have to be monitored to see if they are having the desired impact. If not, they will have to be reviewed and possibly revamped to ensure communication is effective. For the purposes of monitoring and evaluating, this DiP will employ the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle to further develop and refine the change process within the MPS context. It will also encompass data collection tools such as surveys, student focus groups, and interviews.

The Plan-Do-Study-Act Cycle

The PDSA cycle is a four-stage model that evolved from the work of an American statistician Edward Deming (Chen et al., 2021). The PDSA cycle is an iterative four stage problem-solving process used to carry out change within a particular context or organization (Langley et al., 2018). A key component to the PDSA cycle and its application to the MPS context is ensuring community partners have the ability to provide feedback about the dynamics of the school (Taylor et al., 2014). This would ensure that everyone has a voice and is an active participant as the results of the work unfold. In applying the PDSA cycle, guiding questions such as:

1. What are we trying to accomplish?
2. How will we know that a change is an improvement
3. What change can we make that will result in improvement are asked? (Chen et al., 2021).

There are four distinct steps in the PDSA cycle in helping to answer the guiding questions outlined above (Deming, 2000).

- Plan – Planning the change to enact improvement within the organization
- Do - Where change is actually carried out
- Study - Examination of results. What happened and why?
- Act - Stay the course or try something different based on results

The PDSA cycle is a desirable model for change implementation planning not only for its ability to bring about meaningful change, but also because it requires few resources and can be deployed rapidly (Chen et al., 2021). Additionally, PDSA cycles are focused on the direct causes of the problem within the organization and are able to generate evidence of improvement in a short period of time (Hamilton et al., 2020). The next section will outline each of the stages in the PDSA cycle and how they can be applied within the MPS context to monitor and evaluate change.

Stage 1: Plan

In keeping with Kotter's second stage, Stage 1 of the PDSA cycle involves creating a guiding collation. Identifying key team members with the knowledge and ability to synthesize data to produce findings to the greater community is an important task (Chen et al., 2021). In the MPS context, that would fall to the leadership team, teachers, and potentially a parent or two who have the required skillset to analyze data from surveys, focus groups, and interviews.

Surveys

Surveys with open ended questions will be administered to teachers, students, parents, and Indigenous members of the community including Elders and Knowledge Keepers to get perspectives on what can be done to improve educational learning opportunities for students. Participants will identify barriers and create potential solutions. This type of qualitative data captures what is important to participants (Braun et al., 2021). Analyzing data from a multitude of perspectives can allow a powerful argument to be made about the state of Indigenous education at MPS (McEvoy, 2020). Furthermore, surveys give voice to those people who might choose to abstain from face-to-face interactions (Davey et al., 2019). If more information is required and with support from senior leadership within the district, additional survey information can be acquired from community partners in a broader context. As response data becomes available, it would be important for the team to review the responses and identify trends. Surveys allow researchers to assess data as a whole rather than through individualistic experiences (Braun et al., 2021). Just as important, however, the team would have to monitor responses to eliminate negative and derogatory feedback that could be detrimental to the participation of those seeking to make a difference (Jankowski, 2022). Unfortunately, bias and racism does not disappear just because people are looking to do something different. Protecting the status quo happens frequently for those who benefit from power (Jankowski, 2022). In fact, being prepared for stereotypical views and perspectives from those looking to protect the status quo is a key component of the monitoring process to ensure productive information is shared.

Focus Groups

Focus groups will largely be, but not limited to, the students sharing classroom experiences of what is working and what is not. Focus groups are important because they provide

the opportunity for community partners to interact with each other (Sevilmis & Yildiz, 2022). The interaction between people helps stimulate discussion and new ideas (Parker & Tritter, 2006). Indigenous students specifically, can share personal experiences with faculty so they can hear first-hand the impact of past and present teaching methodologies. This could guide in many ways how teaching is conducted within classrooms at MPS. Creating a caring atmosphere has been critical in making this happen (Krueger, 2014). As the MPS leadership team begins to collect focus group data from students, staff, parents, and Indigenous members of the community, responses will be evaluated for progress towards Kotter's third stage, the vision for change. For Indigenous students, there exists a generational trauma from family members that went to residential schools (Cowan, 2020). This is important to recognize because the impact of residential schools continues to impact current students which is reflected in social problems and issues within the family structure (Hoffart & Jones, 2018).

Interviews

Lastly, informal interviews will be done with those Indigenous community members who would like to contribute to the work being done, but might not be able attend to meetings. Interviews are highly desirable because they allow personal interactions between people in a more intimate setting (Thunberg & Arnell, 2022). Additionally, it needs to be remembered that modern communication mediums are Western constructs and for some traditional Indigenous people, those constructs are not used when communicating with others. For most Elders and Knowledge Keepers storytelling is the most traditional way to exchange information (Hausknecht et al., 2021). As an Indigenous man, I feel it would be my duty to work with those Indigenous people who need additional support and ensure time is spent doing one on one informal interviews in a location of their preference (Thunberg & Arnell, 2022). Notes would

then be brought back to the bigger team to be evaluated with the same level of proficiency as survey and focus group data. Having members of the school and community who analyze these types of MPS data will create a multidisciplinary team that not only utilizes the expertise and perspectives of everyone, but also creates further collaborative opportunities between community partners (Chen et al., 2021).

Stage 2: Do

As data is collected and the change plan is enacted, it is important to have a systematic record that can be compiled, that can detect patterns and trends in the data, and that can be evaluated by the guiding coalition (Chen et al., 2021). A checklist will be used to identify key data sources. A checklist is an important tool because it makes data visible and accessible in a way that people can understand it (Krom & Van Den Hoven, 2022). The checklist will also be able to be shared with all MPS community partners so that patterns in the data can become obvious to everyone (Chen et al., 2021). Alberta principals commonly use this tool to review provincial and district data, and it would be an instrument that MPS faculty would be familiar with. Figure 6 is a sample template that outlines the types of data and a timeframe in which it will be collected and analyzed. It will identify deficiencies in the data and potential next steps if needed. The checklist can also be used to assess other data sources such as larger collaborative meetings as well as professional learning community meetings as discussed in chapter 2.

Table 2

MPS Data Checklist

Data Source	Collection Frequency	Trends/Patterns	Data Source (1-4 Scale)	Deficiencies	Next Steps?
Surveys	Annually	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
Focus Groups	Monthly	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
Interviews	As Needed	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD

Note: Table is amended from current MPS checklist used to evaluate school satisfaction data (MPS, 2023).

Stage 3: Study

Using the vision created by community partners and the data that was collected during stage two of the PDSA cycle, it has to be determined through the monitoring and evaluation process if progress has been made, if it was worth the investment, and what the unintended side effects might have been (Markiewicz & Patrick, 2016). In this particular stage, the best evaluative tool would be the voice of the students themselves. With Indigenous focus groups already set up at MPS, students could be the barometer to see if teacher pedagogy is becoming be more reflective and representative of their culture (Eady & Keen, 2021). Since the change being made is directly impacting students, it only makes sense that the greatest source of information if change would be working or not would be the students within MPS (Donovan, 2015).

One of the most observable monitoring targets is overall student achievement. In my current context Indigenous students are achieving ten to twenty percent lower than non-Indigenous students on provincial achievement exams and in their core courses (MPS, 2023). If students are achieving higher academically, not only is that a measure that things are progressing

in the right direction, but it stands to reason that students are more engaged with the work they are doing because assessment practices in classrooms are more culturally responsive (Miller, 2018). If culturally responsive pedagogy is applied by educators in classroom settings and if students are taught with emphasis on their cultural identities, increased engagement and achievement will follow (Claypool & Preston, 2013).

Finally, an effective monitoring strategy that would be important to recognize is classroom visits by the principal and vice-principal. The primary function of classroom visitations is to improve teacher performance so it can positively impact student achievement (Derrington & Campbell, 2018). Increased classroom visits would not only allow the MPS leadership team to observe how Indigenous ways of knowing are being taught, but it would also allow the opportunity to provide feedback for the instructional needs of educators (Cohen & Goldhaber, 2016). It also keeps teachers accountable to regulatory documents such as the TQS, LQS, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action document. This observable data can be shared with community partners, and presentations can be made by teachers to show how the impact of Indigenous knowledge has positively impacted teaching and learning. Classroom visits would also allow trends to be identified as well as commitment to the change process. Further, this provides MPS leadership with opportunities to observe which teachers are facing challenges and who still might be resistant to the process (Derrington & Campbell, 2018).

Once it can be determined how much growth has taken place due to teaching practices using Indigenous ways of knowing, potential ramifications would have to be identified. One possibility is the general well-being of students and how the change taking place is impacting them. While MPS might have thirty students identified as Indigenous, there are others who have

chosen not to identify for various reasons. It needs to be remembered that residential schools left many Indigenous people feeling ashamed of their identities and that degradation has filtered down through the generations (Rowe et al., 2020). With so much new emphasis on Indigenous perspectives, it is not unrealistic to think that this may cause some unwanted attention to Indigenous students and their families. The intention of this change implementation plan is certainly not to create embarrassment, but this is a very real consideration that the guiding coalition needs to be cognizant of when monitoring and evaluating progress.

Stage 4: Act

Once it is determined what successful change has taken place, it would be extremely important to standardize the improvement and regularly use practices that have positively contributed to the identified change (Chen et al., 2021). It would also be good practice to revisit stages of the PDSA cycle to see what else can be improved, modified or eliminated (Langley et al., 2018). At the same time, if the process was deemed to be ineffective, it would be critical for the team to go back to stage one of the PDSA cycle to develop a different approach that would be more successful. It is not uncommon for a PDSA cycle to be unsuccessful, but it would be important to determine if the cycle needs to be abandoned and another one put in its place to produce better results (Chen et al., 2021). It needs to be stated that the PDSA cycle is an ongoing process that should be revisited frequently so that positive change processes can be embedded in the organization. This also aligns with Kotter's stage eight where the new processes become a typical part of the newly created culture (Kotter, 2014).

A significant part in stage four of the PDSA cycle and similar to Kotter's stage six is the fact that there is an opportunity to celebrate wins and achievements from the work being done (Kotter, 2014). As mentioned in previous stages of the PDSA cycle, opportunities exist to

acknowledge individuals who are committed to the change process and to the overall goal of creating a brighter future for Indigenous students within the context of MPS (Boff & Cardwell, 2020). Being able to share that both within MPS itself and also externally to the greater community would be a significant recognition step to honour the people and the work being done (Chen et al., 2021). This could potentially offer encouragement and motivation for other educators at MPS who might not be experiencing the same levels of success in their classrooms. At the very least, mentorship possibilities could be explored and would be a good indication of a long-term investment in teachers toward continuous improvement within MPS classrooms.

Next Steps and Future Considerations

There is still much to consider even though a great deal of work has already been outlined in this DiP. While there is much to be learned from using critical theory, Indigenous knowledge, democratic and transformative leadership approaches, and Kotter's change model, what really needs to happen next is getting as many Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and community members involved sharing their wisdom and knowledge on a regular basis at MPS. With guiding coalitions starting to get setup at MPS with faculty and students, the creation of a third guiding coalition comprised of Indigenous community partners is the next logical step. If I fail to do that, the work outlined throughout these three chapters will be extremely difficult to accomplish. As an Indigenous leader within the MPS context, I have the most agency with students and staff. Even though that agency does extend in the community to a degree, I work in a context where there is significant distrust of the Catholic Church and the education system for Indigenous people (Barter, 2023). As solution one suggests, to truly know if this work can take the next step in creating equitable educational opportunities for Indigenous students, the truth firmly lies with building relationships and the collaboration with Indigenous people. Indigenous worldviews and perspectives for example, being told from Indigenous people, makes them

honored and respected to a level that they would not be if they were told from the vantage point of non-Indigenous people (Han & Laughter, 2019). Additionally, and in keeping with solution two and three, this would also allow culturally responsive pedagogy to develop as educators at MPS could take this knowledge from Indigenous Elders and community members and translate them into meaningful learning opportunities for students.

One of the ways that I can evaluate the effectiveness of what I am trying to do is by how many Elders/Indigenous students, parents and community members come out to participate in the change initiative (Kennedy et al., 2022). Indigenous voices need to be heard and if Indigenous worldviews are being told from the perspective of non-Indigenous people, I know I will have missed the mark (Hausknecht et al., 2021). Similarly, if Indigenous people come out, participate consistently, and take the lead, I know that my venture will be fruitful and our Indigenous students will benefit immensely. It needs to be recognized that while communication is important -- so too is listening. As long as Indigenous voices are kept at the heart of the work being done, that would be an exceptionally strong indicator that this change progress will have been productive (Tonkin et al., 2018). Indigenous storytelling in the MPS context, for example, shares information with everyone about the land, family, community, traditions, values, and beliefs over the course of history (Wilson & Yellow Bird, 2005). Furthermore, Indigenous counternarratives allow Indigenous people to share their experiences with racism and colonization. This is significant, as historically, racism has not been talked about as an oppressive force that has disregarded Indigenous people and their culture (Fong et al., 2021).

An important measure that would be significant in distinguishing if the change implementation plan has had the desired impact is the feedback that would be given by Indigenous members of the community. Furthermore, if feedback is positive, this would also be a

good indication that not only has trust been established within the organization, but positive relationships have transpired as well. The other element about feedback that would be important is that all community partners involved in the process would be able to articulate the strengths and weaknesses. Subsequently, appropriate future directions could be determined, alongside clarification of the steps to address any weaknesses therein. This would have a significant impact on future policy planning as everyone's concerns are heard and valued.

At the local level, it would be imperative for trustees and senior leadership to review policies and procedures that may promote the status quo and perpetuate inequities that have existed in the system for years. While I am in a religious education context and understand that the protection of the church is important, a serious review of guiding documents would have to be done where faith permeation and reconciliation can coexist in meaningful and positive ways. Not only do leaders have to reflect upon policies and procedures that continue to misrepresent, marginalize, and perpetuate inequities and racism, but it is also a great reminder of how individual educators need to reflect on their own personal biases (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). There is still considerable learning and unlearning that needs to be done when it comes to truly understanding Indigenous ways of knowing and being at MPS and in SHSD (Capper, 2015).

Chapter 3 Summary

In chapter three, Kotter's eight stage change model was used to describe how to effectively incorporate the change implementation plan. A knowledge mobilization plan was also outlined to demonstrate the most effective communication processes and measures needed to communicate important information to the broader MPS community. Finally, a four-stage PDSA cycle was described for the purposes of the monitoring and evaluating data. The principal focus of chapter three was on how to implement meaningful change to improve educational opportunities for Indigenous students within the context of MPS.

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Appendix A: Section 197 of the Alberta Education Act

Section 197 of the *Education Act* states that a principal of a school must

- (a) provide instructional leadership in the school
- (a.1) provide a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging
- (b) ensure that the instruction provided by the teachers employed in the school is consistent with the courses and programs of study prescribed, approved or authorized pursuant to this act
- (c) evaluate or provide for the evaluation of programs offered in the school
- (d) ensure that students in the school have the opportunity to meet the standards of education set by the Minister,
- (e) direct the management of the school
- (f) maintain order and discipline in the school and on the school grounds and during activities sponsored or approved by the board
- (g) promote co-operation between the school and the community that it serves
- (h) supervise the evaluation and advancement of students
- (i) evaluate the teachers employed in the school, and
- (j) subject to any applicable collective agreement and the principal's contract of employment, carry out the duties that are assigned to the principal by the board in accordance with the regulations and the requirements of the school council and the board

Note: Reproduced from *section 197 taken from Alberta Education Act* (2019b). Copyright 2020 by Alberta Queen's Printer.

Appendix B: Alberta Education's LQS, SLQS, & TQS

Leadership Quality Standard (LQS)

Supporting the Application of Foundational Knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit

Achievement of this competency is demonstrated by indicators such as:

a. understanding the historical, social, economic and political implications of:

• treaties and agreements with First Nations;

• legislation and agreements negotiated with Métis; and

• residential schools and their legacy;

b. aligning resources and building the capacity of the school community to support First Nations, Métis and Inuit student achievement;

c. enabling all school staff and students to gain a knowledge and understanding of, and respect for, the histories, cultures, languages, contributions, perspectives, experiences and contemporary contexts of First Nations, Métis and Inuit; and

d. pursuing opportunities and engaging in practices to facilitate reconciliation within the school community.

Superintendent Quality Standard (SQS)

Achievement of this competency is demonstrated by indicators such as:

a. supporting staff in accessing the professional learning and capacity building needed to meet the learning needs of First Nations, Métis, Inuit and all other students;

b. engaging and collaborating with neighboring First Nations and Métis leaders, organizations and communities to optimize learning success and development of First Nations, Métis, Inuit and all other students;

c. understanding historical, social, economic and political implications of:

• treaties and agreements with First Nations;

• legislation and agreements negotiated with

Métis; and

• residential schools and their legacy;

d. aligning school authority resources and building organizational capacity to support First Nations, Métis and Inuit student achievement; and

e. pursuing opportunities and engaging in practices to facilitate reconciliation within the school community.

Teaching Quality Standard (TQS)

Achievement of this competency is demonstrated by indicators such as:

a. understanding the historical, social, economic and political implications of: treaties and agreements with First Nations; legislation and agreements negotiated with Métis; and residential schools and their legacy;

b. Supporting student achievement by engaging in collaborative, whole school approaches to capacity building in First Nations, Metis and Inuit education;

c. using the programs of study to provide opportunities for all students to develop a knowledge and understanding of, and respect for, the histories, cultures, languages, contributions, perspectives, experiences and

d. Supporting the learning experiences of all students by using resources that accurately reflect and demonstrate the strength and diversity of First Nations, Metis and Inuit.

Note: Adapted from Alberta Education's Leadership Quality Standard, Superintendent Quality Standard and Teaching Quality Standard (2023a, 2023c, & 2023d).

Appendix C: Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action

Education:

7. We call upon the federal government to develop with Aboriginal groups a joint strategy to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.

10. We call on the federal government to draft new Aboriginal education legislation with the full participation and informed consent of Aboriginal peoples. The new legislation would include a commitment to sufficient funding and would incorporate the following principles:

iv. Providing sufficient funding to close identified educational achievement gaps within one generation.

ii. Improving education attainment levels and success
rates.

iii. Developing culturally appropriate curricula.

iv. Protecting the right to Aboriginal languages, including the teaching of Aboriginal languages as credit courses.

v. Enabling parental and community responsibility, control, and accountability, similar to what parents enjoy in public school systems.

vi. Enabling parents to fully participate in the education of their children.

vii. Respecting and honouring Treaty relationships.

12. We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families.

Education for Reconciliation:

62. We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:

i. Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students.

63. We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including:

i. Developing and implementing Kindergarten to Grade Twelve curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools.

ii. Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.

iii. Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.

iv. Identifying teacher-training needs relating to the above.

Note: Adapted from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action document (2015). The above Calls to Action represent guidelines that MPS faculty will follow to help bring about necessary change to the organization.

Note: Reproduced from *the Truth and Reconciliation Committee of Canada document* (2015).

Appendix D: SOWT Analysis of Mission Possible School

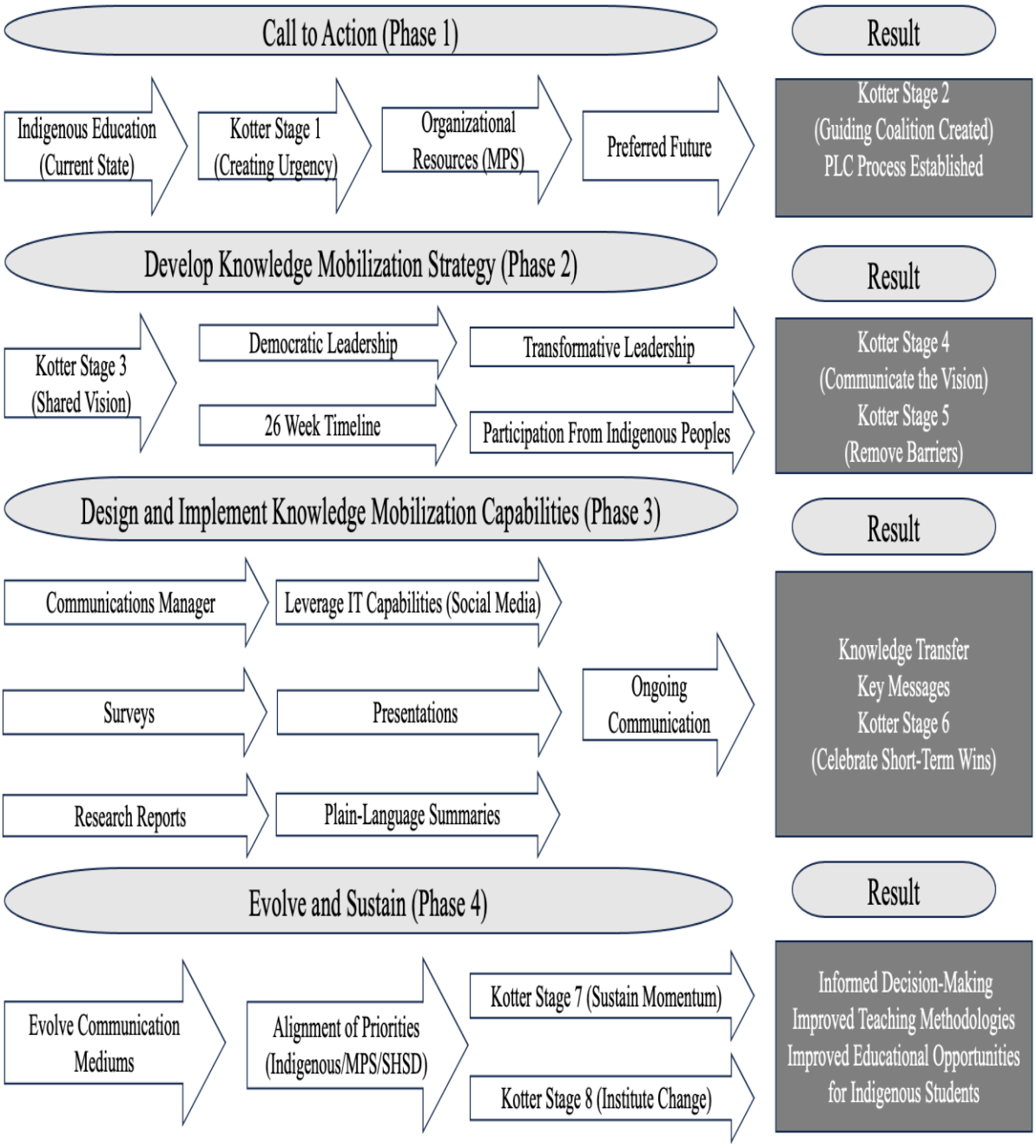
SWOT Analysis of MPS	**Helpful** to achieve goals	**Harmful** to achieve goals
Internal Factors	**Strengths** Community Partner Strengths Indigenous Principal Relationships	**Weaknesses** Lack of Cultural Understanding Mired in Status Quo Bias & Stereotypes
External Factors	**Opportunities** Storytelling Connections to the Land Professional Development	**Threats** Protection of Church Availability of Elders Funding

Note: Reproduced from Farrokhnia et al., (2023). *"A SWOT Analysis of ChatGPT: Implication for Educational Practice and Research"*, pp. 9-10. Copyright 2023 by Farrokhnia et al.

Appendix E: Kotter's Eight Stage Change Model

Note: Adapted from Kotter, J. P. (1996). *Leading Change*, Boston, MA. Copyright 1996 Harvard Business School Press.

Appendix F: Knowledge Mobilization Plan



Note: This figure illustrates the knowledge mobilization process to address the inequities for Indigenous students in education through collaboration, decision-making, and social justice. Adapted from Ziam et al., (2024) "*A scoping review of theories, models and frameworks used or proposed to evaluate knowledge mobilization strategies*" Copyright 2024 by Ziam et al.