

Second Place at the Polish Pow Wow

by

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## Abstract

This paper begins with an Indigenous buffalo teaching. It is followed by aspects of my own story of Métis cultural rediscovery. My hope is this will provide insight into why I am undertaking this writing, as well as provide a means to share information. The hypothesis of this thesis indicates that there exists a gap in knowledge and approach in education which can lead to reduced participation and success from Métis learners. A core premise indicates reclaiming a healthy and prideful identity is beneficial for learning success for Métis, both in formal educational settings, as well as informal and lifelong learning endeavors. This thesis was designed to provide some understanding of the meaningfulness of reclaiming a Métis identity.

The questions informing this study are: How does story provide insight on Métis learning?

Considering Métis history, what are ways to strengthen Métis positive identity in formal education settings?

What emerges from the author's story that may broaden understanding of Métis learning and transformative mindset?

Several themes were identified and discussed related to these questions. This thesis is organized around several chapters, each containing stories that weave in and out of the points I want to make about Métis identity, features lost and reclaimed, and education for Métis people.

## Acknowledgements

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To Poland. At a time I was rediscovering Indigenous heritage I also was reconnecting to Polish heritage as well. There were many remarkable people and places I encountered during my time there.

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List of Figures

FIGURE 1 MÉTIS LIFELONG LEARNING MODEL

23

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>List of Figures.....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Terminology.....</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Problem/Opportunity.....	4
Purpose .....	8
Autobiography.....	12
Rediscovery of Métis Identity .....	14
<b>Chapter 2: Methodology.....</b>	<b>18</b>
Storywork Introduction .....	18
Process.....	19
Research Framework.....	20
Insurgent Pedagogy .....	25
Story .....	27
Relationship.....	30
Themes .....	32
<b>Chapter 3: Tears Anger Laughter and Song (Cultural Recovery) .....</b>	<b>34</b>
Storywork Introduction .....	34

Cultural Deprivation and Reclamation.....	35
Elders/Knowledge Holders/Knowledge Keepers.....	36
Language.....	38
Strategies of Self-Preservation.....	39
<b>Chapter 4: Verbs Aren't the Only Things Subjugated (Education).....</b>	<b>42</b>
Storywork Introduction.....	42
Roots of Western Education.....	45
Self-directed and Métis Informed.....	46
Set Up for Success.....	47
<b>Chapter 5: Who Do These People Think They Are? (Identity).....</b>	<b>49</b>
Storywork Introduction.....	49
Definition.....	51
Rejection and Disempowerment.....	56
Reclamation of Healthy Identity.....	59
Richness in Culture.....	60
<b>Chapter 6: Force of Nurture (Strong Families).....</b>	<b>63</b>
Storywork Introduction.....	64
Trauma.....	64
Protective Factors.....	67
<b>Chapter 7: Valiant Unreasonableness (Resilience).....</b>	<b>71</b>

Storywork Introduction .....	71
Resilience .....	72
Resistance and Self-determination .....	74
We Must Remember.....	75
<b>Chapter 8: Playing Indian (Authenticity).....</b>	<b>77</b>
Storywork Introduction .....	77
Disingenuous Indigenous .....	79
Consolidated Cultural Identity .....	80
Cultural Misappropriation .....	82
<b>Chapter 9: Of Nature (Connection to Land).....</b>	<b>84</b>
Storywork Introduction .....	84
Place .....	86
Dispossession and Disconnection .....	87
Reconnecting.....	88
<b>Chapter 10: A Good Yarn Ties It All together (Story) .....</b>	<b>91</b>
Storywork Introduction .....	91
Wounded Spirit .....	93
Process to Undo.....	94
Rekindled Spirits.....	96
<b>Chapter 11: Discussion.....</b>	<b>100</b>

Addressing Thesis Questions .....	100
Addressing What I Did (Methods) .....	104
What Went Wrong?.....	105
Limitations .....	106
Directions for Future Study.....	107
<b>Chapter 12: Conclusion.....</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>110</b>

## Terminology

**Aboriginal/Aboriginal Peoples:** The collective noun used in the Constitution Act 1982 and includes the Indian (or First Nations), Inuit and Métis Peoples (Joseph, 2018). In this thesis, I tried to use the term “Indigenous” for consistency (a term often used interchangeably with Aboriginal), and using Aboriginal when directly quoting others’ work.

**Batoche:** The Métis community of Batoche is a national historic site in central Saskatchewan. It was the scene, in 1885, of the last significant battle of the North-West Rebellion (Hildebrandt, 2006).

**Bricolage:** Construction or creation (in art or literature) from a diverse range of available things.

**Colonization:** Colonization is a process of gaining control of land and resources. It involves one group of people, the colonizers, coming into an area and dominating the people who are already living there.

**Culture:** Culture should be regarded as a set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or social group. It encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs (United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2002, as quoted in Michell et al., 2008)

**Cultural identity:** In this thesis, the term cultural identity will be used to refer to a complex set of features that together indicate how one thinks of oneself in relation to Indigenous peoples. It includes one's perception or belief that one is Métis (Berry, 1999).

**Debrouillard:** A combination of, being good at finding solutions, being creative, having a lot of street smarts (or country smarts), being a jack of all trades, and being able to make a life for one’s self and one’s family. Most importantly, it refers to perseverance and a willingness to carry on in the face of challenges or setbacks (Kirmayer et al., 2011, p.88).

**Debrouillardise:** A psychological, physical, and spiritual way of being that has contributed greatly to Métis survival and resilience (Kirmayer et al., 2011).

**Elder:** Elders are recognized because they have earned the respect of their community through wisdom, harmony and balance of their actions in their teachings. Being an Elder is not gender specific. One common trait amongst Indigenous Elders is a deep spirituality that influences every aspect of their lives and teachings. They strive to show by example by living their lives according to deeply ingrained principles, values and teachings. Not all communities are the same and it really depends on the culture or community to define what makes an Elder (Joseph, 2012).

**In a Good Way:** “In a good way” is an expression used by many North American Indigenous communities to denote participation that honors tradition and spirit (Flicker et al., 2015).

**Indigenous Peoples:** Peoples in independent countries who are regarded as Indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions (International Labour Organization, 1989). When speaking of peoples, as opposed to people, it is in recognition of collective rights; that each Indigenous people is a distinct entity with its own cultural and political rights.

**Intergenerational Trauma:** Trauma experienced by family members that is passed from one generation to the next (Menzies, 2007).

**Knowledge Holder/Knowledge Keeper:** Members of indigenous and local communities who are knowledgeable in various aspects and forms of indigenous knowledge; such members are recognized in their communities for their expertise and depth of knowledge (Ngulube, 2016). Each First Nation has a term that defines these wisdom keepers, knowledge keepers, medicine

people, healers and ceremonial persons. The term “Elder” is a contemporary English word commonly used for these individuals. Many of these individuals are not comfortable with this term, as it does not adequately describe their role. Today, some are reverting to the traditional term in their own language (“Elders”, n.d.). In this work I tried to use terms “Elder”, “Knowledge Holder”, and “Knowledge Keeper” in reference to how these individuals were described to me or described themselves.

**Métis:** A person who self-identifies as Métis, is of historic Métis Nations Ancestry, is distinct from other Indigenous Peoples and is accepted by the Métis Nation. This term is sometimes used more generally for someone who is of mixed ancestry, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Written with a small m, métis is the French word for "mixed", and it is used sometimes in a general sense for people of dual Indian-White ancestry. Capitalized, Métis generally refers to people of the post-contact indigenous people, the Métis Nation. It may variously refer to a distinctive socio-cultural heritage, a means of ethnic self-identification, and sometimes a political and legal category, more or less narrowly defined (Brown, "Métis", in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, n.d.). Use of the terms "Métis," "Métis people" and "Métis peoples" is meant to refer to diverse groups of "Métis peoples" in an inclusive manner (Short, 2011).

**Métissage:** A research approach and a literary praxis that invites writers to braid strands of their own writing with that of others (Hasebe-Ludt and Jordan, 2011). The word origin of métissage comes from the Latin *mixticius*, meaning the weaving of a cloth from different fibres (Mish, 1990)

**Michif:** The language of the Métis people of Canada, who are the descendants of First Nations (mainly Cree, Nakota, and Ojibwe) and fur trade workers of European ancestry (mainly French, English and Scottish). Michif combines Cree and Métis French, a variety of Canadian French,

with some additional borrowing from English and Indigenous languages of the Americas such as Ojibwe and Assiniboine (Rhodes, 1977; Bakker, 1997).

**Solo Quest:** A vision quest is a rite of passage in some North American Indigenous cultures, usually consisting of a series of ceremonies led by Elders and supported by the person's community. The process includes a fast for four days and nights, alone at a sacred site in nature which is chosen for this purpose. Dreams or visions may occur and may involve natural symbolism, such as animals or forces of nature (McWhorter, 1940).

**Spirit Spot:** A place for quiet introspection and intimate nature observation. "North American Indigenous peoples recognize the special powers that could come to a person by placing oneself in the right frame of mind and the right location" (Henley, 1996, pp. 82-83).

## Chapter 1: Introduction

*“When a great storm brews up on the prairie, buffalo often sense it coming for days prior. All the other animals on the prairie will attempt to travel around that storm, in the hopes of avoiding it. Many perish in this attempt, going too far out of their way. The buffalo sees the storm coming and turns directly heading into it, knowing the shortest path to the other side is to go through it (Lickers, personal communication, September 5, 2005).”*

This important teaching has been instrumental in my journey of personal rediscovery as Métis, so I honor Mike Lickers for sharing this and creating a space for me to understand some depth of its meanings.

The Métis in Canada today are on a path of renewal. Having endured hardship, they are on the cusp of rejuvenation. This emergence and resurgence of Métis identity is happening through a rebirth of traditional knowledge, cultural expression, and political mobilization (Gaudry, 2014; Métis Centre, National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2008). According to Hogson-Smith, a central goal for current Métis education is the reclamation and preservation of the history, culture, language, identity and relationship of Métis to the land (2005).

A gap in learning exists in Canada, one that has poorly understood Métis identity, history, and has failed to incorporate Métis learning aspects into the learning experience. Lack of knowledge and understanding exists around learning needs and educational supports. Therefore, increased awareness of effective principles and respectful recognition of identity should improve educational outcomes.

The hypothesis which forms the core idea of this thesis is that reclaiming a healthy and prideful identity is beneficial for learning success for Métis, both in formal educational settings but also through informal and lifelong learning endeavors. This thesis will look at Métis cultural

identity reclamation. This reclamation involves relearning and rediscovering lost traditions and a culture that is powerful and meaningful for many people of Métis heritage. The current generation inspires awe, encompassing many who refuse to take on a negative image of a Métis identity, and instead identify with a sense of pride and acceptance. Identifying is not always a simple or an easy path. For many, embracing this identity as a positive one involves reframing narratives to combat negative impressions or lack of understanding. This is a key piece of the reclamation of identity. There is a deep-rooted history that has informed previous generations' perceptions of being Métis. Current generations are among the first to be prideful in reclaiming what has been lost or denied and are working on changing attitudes (internally and externally) developed by at least 100 years of colonial policies (L. Higgins, personal correspondence, Oct. 15, 2018).

Many Métis today live in urban settings, disconnected from frequent contact with the land, with fewer occasions to be inspired by the values and traditions of Métis ancestors. Disconnection from culture or traditional teachings present both challenges and opportunities. Reconnecting requires seeking to gain more traditional knowledge to incorporate into one's personal worldview. Sharing culture and finding ways to instill these into community ensure the culture thrives. Indigenous peoples themselves must lead and control the process of change, so it is up to Métis people to retain their culture, language, past and current traditions (Michell et al., 2008; Truth and Reconciliation Summary, 2015).

The questions that inform this study are:

How does story provide insight on Métis learning?

Considering Métis history, what are ways to strengthen Métis positive identity in formal education settings?

What emerges from the author's story that may broaden understanding of Métis learning and transformative mindset?

To help answer these questions, this thesis incorporates personal narrative. The telling of my story is important for this study, illustrating who I am and where I come from, along with some context for a deepening of understanding towards identity reclamation. I describe a disconnect I had from my own Métis cultural learning and how an Indigenous Rediscovery camp reconnected me and set me on a new path.

This thesis is organized around several chapters, each containing stories that weave in and out of the points I want to make about Métis identity, features lost and reclaimed, and education for Métis people. Concepts were explored using a storywork model to introduce ideas, tied to literature review, with the hope this knowledge is presented in a way deemed worthwhile from a Métis lens. Considerations for Métis learning practices will be examined, including the importance of strengthening the cultural identity in education and providing a better basis for success (Truth and Reconciliation Summary, 2015, P. 149).

“All students in Canada deserve a learning environment that they are proud to attend and that gives them hope. We want the same hope as every other Canadian student” (*Shannen Koostachin, Attawapiskat First Nation*).

### **Problem/Opportunity**

Some contributing factors relevant to the views of educational experience, success within or lack thereof for Métis learners. The history of mainstream education began with exclusion, as Métis generally did not have access to public schools (Hogson-Smith, 2005; Michell et al., 2008). When education did become widely available, students attending residential schools received an inferior education, primarily designed to integrate and eradicate Indigenous cultures.

In 1903, the first Métis residential school opened at Saint-Paul-des-Métis (now Alberta). In 1937, Indian Affairs issued a policy directive ending the enrollment of Métis children in residential schools. The federal government didn't want to have to pay for Métis education (Chartrand et al., 2006). Prevailing attitudes assumed Métis were fit only for menial work and labour. It was considered a waste to prepare them for anything more (Education, A., 2005; Michell et al., 2008). Residential Schooling has been a well utilized model of colonization, notably established in British colonies including Scotland and Ireland, based on a model of English boarding schools (Brokenleg, 2015). Those who succeed in this model have increased likelihood of success within society. English youth adapted. For Indigenous children, it was tragic (Brokenleg, 2015).

The policies and programs of assimilation have been failures, leaving a cultural emptiness in Métis learning. Stemming from this history, education continues to present

challenges and barriers. The reinforcement of western values often occurs through forgetting other values and failing to question how these became the dominant ones (Wane, 2008). Certain values permeate, such as an outdated notion of progress, purporting anyone who does not follow that same trajectory be viewed as lesser and heralding European superiority as civilizing the untamed wilderness to make it habitable (Battiste, 2013; Donald, 2004; LaDuke, 1994). These values are defined by examples such as technological advancement and economic growth, thus painting Indigenous peoples as backward and passive recipients of European knowledge. Extending the line of thinking that wilderness must be tamed or vanquished has reinforced a sense of superiority of so-called civilized over primitive peoples, resulting in a belief that over time people will become more civilized and therefore some people have the *right* to civilize other people (LaDuke, 2005).

The current dominant educational model is not the pinnacle of human knowledge transfer, nor is it the sole or best model. Western is just another way of knowing, not one more legitimate than Indigenous systems, yet educators have often assumed a problem resides in Indigenous students and what is projected onto them is a lack of capacity (Battiste, 2013; Davis, 2013; Simpson, 2002). False assumptions position Indigenous students as inherently inferior; being taught their cultures are substandard and wrong (Education, A. 2005). Often, Métis students feel pressured to renounce their cultural beliefs, language, and norms in order to assimilate into the majority culture (MacLean and Wason-Ellam, 2006, p.27).

Detrimental effects of this system include abuse, neglect, systemic deconstruction of Indigenous cultures and a lack of real education, either in social interaction or academic or industrial competency (The Truth and Reconciliation Report, 2015). For the most part, education as a collective experience for Métis has been unsatisfactory, marginalizing, disenfranchising and

ineffective at best; traumatic at its worst. This has resulted in erosion of spirit that defeats life purposes and creates multiple blocks to learning, all of which contribute to lower rates of university education for Métis and within the skilled workforce (Battiste, 2007; Chansonneuve, 2005; Dorion & Yang, 2000).

In education, there is a need for culturally appropriate Métis-specific discussion and practices (Kearns and Anuik, 2015). There is a lack of research directed at and accessible to Indigenous peoples and their communities. The marginalization and de-authorization of Indigenous voices on culture and history resulted in lost control of Métis knowledge bases (Gaudry, 2011). This leaves little of relevance for Indigenous people to gravitate towards, reinforcing the alienation of Indigenous culture. Few post-secondary educational programs in Canada root their curriculum in Indigenous languages, content, processes, perspectives, philosophies, knowledge and Indigenous methods of teaching and learning (Kirmayer et al., 2007; Simpson, 2002). Indigenous spaces on campus are sometimes unwelcoming to Métis students, leading some to avoid these spaces altogether (Gaudry, 2012).

One consideration is the gauge for success and the lens through which this is judged. Success may be viewed differently by Métis learners, as will be discussed using the framework of a Métis Lifelong Learning Model.

Connected to the problem that schooling often remains inadequate for Métis students is an often-opaque understanding of Métis identity. A question often asked and not clearly understood is “Who are the Métis?” As this is an area of misunderstanding, these learners are often lumped into a larger category of Aboriginal or First Nations. Métis identity is often downplayed, disregarded or remains static in a period of history long past. This is important because many Métis students credit academic success to the development of positive identity as

students. Strong cultural identity fosters self-esteem and confidence enabling successful completion of their degree or diploma (Dorion & Yang, 2000, p. 185).

A poorly understood and often forgotten history presents an opportunity to provide an educational experience that is framed within an Indigenous pedagogy of learning; one that is self-determined and uses models of education structured by Métis culture. As we will see, supporting Métis learning practices is fulfilled through spiritual and ancestral teachings, cultural traditions, remembering ceremony, returning to homelands, emancipation from the myths of colonialism, passing healthy behaviour on to those that come after, building self-esteem in the celebration of Métis survival and achievements, all to assert cultural identity (Alfred and Cornthassle, 2005; Kirmayer et al., 2009; Lavallée and Poole, 2010; Michell et al., 2008).

Within these challenges lies opportunity to help those that want to better understand, to harness the value of hybrid thinking and worldview of the Métis and to improve learning experiences for Métis students. Additionally, some say that Métis are best positioned to lead the change necessary for a better future and that it is the Métis who have the ability to help Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike (Fiola, 2015; L. Higgins, personal correspondence, Oct. 15, 2018).

The rationale of this project is best encapsulated by the following:

we must cherish our inheritance;

we must preserve our nationality for the youth of our future;

the story should be written down to pass on

-Louis Riel

## **Purpose**

Today, many Métis are proud, confident, and comfortable with heritage; they cherish it and work to promote and build community. Yet, there are also many people who are unsure, apprehensive, and hold onto a degraded view of Métis identity. Indigenous students are more likely to develop a positive self-concept when their cultures are valued through integration of their knowledge and heritage into a system that respects Indigenous ways of knowing, allows them to embrace and recognize their individual gifts, and celebrate who they are instead of making them doubt themselves (Education, A., 2005; Henley, 1996). Understanding Métis from a respectful and supportive approach is valuable. In this role, teachers act as guides, mediators, consultants, and advocates for the students, helping to effectively connect their culturally-based and community-based knowledge to learning experiences (MacLean and Wason-Ellam, 2006, p.38). Often students who have become discouraged by inaccessibility and have disengaged from school can rekindle their interest in learning through self-determined education using models structured by Indigenous cultural experience (Hampton, 1995; Henley, 1996).

The author David Bouchard, in his poem “The Secret of Your Name” describes reclaiming a Métis identity as an adult, recognizing the loss of traditions and cultural artifacts

such as songs and stories. He writes “I am one of many stepping forward to say that I am proud to be of mixed blood; that I am proud to be Métis” (Bouchard, 2009, p.2). I hope to highlight a renewed understanding of Métis peoplehood that will help to recover strength, self-esteem and dignity, which perhaps will add to a better life for Métis who feel disconnected. For Métis, I hope my research will help to understand why the identity has been degraded, allowing for an acceptance of validated, positive self-worth that is part of a greater whole and assist those reclaiming to “remake the world and renew themselves” (Gaudry, 2011, p. 48). In effect, we must look at what was taken away to map out what to regain.

There has always been an inherent resistance and a fierce proudness that has resulted in a resilience, including a stubborn refusal to give up, which has brought Métis to a point where they may flourish. There are many educational considerations that are hopeful, supportive and recommended. The intent for this research would be to produce insight to aid in the development and deepening of understanding of Métis-specific learning principles, values and identity. Many Métis continue to hold high hopes that education can help close the gaps between Métis and non-Indigenous (Battiste, 2007). Another goal of this research is to present Métis knowledge as worthwhile and able to stand on its own as an Indigenous paradigm. Acknowledgement of the full equality of Indigenous knowledge and ways should add to and provide a kind of education reflective of Métis learners.

The thoughts of Belcourt summarize the ultimate purpose of the research: “I am proud of the Métis people, and I want them to be proud of themselves” (2006, p.191). Seemingly a simple sentiment, there are many who grew up very much ashamed of who they are and only recently have started to be proud of who they are as Indigenous people (Berry, 1999).

Historic implications bear on this, with long-standing stereotypical beliefs harnessed to enact a colonizing goal of dismantling culture, language, displacement off land and labelling all Indigenous people as of secondary worth (providing Métis their own special category of worthlessness- that of traitorous half-breed). Yet, there remains a beautiful, resolute culture which has been held together during awful historical periods. It is worth delving into some of the historic and current trauma that informs this identity, to better understand what requires transformation. This will be in combined with recognition of a resilience that maintained the survival of a people.

Pride in ancestry is a worthwhile pursuit. We should want Indigenous people to learn more about their culture, thereby fostering the re-emergence and rebuilding of cultural heritage. Fostering healthy Métis learning is also enriching collective knowledge, potentially increasing leadership models and adding to the global knowledge pool. One hope is that our systems of education will nurture and facilitate the education of divergent thinking, non-conformist, and dynamic potential leaders. “The planet does not need more successful people. But it does desperately need more peacemakers, healers, restorers, storytellers and lovers of every kind. It needs people who live well in their places. It needs people of moral courage willing to join the fight to make the world habitable and human” (Orr, 2004, p. 15).

While this thesis is tied to academia, Métis people were deemed the intended target group. This thesis was intended to add to Métis knowledge, used for and by Métis themselves. The survival of Indigenous cultures is imperative. Knowledge must be passed along, reinforcing Indigenous Research as designed to convey real world knowledge and to be practical, not confined within academia. Métis have a role to help themselves and others better understand some of the complexities and challenges of identity, both at an individual and community level.

Reinforcing the idea of giving back to community, presenting my research findings back to my Métis community in a public presentation will be important regarding accountability. This motivates me to contribute, seek knowledge and to give back through use of my skills and privilege to effect change, decrease stereotypes and increase understanding.

As David Bouchard (2009) states: “I finally know my heritage.”

I speak for no one community, although my ancestral and spiritual homeland is among the scrub poplar and wolf willow rustling along the banks of the South Saskatchewan River, the fiddle as it echoes through the empty coulees at Batoche- the very place my ancestors fought to keep our nation alive (Scofield, 1999).

### **Autobiography**

Who am I to be doing all this? This accusation is directed both outwardly and inwards: “Not Indian Enough”. Facing this doubt, I turn to the path that others have forged: “I also know that I just might not be the Indian we all had in mind when we think of Indigenous research. Much of my learning about being Indian I learned at school, at university, and through my lived experiences; not through direct teaching from Elders or life on the land. Much of my learning comes not from traditional stories heard in person, but instead from reading text. But I am an Indian and I have a story to tell” (Cardinal, 2010, p. 3). I am Métis, learning and relearning my culture. Our duty is to use our knowledge to give back.

Who I am and where I come from is central to my research, so in telling my story it seems fitting to address these questions (Wilson, 2008). To provide introduction in the manner I have been instructed as is customary for North American Indigenous cultures, I must acknowledge myself culturally and geographically. This is an important practice within Métis oral traditions, done before continuing to speak on issues of interest to contemporary Métis, thereby linking identity, kinship and grounding onto geography, family, and ancestors: declaring my “place connections” (Adese, 2014; McGuire, 2010). I am Métis through the maternal side of my family, and Polish-Canadian on my paternal side; born and raised in southeastern

Saskatchewan. I hold fond memories of growing up there and feel “of the prairies”. I no longer live there, but maintain connections (McGuire, 2010). I maintain these connections through regular visits, through stories, and kinship. Métis families understand their relatedness to one another, especially through conversational traditions rooted from oral histories which tend to stress genealogy (Anderson, 2014; Gaudry, 2014; Hulan and Eigenbrod, 2008). People make meaning from story. Values, beliefs and teachings are an important Métis tradition shared and passed from generation to generation through storytelling and teaching (Métis Centre, National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2008). I learned family history often through stories told at family gatherings, and periodic trips to Batoche, which is an important historical site in the struggle and resistance of the Métis. My mother’s people come from, and mostly remain, in the areas near Batoche and Duck Lake of Saskatchewan. I am from a proud and distinguished Métis family. Many ancestors comprised the Provisional Government and fought in the 1885 Northwest Rebellion/Resistance/Uprising, including Lepines, Pilon, Bruces, and Boyers. These stand alongside other notable related family names in Métis history including Legaré. These were people who believed strongly that their rights and way of life were being infringed. In the words of my cousin:

“Learning where I came from is the most meaningful fact for me. When I was first told my family’s oral history I was overwhelmed with pride as my family did not sit back during the 1885 rebellion, instead they did everything they could to help out their Métis culture” (Legaré, 2012, p.78).

Proud and defiant to the end, participating in the rebellion had a lasting impact on family legacy.

## **Rediscovery of Métis Identity**

“For Métis, how much easier and happier it would have been to start knowing the glory of our people and their accomplishments. The truth would have given us all strength and pride, but instead we followed in the debased path cut out for us by the white image makers” (Adams, 1989, p. 98). While I did not experience traditional teachings at a young age, there were traditions, gatherings, and spending time in the bush. I hold reminisces “inextricably connected to memories of culturally linked sustenance activities such as catching my first fish or picking Saskatoon berries” (Lowan-Trudeau, 2015, p. 40). “The process of rediscovering [one’s Indigenous heritage] is one thousands of young people have made” (The Métis Question, 2015). Finding those roots can be important, perhaps vital.

Land based, experiential education is meaningful for me, as it profoundly expanded my personal awareness and set me on my current path of informal and formal learning. In my mid-twenties, I began to earnestly reflect on what being Métis meant to me. At that period in my life, I attended Ghost River Rediscovery program. This was a land based experiential education camp based on Indigenous knowledge, drawing from wisdom of Elders. This was the first formal approach to traditional Indigenous knowledge I had experienced. It introduced me to learning from the land and on the land through cultural and spiritual perspectives. This was a mixed approach with fun, camaraderie and practical knowledge components. It was the first time in my life I slept in a teepee, had long talks with an elder, sat at a sacred fire, held an eagle feather, participated in sweat lodge, and coupled a solo quest with fast. I learned survival skills, shelter building, immersion in nature, and was introduced to local flora and fauna. I spent time learning about my ancestors and more about who I was culturally and spiritually. All aspects were intentionally from an authentic Indigenous perspective and teachings.

Although I spent much time in nature in my youth, the first time I dedicated time with nature containing a spiritual component (solo fasting vision quest), it was a remarkable experience. Nestled in the beautiful Rocky Mountains, on the traditional territory of the Stoney Peoples, equipped with two litres of water, a sleeping bag, lighter and tarp I set out for a 3-day solo vision quest. My preparations mainly comprised hurriedly gathering wood, scratching out a fire pit and setting up my tarp shelter, as it was evident a thunderstorm was blowing in. It arrived shortly, complete with hail and then a downpour. I hunkered down and collected additional drinking water run-off from the tarp. Much of my time was focused on precision tuning of the fire, moving and regulating a miniscule flame to adjust for rain, optimize heat and light while not engulfing my tarp into a fire ball death trap. The storm eventually subsided. I stayed up late, soaking in the atmosphere after being soaked by the elements. Despite wondering about bear encounters and harsh weather, I ended up enjoying a deep sleep, satisfied in my accomplishment of surviving these tests. I don't want to overly romanticize the experience: I never saw a bear, but by day two I was so weak and listless from not having food, I could have been mauled by a squirrel.

Unaccustomed to fasting, I became lethargic and fatigued for much of the first day. My only visions were of lasagna. I mostly rested, in the sun, feeling unable to do much. Groggy, and with clouded thinking, I felt self-conscious of my inability and perceived weakness. Then, remarkably, by afternoon I had a "second wind": mental acuity returned, as did physical strength. This rite of initiation contained elements, including separation from everyday life, entry into a liminal state (through fasting and other ceremonial activities), assumption of a new identity and the feeling a strong sense of belonging to a community (Kirmayer et al., 2009). Spiritual preparations were important and reassuring. Other ceremonies included sweat lodge, cleansing,

and requesting assistance through helpers (camp supports, ancestors, spirit guides). Discussions with Elders provided necessary encouragement. The mental, emotional, physical and spiritual features of this experience were rewarding and daunting. Just having endured was an accomplishment. I attained a greater sense of worth and mastery (“I can do this”), as well as a sense of belonging (“this is something my ancestors would have done”). Deep knowledge was shared from a perspective different than I was accustomed to. Being awake to possibility allowed for assigning meaning to this experience and so it was transformational both in personal narrative and self-concept.

It was an experience I have a hard time adequately describing to this day because it was so unexpectedly profound. Transformational experiential learning on the land allowed me to shift my understanding of being Métis to a deeper level, to one where I was confidently proud of my heritage, my people and our strengths. This rediscovery experience expanded my personal awareness. Through it, I experienced a transcendent shift in mindset, as well as a renewed pride and ownership of identity (Hingangaroa-Smith, 2003). Though not completely transformed, I was a better version of the person I was than the day before. This transformative process I am undertaking is not linear and compounding, rather it is a combination of graduated and epochal transformations (Mezirow, 2006). Meaning, I continue to experience both large and small changes intermixed with each other.

The above description includes educational elements that support reclaiming of a healthy Métis identity through specific learning approaches. These include: humor, authentic approaches, connection to community, strength based reframing narratives, viewing the information imparted as worthy, transformational experiential education pedagogy, land-based learning,

accomplishment, traditions, ancestral technology and ancestral living (Henley, 1996; Lickers, 2008).

## Chapter 2: Methodology

“It is no wonder that narrative is the primary means for passing knowledge within tribal traditions, for it suits the fluidity and interpretive nature of ancestral ways of knowing” (Kovach, 2009, p.94).

### Storywork Introduction

*There is this blanket that I possess, and I cherish it as one of my most prized belongings. It is a patchwork quilt, hand stitched by my mother. It is made up of square patches of fabric, all with different designs but fashioned into a pattern. On it, she had photographs printed onto cloth. Sewn into this blanket are family pictures, spanning generations. Some of these people are no longer with us, some I never met; alongside dear friends and close family members. Some pictures are humorous, some are of hard times. Many document great moments in life: graduations, weddings, births. Each picture contains a story, and all are woven together in random form, yet when viewed together hold meaning.*

For the methodology of this thesis I inherently gravitated towards what I feel are Métis approaches (theory cobbled together with an intent for practicality, while also allowing for story, emotions and humor to contribute to the academic work’s appeal). Integration of several styles allows for a “Métis method: re-creating, adapting and reformulating a style to suit Métis interests- working with what they are given and maintaining their distinctive style” (Métis Centre, National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2008, p.9). These aspects felt reflective of the decorative flourishes Métis are renowned for and allowed for a storytelling presentation within academic form. A combination of personal narrative, story, and reading research were employed

in a way I believe reflects Métis ways of doing things. This methodology is representative of my own identity as Métis (Lowan Trudeau, 2015). Like my patchwork quilt, the process of collecting data entailed gathering bits and pieces of information that came to form a connected pattern, stitched together in the end.

## **Process**

In forming and posing questions that were designed to address the hypothesis of this thesis, it was important to consider a suitable approach and methodology of going about answering those, while also attempting to do so in a respectful way. Indigenous and mainstream qualitative research methods have both been successfully used by a variety of Indigenous scholars who have recognized the importance of drawing on Indigenous wisdom and ethics to inform research that is relevant for Indigenous communities (Lowan-Trudeau, 2012; Kovach, 2010; Wilson, 2008).

As ideas were gathered and research done, emerging themes then developed. Seemingly indirectly connected concepts emerged, and it was not clear what to do with them. Story was an important construct to convey messages and learnings, both implicit and explicit. Narrative approaches are utilized to support an auto-ethnography approach, incorporating a self-study of my journey as a Métis person on a path of learning and reclaiming positive Métis identity.

Métissage, bricolage, and narrative enquiry are utilized within a storytelling approach to support this auto-ethnography. A Métis Lifelong Learning Model helped conceptualize the learning aspects significant to Métis and also reflects my own self-learning.

Insurgent principles formed a pedagogical grounding, which meant this work has components in it that consciously reflect an outlook that Métis hold capacity for rejuvenation and a bridging capacity between cultures. Insurgent pedagogy was linked to story through narrative

enquiry, which was used to make meaning from story and decolonizing representations of Métis history through relational and community-based pedagogies (Gaudry and Hancock, 2012; Kovach, 2010).

Each chapter contains first a story, then a literature discussion, followed by shared components tying them together. This process entailed telling autobiographical stories. In keeping with the approach of bricolage, it pieced those stories together with literature in the field. Bricolage and Métissage processes developed naturally for organizing and linking. Then, in the spirit of Métissage, these stories become a part of the larger body of work in the field. In order to differentiate sections of this work, I have used a different font to highlight quotes used at the beginning of sections, as well as italicizing areas in the thesis to denote storywork or personal narrative.

## **Research Framework**

Learning experiences grounded in a Métis perspective contribute to an understanding of what creates success. In searching for a means of how to measure success in learning and present a Métis way of learning and educational concepts, I turned to a model that was created to do exactly that. A Métis Lifelong Learning Model offers a compelling and practical approach to sharing knowledge, tradition, and skills from a Métis worldview. It represents the link between Métis lifelong learning and community well-being and can be used as a framework for measuring success (Anuik and Kearns, 2012; “Métis Lifelong Learning Model Living Draft”, 2007).

A common approach to measuring current learning focuses on academic achievement within high school and post-secondary education. Academic achievement measured this way

does not always consider the progress across a full spectrum of lifelong learning. Measuring Indigenous learning with a focus on years of schooling and performance on standardized testing that centers on cognitive domains of learning may seem limited in scope. The mainstream education system focus is not always aligned with the purpose or nature of holistic learning, which entails engaging the physical, spiritual, mental and emotional dimensions across a lifespan.

Book based learning has its place, but placing an emphasis upon it has neglected other components deemed as worthy from an Indigenous lens. “They taught them very, very well how to do paperwork” (Tom McCallum, as quoted in Métis Centre, National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2008, p.18). Meaning, there are several educational considerations that are not always included within a current mainstream model (a model, which some may argue places too much importance on the development of administrative paperwork skills).

Ways in which a Métis Lifelong Learning model measure success include priority of relationships, importance of sustaining healthy connections to land, people, and spirit world. Intergenerational knowledge and rites of passage can be instrumental in facilitating cultural knowledge, acquired through cultural means in a transformational way.

Consideration of approach helps to ensure things are done in a good way, with the intention to live a good life. A goal should be for people to find meaning and purpose in their lives. This may entail designing a system, as David Orr (2004) describes, “to teach usefulness, practical competence, social responsibility, ecological skill, the values of good work, and the higher possibilities of adulthood. And it is possible to restore the minds to the tutorship of soils, wildlife, plants, water, seasons and the ecology of place (p. 4).”

Brokenleg (1999) instructs “If Native American concepts of learning were honored in schools, children would be captivated by stories rather than bored by lectures. Song, dance, art, and creativity would be valued as much as traditional academic subjects or sports. Children would help one another to achieve rather than seeking to mock the “slow” child or make fun of the gifted youngster. Attention would be given to active, searching minds, rather than “disability.” Every person with a talent or skill would feel an obligation to share it with others. The traditional knowledge passed on from elders would be revered rather than ignored. Children would learn how to fail courageously rather than retreat in futility. They would be taught how to handle fear and express compassion (p.197).”

# MÉTIS HOLISTIC LIFELONG LEARNING MODEL

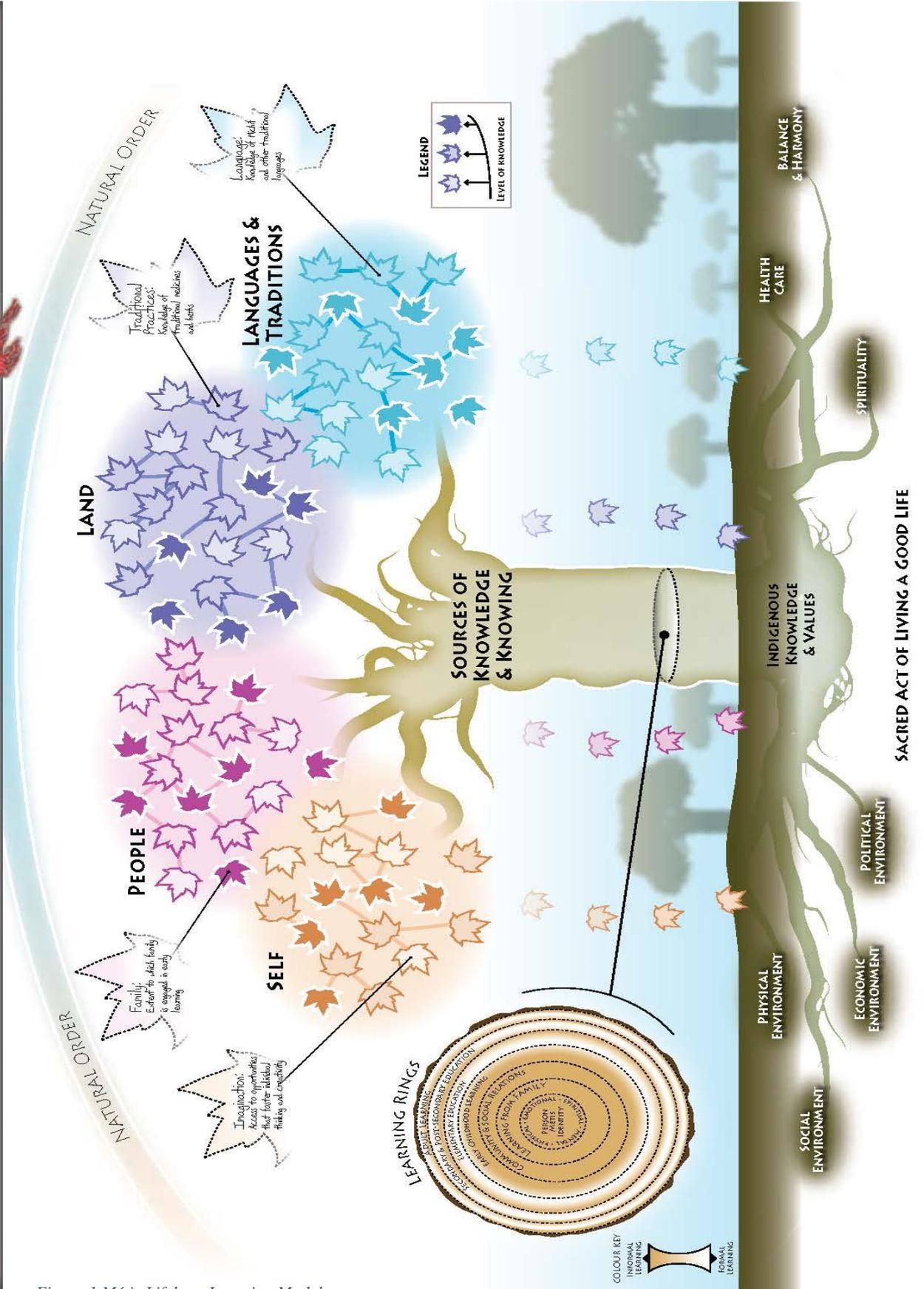


Figure 1 Métis Lifelong Learning Model

This framework, used as a culturally relevant means to measuring success may hold significance for identity reclamation and reframing narratives because it assists with processes of looking to growth, awareness of purpose, wanting to know one's place in the world and the "sacred act of living a good life" ("Métis Lifelong Learning Model Living Draft", 2007; Kearns and Anuik, 2015). It outlines the relationships of learning within a cultural and ecological context, using the cyclical and natural processes of the growth of a tree to illustrate complex living entities that require certain conditions for optimum growth and ultimate well-being of Métis peoples (Anuik and Kearns, 2012; "Métis Lifelong Learning Model Living Draft", 2007). Métis people view lifelong learning as part of a regenerative, living system- the "Natural Order" that includes a community of learners living in accordance with the passing of seasons, respecting the life cycles of those in the natural world, being attentive to natural signs indicating when to begin and end a seasonal round of activities (Adese, 2014; "Métis Lifelong Learning Model Living Draft", 2007). Within this organic system, relationships are interconnected, balance and harmony are maintained in a worldview that honours relatedness with land, people, the spirit world and all beings, human and non-human (Adese, 2014; "Métis Lifelong Learning Model Living Draft", 2007).

Understanding oneself as part of this broad set of relations is part of a "Métis way of being" (Adese, 2014). For this work, my focus was on two aspects of this model: "learning rings" and "person Métis identity." The model (in a cross-sectional view of the trunk's rings) depicts how learning occurs holistically across the life cycle through both formal and informal learning. At the trunk's core are the spiritual, emotional, physical and mental dimensions of the Métis self-identity. Intergenerational knowledge and values are passed on through processes that influence development such as learning from family, community and social relations

(represented by two rings surrounding the core). Four outer rings illustrate the stages of lifelong learning, from early childhood through to adulthood. “Sources of Knowledge and Knowing” include: self, people, land and language and traditions.

In addition, using a Métis framework for Métis learning supports self-determination for education and ways of fostering learning to create more positive strengths. It is emancipatory, instilling leadership. This approach aligns with the idea of self-determination and is intended to draw upon strengths of culture to facilitate the development of adept Indigenous people (Brendtro and Brokenleg, 1990; Brokenleg, 2015; Hampton, 1995). The model recognizes Indigenous rights to determination in education and traditional approaches. It has the flexibility to blend these with or within culturally competent western practices to find a way to balance book or technical knowledge with traditional knowledge.

### **Insurgent Pedagogy**

Insurgent research involves understanding the effect oppression has on students, particularly ones who believe they have been historically and currently disenfranchised by what those students call "traditional schooling" (Friere, 1970; Kincheloe et al., 2011). Recognizing these effects is reinforced by employing Indigenous world-views as framework and by seeing this work as directed toward Métis community (Gaudry, 2011).

Explicitly positioning oneself is a very important aspect of reflexivity (a reflection on circular relationships between cause and effect) in research projects (Absolon and Willett, 2005). The writing in this thesis was done from a consciously biased perspective, using an insurgent research perspective with the intent that this work be informed from Métis knowledge and with the understanding that Métis are the drivers for solutions to the stated concerns and opportunities. As a result, this work does not pretend to be objective. In this context, recognition

was concentrated on the reality that interpretations studied are predominantly from a non-Indigenous point of view, with society placing preeminent importance on that. Indigenous knowledges are required to be justified to a universalized Western worldview. They are deemed legitimate often only when validated within the West's dominant knowledge system (Gaudry, 2011). Wilson advises "We can get past having to justify ourselves as Indigenous to the dominant society and academia. We can develop our own criteria for judging usefulness, validity or worth of Indigenous research or writing. We can decide for ourselves what research we want and how that research will be conducted, analyzed and presented (2008, p.14)."

The goal is an awakening of a critical consciousness that encourages individuals to create change in their world. This is done through a continuous process of unlearning, learning, relearning, reflection, and evaluation. As Indigenous researchers, seeing alternative ways of existing is easier than for non-Indigenous researchers because there is a living memory of another way of being. "We need only look to our ancestors and learn from the values and knowledge they possess" (Gaudry, 2011, p. 133).

Colonialism has been a force in making people forget their own power to change the conditions affecting them. The pedagogy selected was tailored to highlight significant Métis strengths and support a return to ways that sustained Indigenous Peoples for thousands of years (Gaudry, 2011). This thesis work should reflect that Métis are inheritors of a set of resilient traits and maintain self-determination capacity within themselves, thereby acknowledging the impacts of colonization but not allowing it to define (Smith, 2003).

In effect, an insurgent research approach (grounded in an Indigenous worldview and responsible to the community where research is undertaken) is intended to be read by Indigenous community members and is used to further the possibility of community action (Gaudry, 2011).

Gathering of knowledge holds a clear purpose to inspire and provoke people to act (Gaudry, 2011; Wilson, 2001). Insurgent research principles reinforce the importance that this knowledge be used for practical application, with an intent that the information presented will be useful for Métis themselves. The survival of Indigenous cultures is imperative, so the knowledge must be passed along.

## **Story**

Personal story adds to the knowledge gap through an account of the author's experience of Métis identity rediscovery (McIvor, 2012). This thesis employed story based on oral traditions through narrative and oral history, as is consistent with a Métis approach to sharing (Hulan and Eigenbrod, 2008; Métis Centre, National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2008; Webster and Mertova, 2007). Story became increasingly valuable to me in this work when I found that what I was trying to say benefited from personal narratives to illustrate my ideas more thoroughly or explicitly.

Narrative methodologies involving oral tradition and storytelling compliment the interpretive approach of mainstream research. Narrative is intended to be convergent with Indigenous research methodologies, thereby honoring storytelling traditions as a way of sharing knowledge.

An approach was undertaken including acknowledgement of community narratives- those stories told by Métis and stories told about Métis, as well as personal narrative (my experience, my story, my sharing). Hampton describes the relationship between memory and research. He indicates researchers need to know their personal motives for undertaking their research, and these are usually found in story (1995). For me, this has involved sharing story to assist others, to

maintain the critical importance of passing content on to others, as well as for my own self-knowledge (Kovach, 2010; Métis Centre, National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2008).

Academics as storytellers become aware of the ways in which their autobiography influences how they make sense of their lives and experiences. Auto-ethnography is a form of qualitative research that uses self-reflection and writing to explore personal experience and connect autobiographical story to wider cultural and social meanings and understandings (McIvor, 2012). That adds integrity for this work by allowing me to speak from a place of authority, share knowledge and experience, to “share back” and “give away” my learning (Archibald, 2008; McIvor, 2012; Simpson, 2002).

Bricolage and métissage were useful concepts to incorporate story into thesis, in a fashion that matched the process by which gathering information unfolded. An integrated whole arose from seemingly disparate strands.

Bricolage is something created from a diverse range of available items. It was a useful construct as it supported research starting piecemeal and undergoing transformations to end up where it is now. Bricolage allowed for an exploration of ideas and incorporating seemingly differing concepts into a complimentary whole. The bricolage is a braided and evolving construction created by the researcher working with ‘bits and pieces’ of theoretical, methodological and interpretive paradigms, transforming to take new form as different additions are mixed into the puzzle (Donald, 2011; Lowan-Trudeau, 2015).

The textual quality of the braid emerges as the researcher engages with the subjects that inform the inquiry, makes decisions on issues that need closer attention, and decides how best to interpret the significance of the character of the inquiry to the interests of ethical relationality (Donald, 2011, p.544).

Métissage was used to gather themes and tie them together. The word origin of métissage comes from the weaving of a cloth from different fibers. Derived from these origins, métissage is an artful craft and practice, and in a literary sense can be utilized as a pedagogical strategy for negotiating conflicting or dichotomous value systems. It is an approach that invites writers to braid strands of their own writing with that of others. The method of métissage, encourages genuine exchange and sustained engagement with the tracing of “mixed and multiple identities” in the “messy threads of relatedness and belonging” (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009). Métissage, to which the Canadian word Métis is connected, is a methodological approach that often begins with autobiographical text as a starting point for further interpretations, requires a way of looking at how things are interpreted in order to direct the telling of a story that opposes colonial logic, emphasizing that context and place-based understandings are important within a relationship between peoples (Donald, 2004, 2009, 2011; Lowan-Trudeau, 2012). As a methodology approach, this was complimentary to both the storytelling and personal narrative aspects and permitted a self-determined and Métis strengths-based approach. Métissage is explicitly connected to the legacies of colonialism and the need for recognition of the mutual interactions of colonizer and colonized, as well as the supposed supremacy of ‘literate’ societies over repressed oral traditions and storytelling (Donald, 2012). The approach taken here focuses on a métissage of methodological influences that explore this author’s life, experiences, and perspectives through a narrative approach. This allows personal and family stories to be braided in with larger narratives (Chambers et al., 2008; Donald, D, 2012). There came a realization personal stories cannot be easily separated from the larger research stories I wished to tell (Donald, 2012).

Roth (in Lowan-Trudeau, 2015) explains a process that involves moving from bricolage (conscious integration) to métissage (unconscious blending), further expanding opportunities for intercultural educational practice grounded in community-based learning: a place-based sense of collective connection to land and culture, and support for Indigenous self-determination.

Bricolage often leads to métissage, a term suggesting a mix or blend so complete the parts can no longer be extracted from the whole. The results, like the braid-work of a sash, linked interconnected strands together. These are used to try and make meaning of findings to then incorporate into application, putting Indigenous ideals into practice by working from within Indigenous frameworks to re-imagine the world (Gaudry, 2011).

Both bricolage and métissage were helpful to allow metaphors to elaborate the work (Donald, 2011). Metaphor was helpful in this process, facilitating conceptualization and relating key ideas such as a buffalo teaching to demonstrate resilience, description of a Polish Pow-wow in relation to worth and authenticity and the use of the infinity symbol as a potent image in illustrating interconnectedness. This section of the thesis itself utilizes quilt and sash metaphors to illustrate processes for methodology. Metaphor was beneficial in describing ideas and images in a way intended to communicate information effectively. This was meant to provide information in a format that is instructional for Métis learners.

## **Relationship**

An important aspect in the thesis, considered central as an Indigenous person is identifying who am I and where I situate myself within this research (Lowan-Trudeau, 2012). To communicate my process of reclaiming identity and knowledge, reconnecting to community and reframing who I am as Métis, personal narrative becomes an act of self-determination. This

fosters improved relationships, encourages personal accountability, and promotes social and cultural change (Cardinal, 2016; Smith, 2003).

An important consideration to this study will be how this impacts Métis communities. I share my story, framing my Métis experience within the topics of my thesis, using a respectful approach to establish relational accountability, positioning the investigator as participant (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2010; Lavallée, 2009; Wilson 2008). The overall aim is to follow Métis cultural protocols in recognition that “how activities are carried out matter and should be done in a good way” to show acknowledgement of relationships and respect for insights being offered (Kovach, 2010; Métis Centre, National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2008). I follow Wilson by cultivating and maintaining the relationships that are central to conducting Indigenous research (2001, 2008). Throughout this learning journey I have tried to incorporate respectful practices as well as getting on the land for grounding and connectedness. I consult with my family, spend time with traditional Knowledge Holders, engage and assist with cultural events and ceremonies.

Relational accountability requires the formation of a reciprocal relationships with the communities within which one conducts research (Wilson, 2008). Following this approach, students are bound to the community by a sense of responsibility. Close relationships and even kinship make them directly accountable to the community and keeps them responsible for their actions and for the final products of their research. “Indigenous methodology means talking about my relational accountability in a process of answering all my relations when doing research” (Wilson, 2001, p. 177). Rather than asking about validity or reliability, “I am reflecting on fulfilling my role and obligations in this relationship and gaining knowledge to fulfill my end of the research relationship” (Wilson, 2001, p. 177). Who will be impacted? What are the

possibilities of putting findings into action? These are the things I considered when analyzing my work. Would it fit with the values of my family, my community? Will it be of benefit? In analyzing, synthesizing and organizing the data, I must be aware of the implications that my speaking on Indigenous Knowledge may hold.

Connected to the understanding of importance of relationships, it is vital to recognize knowledge creation and possession. Ownership, control, access, and possession as described by Kovach (2009) are considered of central importance in this undertaking: “Ownership assumes that a community owns data or cultural knowledge collectively. Control assumes that Indigenous people have the right to control various aspects of research conducted about them, including research framework formulations, data management and dissemination. The ability of Indigenous people to retrieve and examine data concerning them is the principle laid out in access. Possession describes the function by which ownership can be asserted and protected” (p. 144). It is agreed and understood that “the teachings as stated by Knowledge Holders are those of individuals and not representative of any community, organization or nation” (Métis Centre, National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2008, p.12).

## **Themes**

It was reassuring to see the possibility of alignment towards qualitative data in Indigenous study, in which Strauss and Corbin (in Kovach 2009) describe qualitative research as a “non-mathematical process of interpretation” for purposes of spotting patterns within the data and from which a theory can emerge. Identifying gaps helped to recognize areas of focus. Reflecting on Métis contextual expectations and key teachings resulted in inspirations that were used to establish meaning (Kovach, 2010). Data collection that highlighted storytelling was augmented by inspirations, reflections, dream and getting onto land to help facilitate this process.

As ideas were gathered and inquiry done, emerging themes then developed. A content analysis was inductive (for example, themes, patterns and categories emerged from data). These overarching themes started to be revealed in literature review and story. The Literature Review was based upon groupings designed to correspond to the thesis questions, then categorized into major themes or patterns. Some organizing principles were imposed by deficit (what was taken away, such as land) or asset (what remained, such as resilience characteristics). Others were determined by what should be transformed (powerful stories to replace negative ones). Information that fit within these was incorporated to help identify interconnections, linked together by common threads. It was tricky to develop distinct themes to highlight, as significant overlap exists. Interconnectedness could be itself considered as a theme throughout.

In addition, there was a component of incorporating hunches, intuition and insights in order to develop ideas. This included phrases or ideas that came to me in dreams. An example of this was one of the chapter headings that came to me in a dream, which I then did my best to implement that phrase and build the ideas and literature support to develop a chapter. In the end it came together fittingly, but often felt like going down a path blindly, with the path unfolding and becoming apparent where this was going as I went along.

The characteristics and practices presented in the following chapters form a collection of findings worthwhile to understand, support or further develop. An overview of the literature highlights reclamation of identity as important. Therefore, aspects that facilitate or foster this were explored. There are traits and key features for success identified and should be drawn upon when considering an approach towards the transforming experience of developing, claiming or reclaiming pride.

### Chapter 3: Tears Anger Laughter and Song (Cultural Recovery)

"Someone once told me in a dream that truth was a great white bird.

Here are some feathers I found" (Hoyt Axton).

#### Storywork Introduction

*"What do you want to create?" Paul asked. He said that he could see the determination I held in my heart for my beliefs and instructed me to create what I want in my life. He stated, "Then set the universe in motion, gather who you need, decide what has to happen and who is responsible." Paul continued, "You have been woken up by Spirit, now will feel resistance. You will begin to feel the rough edges of your sight begin to conflict with what people previously saw of you or want you to be" (P. Chaput, personal communication, Feb 20. 2014).*

*Prior to formally beginning my thesis, I met with a Knowledge Holder (Paul), seeking guidance. I told him that it is challenging to explore being Métis as there is much historical knowledge, but the question of what it means to be Métis remains cloudy. The discussion that followed was inspiring. We discussed Métis history, identity, community and self-determination as a people. He encouraged principles, values, and vision. This experience was very valuable for me on many levels. It was supportive to have the encouragement of someone who I hold in high regard. I feel blessed to have people come into my lives and share their teachings and experiences with me. This reinforces the path I'm on and inspires me to move forward, which for me is a new path of old ways.*

Cultural recovery is a wide topic. Consequently, the information presented here will be limited to the following key elements: Cultural deprivation and reclamation, Elders, Michif language and strategies of self-preservation.

## **Cultural Deprivation and Reclamation**

Culture can be powerful and meaningful for many people of Métis heritage, many of whom may be increasingly without opportunities to be inspired by the values and traditions of ancestors. It is important to identify what is needed for people to know somebody cares, so they will find a place of belonging, believe they are important contributors in the success of their community, foster their connection with the land and develop self-affirming self-understandings toward a renewed sense of identity and pride (Gaudry and Hancock, 2012; Henley, 1996; Lickers, 2016). Identifying and fostering what is needed will increase understanding of oneself as a contributor in the greater whole and add to the survival of a culture.

“Young people are craving information—on how to live an Indigenous life within an Indigenous worldview, how to practice an anticolonial existence, and how to engage in direct-action tactics—all in an accessible format. They want to reconnect; it’s just that they or their peers might not know exactly how to do this, and they need a little support” (Gaudry, 2011, p. 128).

A rediscovered sense of place and community can be beneficial. This can be a complicated process to undertake, to know where to turn or to do so in a manner that is confident or self-assured. Recovering and reclaiming aspects of culture lost is a process of reconstruction, self-discovery and cultural recovery. Cultural reclamation should be consistent, continual and must entail finding opportunities for promotion and celebration of Métis way of life (Simpson, 2002).

Sharing and participating in traditions are basic ways to affirm a collective identity, to connect historical knowledge and wisdom to one’s lived experience and everyday life. The

compelling experiences, personal transformations, and new insights that come from participation contribute to Indigenous identity (Kirmayer, 2009).

By reuniting people with their spiritual, economic, language and cultural connections to the lands traditionally used by their ancestors, by creating intergenerational links, by capturing historic land use activities, and by undertaking extensive genealogical research, these are allowing people to learn more about their culture, thereby fostering the re-emergence and rebuilding of cultural heritage so they will want to self-identify (Hogson-Smith, 2005; Lavallée and Poole, 2010; Lowan 2013).

The sense of belonging and that one is a worthy contributors towards the success of community contribute to the re-emergence of Métis as a people. Supporting positive individual identity reclamation is a component of this.

For many Indigenous people, a new awareness of themselves is surfacing and they are now taking steps to connect with their own traditions; a desire to regain, not just maintain, important aspects of their cultural identity: acquiring their language, regaining their spirituality, and generally learning as much as possible from Elders (Berry, 1999).

### **Elders/Knowledge Holders/Knowledge Keepers**

Where does one go to find the culturally appropriate guidance to assist in reclaiming? It is easy to say, “go find and reclaim your culture”, but where does one go? In this search, Elders hold the key. Elders can be and should be the central core of cultural reclamation. Elders represent community. One does not alone decide identity, acceptance, humility and responsibility. They can bridge the gap between ancient wisdom and the modern world with information that would help a person in their defining and understanding Métis.

As keepers of Métis worldviews, they hold the knowledge and responsibility for passing these along. These are the first and best source of information about Métis. They carry Métis histories in their stories, Métis visions for the future, are caretakers of the ways of knowing of how Métis are Métis, and understandings of Métis kinship (Adese, 2014). Elders are men and women regarded as the keepers and teachers of an Indigenous nation's oral tradition and knowledge and are considered vital to the survival of these cultures because some traditional knowledge is becoming scarce. Elders safeguard knowledge that constitutes a unique inheritance, to hold and pass on the accumulated learning to preserve, honour, and protect collective histories and to reinvest in stories, dreams, and visions (Education, A. 2005; Kirmayer et al., 2009; Métis Centre, National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2008). An Elder's teachings may provide an alternative or addition to a formal mainstream education system which often undervalues or ignores Traditional Knowledge.

Elder's knowledge and experience can hold relevance when linked with experiential learning on the land. The knowledge Elders have about how to live and survive off the land has been passed down from generation to generation. This links one with ancestral learning and knowledge.

Elders can be pivotal for those working through conflict, decolonization and can foster resistance strategies and leadership, often through appropriate ceremonies and counseling support. This can be useful when familial ties have been disrupted, become unhealthy or are non-existent. People must be allowed to work through issues (concerns, anger, confusion and conflict between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Knowledge) at their own pace and each must be given time and space for their decolonizing path (Simpson, 2002, p. 23).

Information on how one might find an Elder, protocols to working with an Elder and learning under them can often be gained through local Indigenous organizations such as Friendship Centres and Métis community councils.

## **Language**

Très peu d'entre eux parlent le michif la langue traditionnelle des Métis, dans laquelle on retrouve un mélange des langues crie et française. Translation: Very few speak Michif, the traditional language of the Métis, which involves a mixture of the Cree and French languages (Linguee Michif-English Translation, 2018).

Language loss is a concern for all Indigenous peoples. This is lamented because within language resides the worldview of a people.

The Michif language is unusual (and possibly even unique) among mixed languages, in that rather than forming a simplified grammar, it developed by incorporating complex elements of the chief languages from which it was born. There is suggestion that instead of haltingly using words from another's tongue, the people who gradually came to speak Michif were fully fluent in both French and Cree (Rhodes, 1977; Bakker, 1997). This language is interesting as it incorporates both Indigenous and European, blending and mixing, taking what works from each and coming out with a combined, yet new, form.

Indigenous languages, including Michif, contain a richness and creativity reflecting the spirit of a practical people whose connection to land and the natural world is reflected in language use. The creation of a unique language from a European and Indigenous language underlines a hybrid practicality. Reinforcing language then strengthens the traits and abilities of hybrid practical thinking. Language retention remains a challenge for all Indigenous languages so efforts to remedy this should be supported.

Learning Michif is viewed as contributory for cultural connection and community mindedness. Indigenous knowledge, principles, laws of governance, kinship and genealogy, and teachings about relationship to the environment are found within the Michif language. Michif may be taught during the telling of stories, singing of songs and rhymes, and sharing of observations and experience. Laughter is a big part of the Michif language. In the past, people gave one another nicknames, and sometimes an individual might be given a spiritual name. The protection and promotion of the Michif language are viewed as critical (Métis Centre, National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2008).

### **Strategies of Self-Preservation**

While there is no single way forward, “directions of movement” that support a shift to Indigenous spaces include a return to natural sources of food and active, hard-working, physical activities that would have been common to Indigenous ancestors (Alfred and Cornthwaite, 2005; Meyer 2009). Providing opportunities for people to experience that contact with their culture including dances, songs, legends and traditions shared from an authentic approach is important (Henley, 1996, p. 35). Theatre, singing, drumming, dancing, storytelling are all excellent culturally inherent ways of facilitating an opportunity to reconnect with and maintain culture and a pride based versus shame based cultural identity (Chansonneuve, 2009; Simpson, 2002). One of these strategies of self-preservation involves spending time in Métis settings, sharing stories, developing a Métis-centered analysis of life situations, and simply being with others who understand the Métis experience. Additionally, it can be valuable engaging in cultural exchange in general, with others who might not be Métis (L. Higgins, personal correspondence, Oct. 15, 2018).

For this way of life to continue to improve Métis must find each other and together, press for rights as a way of preserving cultural traditions and bring honour to those proud to call themselves Métis People (Campbell, 1976; Vizina, 2008). Throughout their history, spiritual beliefs and political views were important parts of Métis life. These were things worth fighting for and Métis have played an important part of Canadian history by standing for cultural, political, religious and linguistic rights, creating political and social structures, technology and trade systems, as well as developing unique art, music, dance and storytelling (Vizina, 2008). Preserving these and engaging in these contributes to a greater whole.

I have not spent as much time with Elders and Knowledge Holders as I should. Any time that I can, I find this to be a true blessing. Whenever I have that privilege, I am left with the sentiment, similar to the one described by Adese:

“How are elders key for me? Through their words I hear the voices of my ancestors, and with each passing day I am earning a greater understanding of what it means to say I am Métis” (Adese, 2014, p. 52).

The legacy of colonization has left many scars including hopelessness, poor coping techniques and a lasting dissatisfaction with the educational system. Along with this was survival, determination, healing and keeping traditions alive. There remains a legacy of tears, anger, laughter and song that is a complex mix of enduring residuals. Some of these need to be sought out. Some need to be drawn upon in hard times. Others need to be remembered.

*Engaging with Paul was an Enlightening experience. While he would not describe himself as an Elder, it was worthwhile to be amongst a Knowledge Holder sharing his perspectives on what is helpful. I respect Paul for sharing knowledge he has to offer. One can return to the teachings, attributes and worldview that is an inheritance, incorporate these*

*successfully into the society in which we live today, and in effect make that society better. I believe these remain within the collective. This legacy is a shared one. Through reawakened connections to Métis ancestors and current community, one gains a deeper understanding of being Métis (Cajete, 1994; Short, 2011). There remain inheritors and contributors to a beautiful, resilient culture. Remembering is a way to re-know and reclaim a valuable part of life. As my young son explained to me, at a cultural event, when a Traditional Knowledge Holder pointed out he excelled at activities, despite never having done them before: “It’s in our blood, Dad” (J. Twarowski, personal communication, April 2, 2016).*

#### **Chapter 4: Verbs Aren't the Only Things Subjugated (Education)**

Native American Sacred ways insist on learning, or education as an essential foundation for personal awareness. A knowledgeable human being was one who was sensitive to his/her surroundings. This sensitivity opened him/her to the Grand mysteries and to the possibility of mystical experiences, which was considered the only way to grasp certain intangible laws of the universe (Beck and Walters, as quoted by Ermine 1995, p.110).

#### **Storywork Introduction**

*Teaching Rocks is a sacred space (now set within Petroglyphs Provincial Park) that contains a collection of sacred petroglyphs. Teaching Rocks was described as a meeting place; a connecting place, a hub or intersection of various First Nations Peoples. That holds relevance, as it seems that it has been a shared place, in contrast to perceptions that First Nations groups fought over territory, ceaselessly. This shared space invalidates the common impression they never mixed for peaceful purposes.*

*My visit to this area took place within a formal education experience and with a group of fellow adult Indigenous learners. We went as a group to learn about and experience this place. We were ourselves an intersection of various Indigenous peoples. The experience was instilled with a sense of importance to connect with ancient knowledge. Classmates brought families there. The public was also there. This was not a private or separate experience, so felt like a larger community learning. Our two professors provided information that complemented this learning experience and posed questions for further consideration. This journey was done in a*

*respectful way, prioritizing verbal recognition of the people whose territory we were on.*

*Traditional languages were spoken, as was the singing of traditional songs, offering prayer and placing tobacco.*

*The tour was very informative. We learned that there are many aspects of Teaching Rocks that remain uncertain. What is known about them was described as a best attempt at understanding from a combination of Elder consultations, teachings, archeology, referencing birch bark scrolls, similar petroglyphs and other historical information. Carvings on these rocks contain vital information, practical instructions, spiritual representations, directions for living your life along with a series of teachings, and a myriad of other representations that remain without full explanation.*

*As Ermine (1995) so eloquently writes: “The spirit is the haven of dreams, those peculiar images that flash symbolic messages to the knower. Our progenitors knew and believed in the power of dreams; it is only through dreams that sacred undertakings are attempted” (p. 108). By experiencing Teaching Rocks, the spirit realm of dreams was made real, carved into rocks over thirty generations. I do not have the gifts or insights to say that I understand their meaning but feel privileged to have seen them. I recall Cajete, as cited in Friesen and Ezeife, (2009) who notes Aboriginal science “is a map of natural reality drawn from the experiences of thousands of human generations.” I suspect the petroglyphs present a map to grasping mystical experiences, but we no longer have the eyes to read the directions.*

*This was a meaningful visit because it included many ways of gaining knowledge and a powerful reminder that fundamental knowledge transfer has taken place throughout all human existence. It was a literal illustration that learning on the land has been the way of humanity for millennia. This journey was to a place of power, reverence, meaning, and creation (art, beauty,*

*spirituality, knowledge, and life). It was out of classroom, in the sun and wind, with food, good company, children laughing and bird song.*

*This field trip was unusual in its approach on many levels. It was out of doors, community minded, in public space, family welcomed, included Elders, was based on the land, and combined practical knowledge with intellectual and spiritual pursuits. Learning was experiential, personal within a group cohort of shared learning, and non-directed. It contained many traditional cultural components (from several traditional approaches) or global Indigenous approaches of teaching and learning complimentary to Métis learning.*

*Teaching rocks reinforced the viewpoint that Indigenous People see themselves as an integral part of the natural world. The day's learning experience was based on a non-coercive non-interference approach, with a heavy emphasis on observation, teaching by example, modelling practice, mentoring experiential learning, ritual, ceremony, storytelling, dreaming, artistic creation, promotion of lifelong learning, and personal reflection (Brokenleg, 1999; Cajete, 1994; Michell et al., 2008; Simpson, 2002). Amazing information was discussed along with traditional and spiritual practices. The knowledge was viewed as worthy, with the participants viewed as worthy as well. This was an example of a tribal education approach which sustained a wholesome life process and was viewed as lifelong (Cajete, 1994; Simpson, 2002).*

The information presented in this area of discussion will touch on underlying basis for the predominant model of mainstream education in comparison to global Indigenous and then Métis specific learning values and approaches. It will close with a call for self-directed and Métis informed education models and practices.

## **Roots of Western Education**

The above description of Teaching Rocks approach to learning contrasts with a mainstream model of education whose intent and different expectations contribute to outcomes for Métis students that are not always successful. Stark differences emerge during comparisons of dominant western education approaches and Indigenous approaches of teaching and learning. This comparison is intended to identify Indigenous learning aspects and highlight some that may benefit Métis learners or seekers of knowledge. This can increase promotion of successful approaches and awareness of possible detrimental ones. Some primary concerns of the predominant model of Western formal education appear to be conformity, obedience and providing a route to increased probability of economic benefit (Orr 1992; Hartman, 2005).

European revolutionary uprisings in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries resulted in the formation of a compulsory education model designed to suppress, oppress and shape citizens who would never again consider revolution (Hartman, 2005). This was done by separating out subjects, taught by separate instructors and designed to produce better soldiers and factory workers. Mandatory attendance was enforced. Classroom learning contained no give and take, the clock became the guide of time management and grading followed the pass/fail standard of the assembly line. Rote learning and institutional format instilled obedience through punishment and reward. The core concepts of this pedagogy united with preparatory work for factory employment and so “thousands of years of preceding human nurturing of children were ignored, changing the notion of children (literally) as the purpose of life. Instead they become cogs in a self-perpetuating economic machine” (Hartman, 2005).

The stereotypical view that Indigenous people are not able to be educated to the level of non-Indigenous counterparts, combined with the consideration that education has had a purpose

to suppress resistance, remove traditional values, attributes, approaches, and languages, consequently washing all Indigeneity away. This was done partly in preparation for participation and acclimation into work and society. These are reasons to see why there may be reluctance to participate in mainstream education, or lack of success for Indigenous people in that system.

### **Self-directed and Métis Informed**

Educational approaches do not necessitate replacement of a more formal education, but rather suggest modification to enhance it. Métis education is not simply a rejection of mainstream education models. There is an opportunity to provide an educational experience that is framed within an Indigenous pedagogy of learning; one that is self-determined, using models of education structured by Métis culture.

It is worthwhile for Indigenous knowledge seekers to find a way to balance book knowledge with traditional knowledge, such as learning from the land, learning from Elders and engaging in self-reflection. For Indigenous learners this becomes more complicated as they must do so in a way that is different from the manner in which their ancestors would have done and within a system whose intent has been to discredit or make meaningless Indigenous ways of being. A self-directed and Métis informed approach is congruent with Indigenous concepts of wholistic education (overlapping all life domains and stages). Integration of two disparate systems necessitates the braiding of mainstream education services with traditional learning approaches and finding ways to incorporate these into a unified curriculum.

I found comments from Battiste (2002) illustrative: “Eurocentric education has failed First Nations children and several systematic factors have diminished Indigenous knowledge almost to extinction (p.5). In response to this, Indigenous scholars turned to ancient knowledge and teachings. Indigenous knowledge, heritage and languages will empower Indigenous students if

incorporated into the Canadian education system (p.9).” Despite this realization, few universities across Canada have made Indigenous education a priority.

### **Set Up for Success**

Reintroducing traditional knowledge ensures it is not lost (Michell et al., 2008). Métis traditional forms of education include holistic views of learning and the natural world. They are non-coercive and non-regimented, promote learning through observation, learning in natural setting, teaching by example, and non-interference in the learning process. Connection is important, specifically connectedness of self, people, land, physical environment, languages and tradition, sources of knowledge and knowing, spirituality, health care, balance and harmony. These processes involve community, in traditional contexts, overlapping across all aspects of life and at all stages (Canadian Council on Learning, Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre, 2007; Michell et al., 2008).

My experience at Teaching Rocks was an exceptional one in many ways and demonstrated several important concepts. That exercise considered and utilized the application of Indigenous education models and philosophies to learn about the beauty, humor, wisdom, relevance of traditional cultural teachings and practices. It also looked at aspects that promote resilience, engaged in specific cultural and spiritual practices with joy and pride and provided a safe space to speak the truth of one’s experience without being misunderstood, pitied, misjudged, blamed, shamed or punished and Elders were involved to provide the support, knowledge and direction for learners to develop their gifts, form a sense of identity (linked to a supporting community) and foster a sense of acceptance, purpose and worthiness (Chansonneuve, 2009; Lavallée and Poole, 2010; Simpson, 2002). Reclamation of knowledge was done in a respectful

way honoring traditions, and this was all set within a formal Canadian University system and curriculum.

Indigenous land-based learning and self-directedness in education are desirable. This would entail learning in nature, immersion, play and activity based, honoring difference, being inclusive; as well as recognizing how anger, colonization, substance use, trauma, poverty, racism, and disconnection from cultural teachings and nature have impacted the restless spirits of our youth (Henley 1996; Lertzman, 2002; Lickers, 2008). Deepening understanding of identity, historical impacts, and current challenges may lead to increased satisfaction for both learners and educators.

We must ensure that education is effective for Métis learners. The concept of purposeful education appears conducive to this goal. In the past, the Métis had the buffalo. Leclair (2003, p.62) tells us the buffalo taught Métis about perseverance, life as continuous and “knowledge is created through a continuous process of mutual exchange between all beings, individuals and groups”. It is hard to overstate the importance of that animal in Métis culture, but buffalo as purpose has been lost. Now there is need to find a new purpose. Education is one means to substitute for buffalo (Couchie, 2017). We must best utilize the resilience, skills and traits associated with Métis, to allow for continued survival, thriving and rejuvenation of Métis culture.

## Chapter 5: Who Do These People Think They Are? (Identity)

### I Am the Dwindled Son

I am the dwindled son of a race of supermen,  
The violent, strong, adventurous; from this strain  
I take the northland homesickness which comes  
With the grey days that autumn brings again  
All the fierce past of those couriers de bois~  
Hunters and trappers, raftsmen, lumberjacks,  
Merchant-adventurers, labourers on hire~  
Bids me to seek the North for half the year.

-Alfred des Rochers

### Storywork Introduction

*“So, what do I know about who I am?” (Kovach, 2009, p.4). I am fair skinned and red haired, a genetic trait inherited from my Scottish fur trading ancestors. I feel an affiliation with the line Andrea Menard sings (in her song “Half Breed Blues”, 2002) “I was born the privileged skin, you’d never know there is Métis blood raging underground”. This has resulted in me being not readily identifiable as Métis. I have always held pride, but my outspoken-ness diminished in my youth from hearing messages about Indigenous issues that were predominantly negative. I am sorry to say, for a period I echoed some of those sentiments. I learned at a young age being Métis was not something always viewed with respect. Sometimes, that is even the case amongst*

*Métis themselves. My grandfather was dark featured, both in physical appearance and demeanor. At a young age I was introduced to his hatred of the “Indian in us”. He denied having any Indian or Métis heritage despite this being commonly known and documented through family records. He held anger toward his own identity. I suspect internalized racist attitudes contributed to this outlook and believe many of his generation were similar. He and I are an interesting contrast. In a way, he and I function like two sides of the same coin- he could not convince anyone he wasn’t Métis, I struggle for people to accept I am.*

*There is a common misperception that a certain amount of First Nations blood is required to be Métis and once a certain threshold is not met, a person is no longer Métis or Indigenous. Métis is not about percentages, whether someone is 1/8 or 1/64. These are my stories people often are preoccupied with. They ask, “How Métis are you?” “Are you one-eighth?” “After how many generations are you not Métis anymore?” It sounds like an old math problem but is actually addressing the old “Indian Problem.” Interestingly, not once has anyone ever asked “So, how Polish are you?” I used to answer these questions about blood quotient, until I realized doing so was legitimizing the very question. I carry blood of Indigenous and European. I reject neither. Having the ability to pass for non-Indigenous, I could choose a less contentious life. Yet, doing so would be a rejection of who I am. Despite any contention, it makes me sanguine to hold immense pride regarding my ancestry. Connecting with a culture and worldview I find so meaningful, beautiful, and worthwhile has been a most rewarding aspect of my life. I pass this pride on to my children, so they may carry hope, honour those who came before, connect, and learn traditions on the land. Finding a “sense of belonging” and having necessary cultural connections are important (Kovach, 2009, p.10). Identity and belonging are important keys to education. It is important to learn about family and community histories (Métis*

*Centre, National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2008, p.12). These are issues relevant for me and something I continue to reflect upon.*

Some have been fortunate to understand what it is to be a Métis from a positive viewpoint, but many families hid their Métis identities out of shame or survival. Identity was buried, diminished or denigrated. Added to this mix is a cloudy understanding who the Métis are.

This chapter will review Métis definition, impacts of stereotypical views on the identity, and highlight strengths and positive qualities of this rich culture, with a focus on the bridge building potential for cross cultural understanding that hybridity in worldview brings. Identity and belonging are crucial to the human experience and play a key role in success in all aspects of life, including education.

## **Definition**

Métis history and identity are complex and controversial subjects, with the definition of identity being debated amongst Métis themselves, resulting in differences regarding definition, and debates about who should call themselves Métis (Anderson, 2011; Gaudry, 2015; Lowan, 2013). Although designing a clear definition for Métis is not the intention of this paper, it bears review. Defining holds real importance for Métis (as definitions impact courts, government policy makers, industry and public awareness). I believe Métis should be considered the only people capable of making such a determination, on their own terms, from their own senses of self (Adese, 2014; Anderson, 2014).

Any described definitions included here are to assist people in understanding intricacies of the identity. It must be noted this is in no way intended to be the last word on the subject. Rather, a goal of this investigation is to explore the complexity of Métis histories and identities to speak to the difficulty of defining a “Métis Worldview” or “Métis Experience”. There are

arguments no singular Métis worldview exists, that many values and practices occur and the diversity between and within Métis communities is greater than their commonalities (Gibbs, 2000; Lowan, 2013). Yet, this could be considered true of most cultural designations, with culture described as an “abstraction of a fluid, shifting, and complex mix of different streams of knowledge and practice that have their own contradictions, conflicts, and dynamics” (Kirmayer et al., 2009, p. 465). While acknowledging differing and contested understandings, this paper will proceed with discussion of a Métis worldview viewed not as homogenizing, but as culturally enveloping. There is no intention to attempt to settle any debate, but rather to acknowledge it exists and contributes to confusion surrounding this identity. Differing and sometimes conflicting assumptions around defining leave this issue unresolved.

Tom McCallum (as quoted in Métis Centre, National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2008, p.15) tells us “to the Cree we are nehiyowak. Apihtaw’kosisan means a sort-of half son, translated to English as Half-breed. To the Ojibway they say wisahkotewinowak, which translates to mean where the fire has gone through and burnt everything, and the new shoots come up from the ground. That’s where the Métis comes from, they were the new nation, the new shoots.”

Other terms Métis have been known as include: Mixed- bloods, half-bloods, half-breeds, bois brûlé, chicot, Brois-Brules, Bungi, Black Scots, Jackatars, Michif, Voyageurs, Coureurs de bois, Métis Anglais, Road Allowance People, Half-caste, Rupert’s Lander, country born, Wissakodewinme (which in Ojibwe means half burnt woodmen), and Kaa-tipeymishoyaahk- which translates from the Cree to mean “they own or govern themselves” (Gaudry, 2014; Lowan-Trudeau, 2015; Vizina, 2008; Vowel, 2016). The Sioux, historically referred to the Métis as what could be translated to the "flower beadwork people" (Short, 2011).

They are a diaspora that came out of a specific history to form their own communities. Consequently, Métis people are hard to categorize. While there is agreement the term refers to persons of mixed Indian and Euro-Canadian ancestry, it is difficult to obtain a more precise definition and such questions are problems in historical understanding (Gaudry, 2014; Graveline, 1998). Despite the important role Métis have played in the creation of the nation of Canada, and as one of Canada's Aboriginal Peoples, Métis identity remains murky, misunderstood and contentious.

For some, the Métis identity is recognized as being forged from one or more cultures, usually Indigenous women and European (primarily French, English or Scottish) fur trading colonial ancestors with a resulting synthesis that is distinct from its component parts- a process termed *métissage* (Kirmayer et al., 2011). Métis are post-contact Indigenous People with geographic roots from the historic Red River community; a distinct Aboriginal people with a common political will, their own history, consciousness, culture, language (Michif) and homeland (Hogson-Smith, 2005; Vowel, 2016). Located primarily in the Canadian western provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario, Métis are a culturally diverse nation, regionally visible, and locally focused (Anderson, 2014; Education, 2005; Kirmayer et al., 2011). The period between 1830 and 1870 is significant because this era shaped a sense of peoplehood and (self-aware) nationhood during which political thought formed and adapted and Métis values, ways of life and defining cultural features were refined (Anderson, 2014; Gaudry, 2014). Métis were the descendants of Indians, but also a people in their own right whose Indigenous authority was established through presence on the land, descent from the original inhabitants, and an ability to defend one's territory (Gaudry, 2014).

Adding to this definition, one description states: “Métis means a person who self-identifies as a Métis, is distinct from other aboriginal peoples, is of historic Métis Nation ancestry, and is accepted (by the historic Métis homeland).” Declaring a Métis identity must account for the fact “Métis” refers to a nation with membership codes that deserve to be respected. What links Métis is history and sense of kinship and community. Commonalities exist amongst Métis, including certain similarities in language patterns, spiritual beliefs, and other cultural markers. For many, Métis identity is defined in terms of historical symbols, people, places, and events that produced a historical peoplehood and the experience of a collective political and cultural life, a style of music and dance (jigging/fiddling), flag, artistic decorative style, all woven together by shared language, kinship ties, stories, cultural practices, and worldviews (Adese, 2014; Anderson, 2014; Gaudry, 2014; Vowel, 2015).

In this view, Métis are not simply reduced to being bi-racial (with a common misconception any Indigenous ancestor makes a person Métis). Métis does not mean they are not white but have white ancestry or not First Nations but have First Nations ancestry (Anderson, 2014). This definition is controversial as it excludes a significant number of Indigenous mixed heritage people in Canada (Lowan-Trudeau, 2015; Richardson, 2004).

Another common definition follows a Supreme Court of Canada ruling on Métis rights which said the term can refer to the community stemming from Manitoba’s Red River Settlement or be used as a general term for anyone with mixed European and Aboriginal heritage.

“There is no consensus on who is considered Métis or a non-status Indian, nor need there be. Cultural and ethnic labels do not lend themselves to neat boundaries. Some mixed-ancestry communities identify as Métis, others as Indian: There is no one exclusive Métis People in Canada, any more than there is no one exclusive Indian people in Canada. The

Métis of eastern Canada and northern Canada are as distinct from Red River Métis as any two peoples can be. . . . All Métis are Aboriginal people. All have Indian ancestry”

(Hamilton, 2017; Daniels v Canada, Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 2016).

Métis describes anyone with an Indigenous ancestor who has been disenfranchised by past and present Canadian Indian policy. Karahasan (in Lowan-Trudeau, 2015, p. 39) suggests Métis peoples formed a broad new variety of cultures based on the geographical and cultural characteristics of each region, drawing on the diverse cultures of both European and Indigenous ancestors. Distinct social and economic differences exist between Métis sub-populations living in remote rural or northern communities and urban centers. Sources of Métis identity vary across the country, so the Métis in Alberta are *not* the same as the Métis in Ontario (Vowel, 2016).

Objections stemming from this second definition include ownership of term Métis and concern for those Indigenous people who have been dispossessed from their First Nations community. A comparison would be someone who declares a Blackfoot identity because they could not gain recognition as Cree or Inuit. A possibility is people take on this identity, or have it hoisted upon them because they don't fit elsewhere. An identity (which has been taken or denied them) is unclear or unavailable. Consequently, this affects the existence of Métis as a collective people through a catch-all definition of Métis that becomes all encompassing (Adese, 2014; Anderson, 2014; Vowel, 2016). A problem with legal categories is the common practice to collapse all differences into one, uniform "Métis" which may not best signify people (Short, 2011).

If Métis identity is “caught between two worlds,” it isn't because it somehow reflects the “core” of our identity. Nonetheless, the idea that Métis are essentially “mixed” remains a near-ubiquitous feature of Canadian society nation; the Supreme Court of Canada

declared in the 2003 *Powley* decision that Métis are Aboriginal despite – or in addition to – our “mixedness” (Anderson, 2011, p. 161).

For simplicity, many now refer to “large M Métis” to describe a particular sociocultural heritage (Red River linkages, an ethnic self-identification based on more than racial classification, by means of kinship ties which are important for identifying oneself) and “small m métis” to describe (mixed or bi-racial). Just to further confuse: My mother’s people include Métis lineage spanning generations and with linkages to Red River, yet my father has no Indigenous heritage. As a walking contradiction, from certain perspectives I could be both big M and little m Métis. This is not a problem for me, but to quote Donald: “My particular problem, in terms of identity and belonging, is that I have been led to believe that I cannot live my life as though I am both an Aboriginal person and the grandson of European settlers... there has been considerable pressure to choose sides” (2012, p.543). As Vowel suggests, Métis should be asking themselves why it even matters to have a definition for Métis (2016). These kinds of identity dynamics and internal divisions can create tension and confusion among contemporary Métis peoples as well as with non-Métis people attempting to understand (Gaudry, 2014; Lowan-Trudeau, 2015).

### **Rejection and Disempowerment**

Regardless of whatever way is used to describe Métis, for a period of time that designation was buried or rejected by many. After the Battle of Batoche, the name Métis was made synonymous with crisis, rebellion, and disloyalty and so following the failed uprisings/resistances, generations of Métis were deeply affected (Leclair, 2008). Many faced violence, legal ramifications and divided opinion. Power imbalance was enforced militarily.

Métis Scrip was issued and whether land was lost or willingly sold, the result was the hollowing out of Métis communities.

Métis identity suppression in many families has meant a cultural disruption that inhibits some from claiming this identity. There is almost certain probability that being branded as traitors, rejection and negative portrayals contributed to some Métis people renouncing or hiding their Métis identity. There have been systemic strategies used to remove Indigenous peoples from cultural identity, with many families having buried identity as a survival technique, particularly for those able to pass as non-Indigenous. Culture was taken or diminished. While many families hid heritage, many other have taken on a tarnished identity and by looking to western values and ways of living to get ahead, may reject or leave behind Indigenous values, identity or way of being. Goffman (as cited in Short, 2011, p. 42) indicates “the choice for many people becomes one of living with a stigmatized identity or, if possible, repressing the discrediting information about oneself.” Indigenous people might choose to attach to or detach from an Indigenous group, and conceal one’s Indigenous identity, using denial as a coping strategy (Berry, 1999). The reason was understandable: parents hid ancestry from children because they believed by denying their roots, they had a better future or to safeguard them (Berry, 1999).

Even recent generations describe being Métis as not necessarily something you were taught to be proud about (Vowel, 2016). One outcome that the opaque understanding of Métis has on the public consciousness is a de-legitimizing of Métis identity in the eyes of many. Pride in heritage is important, but can be diminished by the factors of racism, oppression and a hierarchy of knowledge (Adams, 1975). A person may draw strength from collective identity, but when the collective is devalued, individuals may suffer feeling “lesser than.” This has been

identified as a challenge faced by all colonized peoples (Adams, 1975; Kirmayer et al., 2009). A regretful shared commonality is an identity painted with negative connotations, through both racism (historical and current) and disempowerment. There have been systematic efforts to discredit Métis as lesser, undeserving, and illegitimate through more than a century of official Canadian (and sometimes even First Nations) attempts to impose binary “truths” (“Indian or Canadian”) and “mixed-ness;” thus shaping self-consciousness in a manner inconsistent with community grounded Métis self-understanding (Anderson, 2011; Gaudry and Hancock, 2012).

Self-hatred naturally follows the well-known stereotypes. Burial of true culture creates an inferiority complex (Adams, 1995, Adams et al., 2005). Consequently, children internalize these inferior images; often developing strong feelings of shame and a lifetime of powerful “less than” and “not belonging” stories (Adams, 1975; Cardinal, 2010).

Frequently, the self-identification of Métis has been met with disdain. The dominant society defined Métis as a distinct subordinated racial minority, seen as not worthy because of their preconceived notions of what lived experiences of being Indigenous are (Adams, 1975; Cardinal, 2010). Métis face the same or similar stereotypes as all of Canada’s Indigenous peoples. Métis identity has been predominantly portrayed with stereotypical views of perceived special treatment such as tax breaks, reliance on welfare or government handouts, and negative attributes such as laziness, non-contribution to society, obstacles to economic development and expansion; a dislike for work and discipline, child-like inability to resist temptation, and a general inability to adapt to the pressures of a contemporary lifestyle (Donald, 2004; Joseph, 2016). Collective identity is influenced by a larger cultural framing, which may inflict devalued identities and marginalized status resulting in little choice as to whether Métis would be Indians,

Whites, or in between (Adams, 1975; Kirmayer et al., 2009). Situated by the collective as somewhere between not White and not Indian, Métis exist in a sort of identity limbo.

### **Reclamation of Healthy Identity**

With this confusion, there may be public perception Métis seem to be unable to forge a sense of solidarity and identity. That is not strictly true. Variance amongst the hybridity is reflected in how people identify and live. Tom McCallum (as quoted in Métis Centre, National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2008, p.15) states “Métis are not all the same because we have been brought up in different ways”. Some Métis draw fairly equally on the Indigenous and European traditions of their ancestors, living and viewing the world through a lens that blends both perspectives. Others identify more firmly with one or the other, while others have maintained or recovered their Métis identity and culture (Edge and McCallum, 2006; Richardson, 2004).

Identity dynamics can take place even within families, with some people identifying as Métis, others choosing not to (Lowan-Trudeau, 2015). Gibbs (as quoted in Lowan-Trudeau, 2015, p. 39) notes “differences do not appear to lessen family ties but rather appear to strengthen sense of solidarity and identity”. Métis remain remarkably adept at maintaining their kinship responsibilities to one another, which have arguably served as the backbone of Métis societies (Adese, 2014). Debate will continue as will deepening of understanding. Identity may be confused and there is variance, but Métis people need to be the ones determining definitions. There is a period of reclamation happening, in which the heritage is viewed with pride and worth. This should be fostered, encouraged and supported.

## **Richness in Culture**

Battiste (as cited in Michell et al., 2008, p.92) tells us “discovering what people connect to and feel comfortable with when the teachings of their own cultural history are not available becomes a search for identity. Having a sense of identity is one of the most important aspects to all human beings and plays a centrally important piece in Métis culture.”

There are cultural features that are significant to learn about; beauty, humor, wisdom, and relevance of traditional teachings and practices for those seeking the positive, reaffirming aspects of this culture. While a common linkage of this identity is exposure to colonization, it more importantly contains cherished traits and qualities seen as quintessentially Métis; close family ties, humour (the endless teasing and joking, the storytelling); respect, love and caring for the Elders; sacredness of sharing; spiritual connection with the Earth, complexity, resistance, adaptation, resilience of communities and being intercultural mediators between European and Indigenous cultures (Anderson, 2014; Henley, 1996; Lowan 2013; The Métis Question, 2015).

The potential remains for Métis worldview to act as a bridging culture to facilitate cross-cultural understanding. This may be an area where Métis culture will shine. Perhaps a part of the role of Métis education can be mediation, holding a capacity to be of two minds, two cultures to help Indigenous and Euro Canadians find shared understanding.

Dorion and Prefontaine share:

Another metaphoric image that speaks to the intertwined Western-Indigenous relationship is the infinity symbol found at the centre of the Métis flag: “the horizontal eight is an infinity sign, which has two meanings; the joining of two cultures [European and Indigenous] and the existence of a people forever (as quoted in Lowan-Trudeau, 2015, p.19).

Dualism involves reducing complex systems into binaries, thereby adding to divisive “either-or” mindsets. Indigenous knowledge is far more than the binary opposite of western knowledge. Through a “delicate dance of two worlds” Canadians need to re-discover connections between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, even if these connections are not always pleasant to discuss (Donald, 2004; Lickers, 2008). Re-envisioning dualism could work to do this. Infinity as a symbolic concept has been useful to describe an ability for Métis to provide a bridging capacity between cultures. The Métis infinity symbol has the dual nature of two circles- one Indigenous, one European, recognizing the contributions of both. Being a hybrid person has distinct advantages, with many Métis exemplifying intuitive understanding of the dynamic relations between cultures. The combination of two mindsets (the mutualistic/holistic orientation of Indigenous and the rationalistic/dualistic of Western contributes to Métis humor, wordplay and creativity (Cajete, 1999; P. Chaput personal communication, Feb 20. 2014). The center of the infinity symbol could be viewed as an intersection where thoughts and knowledge pass over and through each other, becoming transformed by the process in an endless loop. It is essentially impossible for Indigenous and Non-indigenous to cohabitate without influencing each other, both negatively and positively. The hope of a renewed relationship (based on commonalities) creating intercultural dialogue is real, but this does not mean it would be perfect or ideal (Donald, 2004). The idea of cultures circling around an infinity symbol, passing through each other, influencing, leaving traces, and intermixing would allow for a collaborative (rather than a conflicting) interaction.

The Métis infinity symbol also contains a double meaning: symbolizing that Métis culture will live forever. This notion of endlessness extends itself to a learning journey. One must undertake a journey of learning, unlearning and relearning, therefore learning is never

finished; it is a treasured part of everyday living and a lifelong process, so no real conclusion exists (Absolon, 2011; Maclean and Wason-Ellam, 2006).

*There is much to be gained from supporting Métis students to succeed. Along with the transfer of culture, skills, traditions and knowledge, a part of the role of Métis education may be a bridging role. The hybridity that comes so natural to Métis could be utilized to diminish an either/or mindset that propagates an oppositional stance rather than recognize worth and value of differing perspectives. An example of this could be my daughter's first ice fishing experience. She was very young at the time and caught a Northern Pike. After she examined the fish, everyone else got to work setting another line. After a while we noticed she was "smudging" the air over the ice hole. A western perspective may account for this by explaining she was confused and trying to make sense of a monumental experience by resorting to one ritual she was familiar with. An Indigenous accounting of this may explain at that age she still had firm connections to spirit world, one beyond adult comprehension and so smudging was her way of honoring that fish. Neither explanation is wrong.*

## Chapter 6: Force of Nurture (Strong Families)

The river is good today, calm and peaceful. I stand before it, a mixture of blood and history running through my veins. I am neither from one nation nor the other, but from a nation that has struggled to define itself in the passages of Canadian history. In keeping the spirits of our great-great grandmothers alive, the first country wives of this land, we claim our aboriginal heritage and inherent rites, which have yet to be fully recognized by our Native and Non-Native relations. In keeping with the hopes and dreams of our great-great grandfathers, who fled to this land in search of political and religious freedom, prosperity, and new beginnings, we claim our rightful place as distinct yet valid people. I speak for no one community, although my ancestral and spiritual homeland, is among the scrub poplar and wolf willow rustling along the banks of the South Saskatchewan River, the fiddle as it echoes through the empty coulees at Batoche—the very place my ancestors fought to keep our nation alive. The Thunderers of my great-great grandmothers flourish in my veins, rumble from somewhere deep within—only this time the spirit keepers are with me (Gregory Scofield, 1999, p. xvi).

## **Storywork Introduction**

*At a family reunion in Saskatchewan we saw my cousin dance a jig for the first time, and watched my non-Indigenous aunt prepare bannock over the fire. We caught perch fish on a tiny lake near the village of my mother's family. This was where my mother and her brothers learned to fish, as did me and my siblings. We shared stories, laughed a lot, remembered those who are no longer with us and enjoyed the sights, smells and sounds of this familiar and dear place. Most importantly, a younger generation spent time in the boat with grandma, grandpa, aunts, uncles and cousins. I have a good family, a strong family. It is one to be proud of. It was good to see the family re-learning and taking steps to gather what we can and move forward in a way that feels healthy by just doing the best we can.*

The following discussion will explore the impact of colonization on family and the disruption that it caused. Impacting across many domains, it has created a significant challenge in learning, health and cultural continuity. Some mitigating protective factors will be touched upon.

## **Trauma**

Strong families form the structure for community. However, it is hard to have strong families and positive identity when societal forces are at play to diminish and dismantle the structure and health of that very dynamic. Stereotypical views portray Métis as broken. In the context of significant and pervasive negative stereotyping, the question has been asked about Métis people: "What is wrong with them?" The answer is "there is absolutely nothing wrong with them- traumatized people do not look after themselves well" (Brokenleg, 2015). What are commonly viewed as character deficits are instead an understandable response to trauma and attacks on cultural identity (Lavallée et al., 2009). Canadian Indigenous Peoples (including

Métis) are not defective or incapable- one must understand intergenerational trauma from a social and historical context as it has left an emptiness in many Indigenous people with respect to their identity, both collectively and individually (Kirmayer et al., 2007; Thompson et al., 2009).

These impacts of colonialism have resulted in terrible consequences. The eradication of Métis has been systemic (Kearns and Anuik, 2015). Colonialism must be understood for its role to pressure, to reject and de-legitimize Indigenous Knowledge, along with concerted attempts to exterminate, marginalize, and exclude. The effects stemming from cultural suppression consist of forced assimilation; discrimination, fostered dependency on the state, violence, abuse, addiction, Residential Schools, Indian Hospitals and negative portrayal of Métis people. Colonization has resulted in loss of languages, land and resources, traditional family and community ties, traditional teachings, spiritual ways, parenting skills, and respect for Elders by youth, while also contributing to alcoholism and other substance misuse (Drees, 2013; Kirmayer et al., 2009, 2011; Métis Centre, National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2008). In addition to enduring violent attacks and systematic oppression, there were nonviolent (but significant) transformations in ways of life that made it difficult to maintain cultures, traditions, and social structures, and these have not ended (Kirmayer et al., 2009).

Intergenerational trauma means that when an individual or a group of people experience violence, abuse or some other form of trauma, the negative impacts of these experiences are felt by their children and grandchildren. The trauma inherited by future generations can show itself in many ways, including destructive behaviour and health problems (Menzies, 2007).

From education, to healthcare, to displacement, to willful ignorance and disbelief, historical traumas have shaped the lives of Métis. These have taken place over generations to foster cultural assimilation or marginalization, holding success in destroying the family structure-

the lodge pole of community. “Intergenerational trauma is complex; if left untreated it gains momentum each generation and if not transformed, will be transmitted,” (Brokenleg, 2015).

Many grandparents who attended residential school felt a sense of shame. The problem then becomes intergenerational with their children then “developing insecure attachments with their caregiver, which may lead to their developing and insecure attachment with their children” (Thompson et al., 2009, pp. 345-6). This loss of opportunity to develop parenting skills inflicted untold damage. A flawed system resulted in generations being deprived of a normal family life. Parents lost the chance to raise their own children, and children lost the love and security of their homes, families and communities. Similar experiences occurred through the Indian Hospital System, where patients were put in special segregated Indian hospitals and sanatoria and taken away from family and community (Drees, 2013).

How do you have strong Indigenous families and community when you are not allowed to gather to practice established coping strategies to endure hardship? To understand why knowledge and traditions have been lost, one must comprehend the impacts of a colonial power acquiring full political control over Indigenous people, the occupation of lands by settlers and economic exploitation. These acts were condoned as “nation building” (Barnholden, 2009).

Canadian legislation banned Indigenous people from participating in their spiritual ceremonies. In taking away ceremony, the legislation removed security, identity, ideology, rituals, belonging, reciprocity, beliefs; along with responsibility for actions, access to resources, time together, healing and justice (Lavallée and Poole, 2010; Linklater, 2011). “Gathering to share culture would be broken up, people arrested- It bears remembering 40 years ago a gathering for such a purpose would be illegal” (Lepine, 2016). The outlaw of Indigenous ceremonies has created extensive challenges as many generations have not had access to

traditional ways of healing, grieving, and understanding balance and wellness; all which have deprived many familial caregivers of their sense of identity and cultural pride, with silence becoming one protection for outlawed Indigenous discourse (Haig-Brown, 2010; Kirmayer et al., 2009; Linklater, 2011). As a result, the ability to gather, draw upon practices to nourish, heal, and create adept Métis people was removed. In an Indigenous context, being detached from one's family and extended family can lead to further disconnection from one's community and culture. This disconnection may have an impact on self-esteem, sense of identity and sense of belonging. Children who are raised away from family, community, and culture are at risk of not having their sense of self shaped by their cultural heritage. The potential communal sources of resilience, coping, and rebuilding have been undermined. So, we must look at ways at restoring a capacity for trust which has been compromised through deliberate strategies of oppression, intended to destroy culture by destroying families, thereby resulting in intergenerational trauma (D. Chansonneuve, personal communication, March 3, 2015; Kirmayer et al., 2009). There are strategies utilized to redress this. One key area in restoring a sense of pride in identity is rekindling a sense of belonging within family and community.

### **Protective Factors**

The risk factors of historical trauma, wounded family, traumatic stress, early adversity and acute stress or loss are mitigated by cultural continuity, family strength, and healthy development (providing safe environment that nurtures social and emotional development). Recognizing these risk factors should allow people to discontinue blaming themselves and others close to them by understanding their behaviour as an outcome of forces beyond their control; it confirms their suffering to historical injustices, allowing their stories to be validated, honored, and commemorated (Kirmayer et al., 2009).

I am reminded of the Métis Lifelong Learning Model that describes that intergenerational knowledge and values are passed on and influence development (2007). The importance of knowing one's relations and family genealogy is viewed as central to one's identity as Métis. Knowing one's family's history and pride in one's Métis heritage are important for good health and wellbeing. It is important for people to learn about their family and community histories and understand more about their own culture, thereby increasing their pride (Lavallée et al., 2009; Métis Centre, National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2008).

Protective factors include “having a warm and supportive mother, perceiving community support and exhibiting higher levels of enculturation increased likelihood of pro-social outcomes” (LaFramboise et al., 2006, p.193). Connection to extended family is vital to health of communities and for some these ties are severed or may have become unhealthy. Social wellness was something North American Indigenous peoples excelled at historically (Brokenleg, 2015). Traditionally, family and community ties were strong and provided a sense of kinship, stability, support.

It is important to understand colonization has left Métis diminished but not broken. The impact from historical trauma was reviewed, not to elicit sympathy but to highlight how this system laid the ground work for where things stand today. The practice continues of marginalizing, criminalizing, disempowering one marginalized group, while simultaneously benefiting one dominant group over others. Pointed and conscious attempts at removing culture did not end when residential schools closed. For example, there are more Indigenous children in care now than at the peak of residential school attendance.

It is difficult to get ahead when you don't have strong families. It is challenging to have strong families when you don't have community. It is near impossible to have community when you are not allowed to gather.

Strong family is important. Recreating a family or community dynamic is beneficial for having an extended family or wider social network of support when many of these bonds have been severed (Berry, 1999; Brokenleg, 1990; Henley, 1996; Kirmayer et al, 2011). Ideally, this approach would take place in a land-based setting, present ancestral knowledge in an experiential fashion with discussion and cultural instruction to work through the effects of "pointed attempts to annihilate language, culture and people" (T. Phillips, personal communication, Feb 18, 2016).

The intent would be to support transformational experiences and establish practices effective in dismantling colonial misrepresentations of Métis. "Transformations achieved by direct-guided experience in small, personal, groups will usher in a new path towards decolonization and regeneration" (Alfred and Corntassel, 2005, p.613). In many respects, experiential education on the land within an Indigenous framework reverses the process of the Indian Residential School by providing the groundwork for transformational learning: "through wilderness, it brings people back in touch with the land, their cultural roots, and most of all, themselves" (Henley, 1996, p.26). Careful consideration needs to be undertaken to ensure that family dynamic is protected. This may involve healing. This may necessitate community rallying together, or recreating family dynamic. Caring and gentleness would be required. Relearning through laughter and tears can be powerful. These soft skills and attributes pair well with the resolute defiance and resistance that are often associated (justifiably so) with the Métis.

Despite the onslaught of colonization, Métis families continue to recoup from losses and work towards reconstructing families to allow current and next generations to thrive. There

stands a dichotomy of intergenerational trauma against intergenerational resilience (Williams and Claxton, 2017). Remember, the spirit of family (even those no longer in this world) thunders through Métis veins.

## Chapter 7: Valiant Unreasonableness (Resilience)

“If there was good food, there were stories, music and laughter, and from this came a richness no amount of poverty or violence could completely take away. We were then, and we continue to remain kah tip aim soo chick: “the people who own themselves” -Maria Campbell, Métis Elder and writer (as cited in Belcourt, 2006).

### Storywork Introduction

*My most influential Métis instructor remains my mother. I am fortunate to have been able to speak with her about my studies. When I asked her what she thought of me doing graduate work in an Indigenous education program, she replied “Proud, but I am sorry I did not have anything to give you” (A. Twarowski, personal communication, July 2013). She meant that many of our traditions were lost, language was lost, schooling was mainstream, and spirituality was Christian. Her words were powerful because I could feel her sense of loss. What I did reflect back to her was while she may not have had the language or the teachings, she taught that we must carry ourselves with dignity; instilled practical skills and attributes to get through hard times, and demonstrated the importance of family, humor, hard work and respect. Without ever explicitly stating it, she instructed “we are not better than, but not lesser than others”. My mother, although petite, was formidable. Her counsel was sought often, both for her forthrightness and ability to express what she thought. She stood up for her values, unabashed and unafraid. These values, as well as determination, have contributed to family resilience. She*

*had many struggles in life but was strong and determined to make a better life for herself, her family, to help her community and those that struggle.*

*She did not jig or speak Michif, and although a gifted artist in many ways, she did not bead. She was not raised with many cultural practices, but that made her no less praiseworthy. She was my greatest Métis teacher, (despite any perceived lacking in overtly traditional attributes) because she never gave up. She was tough, kind, beautiful, resilient, proud and stubborn. In this way she exemplified many Indigenous traits I admire. She was and is an embodiment of those who own themselves. Unreasonableness is described as the “sheer inability to surrender in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds, opposing opinions or even force” (Orlov, 2013). Sadly, she passed away recently, but not without living a valiant life and at times being gloriously unreasonable.*

Resilience has played a pivotal part in the survival of Métis and the culture today. It is a trait to be prized for its historical importance, but also holds promise for a stubborn refusal to yield, ingratiate or choose an easier path. Aspects of resilience discussed here are stubbornness, Debrouillard and Debrouillardise. These contribute to resistance strategies along with self-determination. Remembering those who kept the traditions, language, humor, and culture alive is important.

## **Resilience**

The right to pursue a Métis way of life has been a long struggle. The Métis have endured many hardships throughout their history, such as repression, restrictions on trading, fraudulent schemes to dishonor Métis land entitlements and marginalization of their culture and rights (Education, A., 2005). A core resolve to succeed and an ability to adapt to circumstances has been a necessity because of adversity and historic marginalization. From displaced people to a

path of rejuvenation and revitalization, resilience must be recognized as effective for getting the Métis to this point. Resilience is the capacity to recover and cope with adversity (Farrell Racette, 2011).

It is a credit to Métis people that ancestors survived, and brought with them many redeeming characteristics, including a stubborn ability to endure. “We are as resilient as a weed and as beautiful as a wildflower”, describes Christi Belcourt, as quoted in Farrell Racette (2011). Ideas of resilience grounded in cultural values have persisted despite historical adversity or have emerged out of the renewal of indigenous identities (Kirmayer et al., 2011). It is important to understand that fostering a healthy sense of self and ensuring cultural survival, knowledge of living on the land, community, connectedness, and historical consciousness all provide sources of resilience (Kirmayer et al., 2009). Embracing of traditional knowledge and teachings, restoring of identities and appreciation of strengths and cultural pride will impact the next generations to build effective resilience and resistance strategies based on traditional cultural values and processes (Lavallée and Poole; McGuire, 2010; Simpson, 2002).

Certain traits that increase likelihood of survival and ability to adapt to circumstances include indifference or detachment, the will to survive, self-reliance, and unreasonableness (Orlov, 2013). Along with unreasonableness; doggedness and perseverance also rank among traits, characteristics and attributes contributing to resilience. An emphasis on self-reliance, autonomy, and independence link Métis across diverse communities. Kirmayer et al, elaborate on these themes within the concepts of *Debrouillard* and *Debrouillardise*:

“*Debrouillardise*” is verb that describes the psychological, physical, and spiritual way of being that has contributed greatly to the Métis survival and resilience. Being

“*debrouillard*” refers to perseverance and willingness to carry on in the face of challenges

or setbacks, as well as a blending of solution finding, creativity, street smarts (or country smarts), being a jack of all trades, and being able to make a life for one's self and one's family (2011, p.88).

Both concepts in combination have allowed Métis to make an asset of their hybridity and for individuals to preserve unique identities while flourishing as a people (Kirmayer et al., 2011).

### **Resistance and Self-determination**

Resistance and self-determination can be regarded as resilience traits put into practice. Resistance as a current struggle against oppression involves consideration about how those ancestors have repelled the process of colonization and assimilation in the past (Farrell Racette, 2011; Simpson, 2002). Métis people tend to challenge authority or prescribed behaviour and have mobilized many strategies for keeping some aspects of their culture and their spirit alive in resistance to colonization, including an emphasis on self-reliance, autonomy, and independence (Kirmayer et al., 2011; Richardson, 2004). Resistance strategies counter stereotypes of Indigenous Peoples as helpless victims and inject power and hope by focusing context on capabilities (McGuire, 2010; Simpson, 2002). Rather than to highlight Indigenous disadvantage they allow challenges to be reconfigured as a search for success instead of an explanation of failure (McGuire, 2010).

Instrumental to both resilience and collective survival means Indigenous youth are needed to protect traditional lands, reclaim, revitalize, and nurture traditional systems of knowledge and keep harmony with nature so it exists for following generations (Kirmayer et al., 2009; Simpson, 2002). Self-determination has always been a vital aspect of Métis peoplehood. This can be encouraged today by working with communities to build capacity within education and have a Métis voice in decision making process. "Métis are able to survive and thrive in the

dominant culture, but this depends somewhat on being able to experience belonging, respect, dignity, and the comfort of being with people who understand them implicitly (Richardson, 2004, pp.181-2).” Métis leadership and political rights provide important ways of demonstrating pride in cultural identity (Battiste, 2008, p.100).

### **We Must Remember**

Hard times of persecution, poverty, landlessness and denial of education followed a period where Métis stood for the rights of many (Boyer, n.d. *1885 Aftermath*). It was a strong and proud people who survived. There are many who sacrificed. There are many who were denied the opportunity for school, who were marginalized and relegated to subservience. Perseverance through struggle has brought the Métis people to where they are now; which in many ways is a hopeful place. To honour the memories of relatives who gave this wisdom and refused to forget, give up or go away, one must recognize their struggles and the significance of the re-emergence as a people that could to adapt to and weave new ways of living (Adese, 2014; Farrell Racette, 2011; Lowan -Trudeau, 2015; Métis Centre, National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2008). Ancestors got Métis to this point through sheer will, so that spirit is honoured. It is a worthy trait to draw upon when times are tough or problematic. A resilient spirit and stubborn refusal to yield was responsible for all information not being lost, and so much honor and gratitude is given to those who quietly kept this alive.

Although things are improving, resilience is an important Métis trait because the road ahead is not easy. There is need to ensure the next seven generations benefit from the struggles those ancestors have done. Nothing is more important.

*I will pass on one final note of instructed wisdom that was deeply important to my mother. Her admonition to loved ones, as far back as I can remember was “never crawl” (grovel or debase oneself before others).*

## Chapter 8: Playing Indian (Authenticity)

“Once you appreciate who you are, you can just grow” (Lepine, 2016).

### Storywork Introduction

*I have an experience of “Playing Indian” (Twarowski, 2013): The audience all got ready; the dancers made final touches on their regalia and the MC got the Pow Wow underway with the introduction of the drum group. This description would probably be familiar for any typical Pow Wow. However, I (along with a Coast Salish First Nations colleague) had the unusual experience of attending this one in Poland, featuring exclusively Caucasian Polish and German participants faithfully enacting a Pow Wow, painstakingly recreated to minute detail. Some were in regalia; many were walking around in buckskin coats, cowboy hats, and turquoise jewelry. North American Indigenous cultures and history were venerated in adoring detail. It was a surreal experience: fun and flattering, yet uncomfortable and challenging. Many participants spoke with myself and my colleague. It was unusual to see adult people almost moved to tears to be able to meet an “Indian”. Many expressed disappointment we did not dress or act “Indian”- I am not sure what that means, but I think they wished we had dressed and acted like them.*

*They knew tremendous amounts of history, from books and internet, which was a point of pride and passion. Several were pleased to point out they know “more” than most Indigenous People (about history and culture). Many had no discernable interest in what current Indigenous culture was like, only discussing at great lengths about historical warfare. Most people were*

*extremely polite and seemed sincere in their belief they were not disrespecting the culture but honoring it, by imitation. But, in effect, the whole event seemed devoid of any teachings or beliefs. Some said they would not want to participate in any spiritual activity, as that would “go too far”. Their idea of “Indians” was primarily romantic, sentimental and with a strong dose of fantasy and role playing. My experience was similar to attending a costume party. I jokingly said to my colleague, the dance winner gets to meet an “Indian”, the runner up gets to meet a “half-breed”.*

*It is not my intention to completely disparage the participants. In fact, I tried to get to know many people and most were certainly not short of questions. We did get to give a presentation and talked about contemporary Indigenous people, which was rewarding. We talked about positive aspects and growth of communities, while discussing challenges and difficulties that plague many areas. During our talk, we were able to explain that historical facts may not be a priority for many Indigenous peoples because written history is usually one sided, much of Traditional Knowledge is through oral traditions and it is often painful to study the decimation of your culture. Some were interested to hear us speak about Canadian Indigenous communities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This whole experience began by being faced with the ideal of the Noble Savage and cultural mis-appropriation but developed into a good experience talking to those who were interested in other areas of Indigenous issues. I observed a respect and appreciation from a White culture that is lacking in many North Americans I know. I hold a confused interest and compassion for those Polish people who threw off the chains of communist oppression and then spent their weekends emulating another oppressed people. My overall experience left me in admiration at their willingness to share when they had little, combined with a tenacious resilience.*

*My feelings remain mixed about the Polish Pow Wow. That is not to say I condone it. It is understandable to be offended by this event. My main point here is to highlight that beyond the obvious cultural appropriation, something substantial was missing in their interpretation. It was superficial, going through the motions but contained no depth of understanding (Kirmayer et al., 2009). Cultural and artistic aspects were emulated painstakingly, but had little context, no meaning. To use an expression I have heard before, “they knew the words but not the music.”*

This story contains several elements to demonstrate insight in reclaiming Métis heritage centering on authenticity. Specifically, questions around motives, the sometimes-conflicting nature faced when practicing culture, and misappropriation are discussed. Together, these features should provide some understanding linking to authenticity and provide encouragement for consolidating cultural identity.

### **Disingenuous Indigenous**

The Polish Pow Wow experience was momentous for me. Upon reflection, being confronted by a superficiality of Indigeneity was a transformational experience. These were people pretending to be Indian, which is what many have assumed I am doing. The accusation of playing Indian can feel piercing at times and when one doesn't have the knowledge or customs, this may result in feeling foolish. Those attempting to reclaim are often met with suspicions of motive, derision, skepticism or discouragement and even self-doubt. Taking part in activities may be accompanied by disparagement of attempts at embracing Indigenous heritage.

Disconnection from culture has an added contributor of self-doubt. This belief can be reinforced from within self and by society. It can be difficult for a person disconnected from culture to not feel self-conscious, internal discomfort or even fear when reconnecting (Alfred and Corntassle, 2005; Kirmayer et al., 2009; Linklater, 2011).

Attempts to reclaim Métis culture can have barriers that are compounding: culture has been disrupted and eradicated, followed by internal (mental) and external (societal) forces which reinforce an ownership or rejection of this negative portrayed identity. The accusation of “playing Indian” has been lobbed at Métis, meaning many Métis have never been considered true Indigenous people. This lack of legitimacy has been summed up in the common refrain “accepted by neither, rejected by both”. This sentiment can be observed in the form of questioning the very existence of Métis. “Playing Indian” accusations support dominant narratives that Indigenous peoples are vanishing or have already vanished- that “authentic” Indigenous people no longer exist. Our society has many preconceptions as to what an authentic Indigenous identity is or is not. These are often complex and can be judgmental. There is a complexity of portrayal of Indigeneity. Meaning, some are accepted, and some aren’t, judged by outside authority using arcane criteria.

### **Consolidated Cultural Identity**

Pushing past self-doubt reaffirmed for me the importance of deeper understanding, embedded in the larger system of meanings and practices of a community, with its history and ongoing ways of life (Kirmayer, 2009). These reflections seem to be common for those reclaiming identity.

Many people who have been lost or been forced from their beliefs go through a stage of romanticizing when they come back or rediscover their indigenous heritage. For some, their indigeneity gets revitalized somehow or another, but they are still missing something. Rather than living the life and internalizing the things they are learning about, all you can see are the external trappings. The external show becomes more important

than the internal feeling and integrity of the Indigenous beliefs. The act of living the beliefs makes them real (Wilson, 2001, p. 178).

Reclaiming Indigeneity is not an overnight transformation. A hope is that living the external part will help internalize these values and principles. As this occurs, the relationship between these beliefs and the person gains strength and “Indigenous people start to trust their strength and intuition, and really start to grow” (Wilson, 2001, p. 178). A positive Indigenous cultural identity carries responsibility to call oneself a member of this community. This includes seeing oneself as Indigenous and feeling this is important, having positive feelings about being Indigenous, wanting to remain an Indigenous person, and expressing these in one's daily behaviour (Berry, 1999; Mailhot, 2017). Any search to clear up and share insights must come first from within, to take apart stereotypical and invented identity with the purpose of constructing a new authentic identity (Leclair, 2008). A consolidated cultural identity exists when there is consistency among those components, a confused identity is present when there is uncertainty (Berry, 1999, p. 6).

Empowerment can be facilitated by confronting fears through spiritually grounded action, individual and community-based initiatives, larger political cultural processes and through asserting collective identity and power (Alfred and Corntassle, 2005; Kirmayer, 2009). Recently, Indigenous Peoples have begun to revitalize traditional ceremonies openly without fear of repercussions and persecution (Linklater, 2011). Traditions are central to defy the legacy of injustices and suffering, to rise above the fears used to dominate and manipulate into complacency and cooperation with its authorities (Alfred and Corntassle, 2005).

Ultimately the criteria for how each person lives an authentic Métis existence is up to themselves and their community. Each journey is unique, so each must go at their own pace. It is

the person's path to decide. A non-judgmental and strength-based approach is recommended. Acceptance is gained through being around others who view these practices as valid and valuable. Let go of some of the shame. Push through discomfort towards an enjoyable, pride-holding and worthwhile self-concept. Trust in strength and intuition!

### **Cultural Misappropriation**

Respectfully taking part in Indigenous activities is welcome and adds to cross cultural understanding. Cultural mis-appropriation and debasement does not. Let me offer a word on cultural misappropriation as advice for teachers, learners and seekers. Questions of cultural appropriation are delicate ones. Enthusiasm and understanding are welcome, appropriation is not. Consider:

While this may seem overly sensitive and possessive, one needs to view these concerns in a historical context. Imagine more than a century of cultural oppression where your ancestors were imprisoned, tortured, and even killed for practicing their sacred rites. All that survived was that which was taken underground and held close to the heart. Now imagine that same imposing culture coming forward a few generations later, and, without being invited to do so, prying into those sacred places (Henley, 1996, p. 336).

Authenticity was included to address the real concern around attempts to de-legitimize all Indigenous cultures, including Métis. Authenticity is a core value and one that is consciously attended to. Generations of co-opted cultural practices have had the effects of being minimized, dismissed, or demeaned.

Learning and re-learning is often a slow process because the knowledge being absorbed often contains spiritual elements requiring a certain readiness and preparation. Legitimacy comes when stories are given, when ceremony is undertaken, and gifts are gifted. Those all add the

realness to the things we are then able to share (L. Higgins, personal correspondence, Oct. 15, 2018).

*The Polish Pow Wow was important for me on many levels and I was privileged to witness its spectacle. Although not intended by the organizers, this experience provided me with much learning. However, having both Polish and Métis heritage, I would have thought I would have been more highly regarded at this event. Perhaps the judges were questioning, “just how Polish is this guy?”*

## Chapter 9: Of Nature (Connection to Land)

“I take a deep breath, exhale, and give thanks for clean air, clean water, and good health. I ask the same for everyone else: humans, four leggeds, winged ones, and swimmers. I pray for strength, patience, peace, and a sense of humour” (Lowan-Trudeau, 2015, p. 38).

### Storywork Introduction

*There exists a place in the bush in our back property where a rock formation remarkably resembles a resting bison, hence we have nicknamed it Sleeping Buffalo Rock. This piece of land where we go to is special for my family. Living in this place, we have developed a relationship with this spot. It is a frequent visiting place for all members of my family. It is our place to commune, heal, observe nature, spend time, celebrate and enjoy. It is a family place to be in nature, exploring, seeing the life that is there, and picking berries. It holds special memories for my family. I feel a connectedness to this place even though it is not the traditional lands of my ancestors.*

*I will use example of reflections from formal education-based experiences on the land to highlight attempts at understanding at a deeper level concepts such as: a good way of being (health), identity, connectedness, and ancestral understanding. Excerpts taken from Twarowski, Deepening Experience assignment (Unpublished manuscript, 2014):*

*It was winter, cold and blustery. I could not find my snowshoes, but I set out anyways. It was a slow process moving through deep snow, which forced patience and acceptance. I ventured out*

*to my destination. There was no wind, no sound but the crunching of snow, and the odd snow mobile in the distance. I wanted shelter from the elements, so I dug a hole in the snow beside a rock face to crawl into. This was pleasurable and not that difficult. It was curious to see the leaves, grasses and branches uncovered in this process. After this was done, I smudged. I have some experience with this practice, but I humbly asked for forgiveness in case I got anything wrong. I thought this would be a good opportunity to practice a survival skill, starting fire using a flint and steel. What a difficult and challenging thing. I had brought out lint as that is supposed to catch fire easy, yet I tried and tried with no success. I took a break to figure out what to do next. My snow roof then collapsed right on the pile of tinder. After that even matches wouldn't set fire to the lint. I hunkered into the snow shelter to experience and focus on the environment. Everything was vivid and stark, washed in greys and whites and black. There were no bright hues of color. The only trace of life I saw was the carcass of some fuzzy insect. I attempted to see with a new perspective and clear my mind. Being present was hard for me. I struggled with a wandering mind but found myself taking note of details and searching the area for hints or signs of this place revealing itself to my untrained eyes. Physically it was a bit of a tough slog. Even though the snow was insulating, it was robbing my back and kidneys of warmth. Mentally, I found it challenging to be mindful of surroundings, even when that was my intent. I see with hurried eyes. Spiritually, I was pleased to have smudged as it helped me approach this task in a good way. Emotionally, I felt self-conscious in my lack of abilities but proud to have made the attempts.*

*This experience reinforced my understanding of interconnectedness of all things; that the well-being of the earth is essential for survival and from which sustenance is taken carefully and natural resources are treated with the knowledge that future generations will also depend on the*

*earth (Education, A., 2005; Henley, 1996). I try to view nature as a place of sustenance and where we belong, not as a frontier to overcome. However, this trip reminded me that although I enjoy it, my ability to be in nature is limited, skill and knowledge wise. As a man over 40, I do not possess the bush craft skills that a child from three generations ago would. Yet, I was reminded of the teaching that no test is given that the traveller does not have the strength to meet. Still, what a satisfying experience. At the same time, I do feel like there is so much more to understand. I know I only scratched the surface of connecting or communing with place on this level, but the possibility of having any kind of deepening experience with this land felt rewarding.*

There are several elements to parse out from this story that will inform on connectedness to land. These include the importance of place, spiritual connections to the land, disconnections with nature and land based ancestral knowledge, and finally a suggestion for experiential education practices.

## **Place**

Sleeping Buffalo Rock has become my spirit spot- a place for quiet introspection and intimate nature observation. “People with Western Secular biases tend to find it difficult to imagine a place imbued with power- much less suited to a specific individual. North American Indigenous peoples recognized the special powers that could come to a person by placing oneself in the right frame of mind and the right location” (Henley, 1996, pp. 82-83). A sacred relationship with nature is the heart of traditional teachings and practices (Education, A., 2005).

Spiritualities, identities, languages, systems of governance, wisdom, worldviews, philosophies, source of knowledge and teachers themselves come from the land and the spirit-world it encompasses, so in return there is offering of appreciation for the gifts the earth has

given (Métis Centre, National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2008; Simpson, 2002). Sitting on the land attempting to connect further has established for me a deeper link between nature and self. It is a way to notice surroundings and become involved in the world around us (Henley, 1996, p.28). There is an opportunity through inward introspection to recognize humans are nature (with and of nature, not just in it); we all exist in relationship with Land (Dickinson, 2013; Styres et al., 2013). Nature is our homeland, which has provided shelter, sustenance, and spiritual nourishment for millennia. Métis relied on the land for food procurement, animals, medicines, and livelihood. Traditionally, the Métis lived in harmony with nature and knowledge of plants, roots, bark, flowers, fruits, leaves, oils and seeds were passed from generation to generation (Chansonneuve, 2005).

Traditional ecological knowledge passed down through stories explains relationship to homelands and this is how one places one's self. Place has always been central to Indigenous existence and forms a core of existential understanding with seasonal cycles of social and subsistence activities (Kirmayer et al., 2009; Styres et al., 2013). Many generations interacting with place forms an awareness of land on which it exists, forms the way Indigenous language is used, shapes how the world is viewed, and it becomes relational with strong spiritual, emotional and intellectual feelings of connection (Lowan, 2009; Styres et al., 2013).

### **Dispossession and Disconnection**

Discussions on connection to land begs the question: "If the Métis have no land, how can they be connected to it?" (Métis Centre, National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2008, p.98). It could be that Métis are connected to the land because of constant dispossession from it. "There is a very true and honest way to learn the value of land when you are steadily and forcibly removed from it" (Métis Centre, National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2008, p.98). Along with

displacement or appropriation of land is an undermining of the cultural meanings of land in the sense of self, marked by the dispossession of lands and way of life (Kirmayer, 2009). This loss of land and inability to have connection to it (physical, emotional, spiritual and mental) has impacted a sense of self as well as peoplehood. There remains a sense of loss, not only of the tangible, but for a way of life that was forcibly removed and denied.

### **Reconnecting**

More people are disconnected from nature than ever before, so humans come to believe nature's laws no longer apply and are somehow immune to a non-relationship with land, resulting in alienation, loss of community, and a deep sense of incompleteness (Cajete, 1994; Dickinson, 2013; Henley, 1996; Henley and Peavy, 2015; Styres et al., 2013). A reciprocal relationship occurs between humans and the earth and so the health of the land is related to the health of us.

Connection to the land has played an important role in Indigenous conceptions of personhood and wellness. Disruption of this link is a pivotal historical loss and has been a major contributor to the social suffering endured by Indigenous communities, where knowledge systems relating to the natural world were severed, combined with disruption of traditional Indigenous education systems that had been in place for centuries (Brokenleg, 2015; Kirmayer, 2009). The hurt was cultural as well as personal. Mainstream education practices made Métis forget what they learned about living off the land and this disconnection was reinforced with a central belief “any nostalgic feelings for the land would soon be forgotten if they would only pick up some tools and hustle to get ahead like everyone else” (Donald, 2004, p.45; Leclair, 2008).

Getting to know “place” has helped me to know where I come from and provides a sense of belonging. Place helps define me and my family. Being geographically removed from my homeland, connecting with the land where I am at now has been a meaningful practice in striving to reweave myself in nature and deepen my connection with the land through introspective reflection (trying to know through the “eyes” of my ancestors). Absolon and Willett, as quoted in Kovach (2010), note “Our ancestors gave us membership into nations and traditions; location both remembers and “re-members” us to those things (p. 111). Grounding is not solely found in our ancestral territory, it can also be found in the larger Indigenous community (Kovach, 2010).

This concept is meaningful because I am removed from home community, so engaging on the land reconnects us. Introspective reflection and attempts to connect and deepen links with land have been instrumental in psychologically viewing self as being of nature and trying to be in nature in a way that goes beyond recreation. Land based knowledge is practiced knowledge, knowledge used on the land. It is tied to the personal identity, spiritual development and overall relationships with others (McGuire, 2010).

Cultural deprivation is a deficit addressed by providing access to our own ancestral knowledge in a setting on the land. Reconnecting with the land of Indigenous heritage is crucial to comprehend the teachings and values of the ancestors, yet land based knowledge is becoming more difficult to pass on, with the risk we forget bush ways (Adese, 2014; Alfred and Cornthassel, 2005; Leclair, 2003). Connecting Métis seekers to ancestral knowledge through being rooted in the land, based on the culture and guided by the leaders is inherently Indigenous. “It is a magical, fun, and healing experience” (Lertzman, 2002, p. 3). Experiential education practices provide an opportunity and means to facilitate this. By linking learning experienced in the physical world (a view which emphasizes doing, acting and experiencing as ways of learning) with a sense of self

as “living a good life” there are many ways to facilitate experiential activities (“Métis Lifelong Learning Model Living Draft”, 2007). Environmental and cultural learning should be taught using immersion, observation, exploration with all senses and finally, appreciation (Henley, 1996, p.46). Small things that can benefit this practice include enabling spiritual time in nature, growing or harvesting food, learning what plants in our environments are edible, medicinal or useful; go outside more, camping- practicing outdoor skills as a means towards a re-wilding process. These all allow people to learn something of the knowledge essential to their future lives from the vast talents that their community had to offer (Henley, 1996).

To understand the Métis, one must understand the land. This may seem like an oversimplification or understatement, but ancestral ways of being and forging identity centred upon land-based learning. It formed the core of who a person was. There is a quality of being on the land that fosters reflection, connectedness and an Indigenous way of successfully navigating this world. Dispossession was a means of taking away that connection. Reconnection to place is a vital link to identity, ancestral ways and key to learning approaches.

*In developing connection to place, such as the Sleeping Buffalo Rock experience, through undergoing a process of engaging on the land, I feel a connection and deepening of understanding with Métis identity. Basso (1996) describes “places come to generate their own fields of meaning, their character and spirit” (p. 108). I find this statement also speaks to me as a way of understanding Métis, who have a unique identity generated from their own meaning, character and spirit. By engaging on the land and trying to see through eyes of ancestors, one can connect back to their spirit. Understanding oneself as part of a broad set of relations governing connection to land, personhood and wellness is part of a “Métis way of being” (Adese, 2014). Land based experience can be truly contributory to shift mindset.*

## Chapter 10: A Good Yarn Ties It All together (Story)

“It’s all a question of story. We are in trouble just now because we do not have a good story. We are in between stories. The old story, the account of how we fit into it, is no longer effective. Yet we have not learned the new story” (Berry, 1987).

### Storywork Introduction

*“When a great storm brews up on the prairie, buffalo often sense it coming for days prior...” (Lickers, personal communication, September 5, 2005).” The buffalo story provided at the beginning of this work was also a starting point for me in many ways. The story, or teaching, was given by a man I greatly respect, at a time and place in my life where I began earnestly rediscovering heritage. It was introduced to me at a time and setting in which I was able to consider what its meaning was for me, appreciate this knowledge as a gift and consider Indigenous knowledge thoughtfully.*

*I had to wonder why traditional knowledge and perspectives were so degraded and not cherished? This is especially true now, as this knowledge is scarce. Spending time and gathering with other like-minded people who held traditional knowledge with respect and high value provided a differing perspective than I was accustomed to. It was this experience that became a turning point. This aided my ability to reframe the narrative told by outside forces, understand meaning from my own perspective and turn disenfranchisement into a motivation to see true strength, beauty and practicality of a Métis way of life. From this, I was able to reimagine self-*

*concept which transformed both my own narrative and others. I was able to appreciate my own family history and people deeper, and I had to contemplate why others didn't.*

*By recognizing the hardships that family endured, and the ideals fought for, this reinforced the heroic tale of warrior spirit and resilience. That story became my reality, one that was closer to the truth than the story told about handouts for a defeated people: the traitorous bastards of Batoche (a derogatory term directed at my family that I heard more than once as a youth). My proudness went beyond the historic pride of participation of significant events to embracing who we are now, and who we will be. As Fleury writes, "The storytelling is how you heal through this process. That's the way I see it. When I talk about my history and traditions, it's about an inheritance from my family, like I inherited these things" (Métis Center, National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2008, p. 44).*

*I am not the storyteller in the family. That honour goes to my uncle. Stories are more important than ever, as the storytellers I know are getting older. However, when it comes to these writings, I try to incorporate story-work to add meaning and resonance. I love stories because they shape who we are, entertain us, help guide us, and connect us to our people. Humor is used to get through the rough times and humor is used to celebrate in good times. Stories help pass along values, traditions, how we live our lives and how as individuals we fit in all of this.*

The following areas of this section will look at impacts of negative story resulting in a wounding of spirit. Story will be highlighted as important for mitigating the detrimental impacts on Métis and foster resilience, thereby increasing success in education. The design of this section encompasses my own experience, followed by examining the wounded spirit and its effects, a

process to undo the effects and Métis specific suggestions for changing the story, thereby rekindling the spirit.

### **Wounded Spirit**

Words hold power. Stories told have consequences. Sometimes the stories and the events preserved in memory cause suffering, particularly when the stories are negative (Mehl-Madrona, 2015). Stories about Métis do not generally portray resilience and they render feelings of inferiority and shame (Kearns and Anuik, 2015; Kirmayer, 2011). There is a need to change the stories (ones Métis tell themselves, those told about Métis) into healing ones. This is especially true when the predominant stories ignore, undermine, or obscure Indigenous knowledge. It is important to create the narrative Indigenous knowledge is not only as valid as other knowledge systems, but crucial as a knowledge system with value for all (Battiste, 2007). Ways of being in this world that existed for thousands of years have not lost relevancy in the last hundred. Indigenous knowledge remains not only relevant but offers practical solutions and a way of looking at the world that would benefit us all.

Unfortunately, there are predominant stories that are negative and full of stereotypes. A change in narrative needs to occur to overturn generations' worth of defamation. This is to ensure the identity is filled with beauty, pride, and traditional cultural aspects instead of degraded, misinterpreted and traumatized ones. The stories created for Métis are outdated or were rarely accurate. Métis are mainly remembered in a historical context, and usually not fondly. Eurocentric thought often asserts only Europeans progress and Indigenous peoples are frozen in time, so consequently the Métis story is confined to a period culminating in the 1885 uprising: centred upon one figure (Louis Riel) and given the unfortunate impression they have not done much in recent history (Battiste, 2013; Donald, 2009; Gaudry, 2008; Richardson, 2004).

If considered at all in current times, contributions largely go unrecognized. This has been reinforced because Indigenous interpretations of history have not been considered legitimate (Donald, 2009). Therefore, Métis have often not been the authors of their own stories. This is significant since disruption of a Métis way of life has interrupted the creating of an “own self-narrative”, which has resulted in the collective narrative being instilled with a profound sense of anger or despair (Kirmayer, 2011).

It is necessary to find meaning when significant cultural features of a traditional way of life are shattered and practices are prohibited or drained of meaning, thereby making that life senseless. This simultaneously leaves many both grateful and proud for those who struggled to ensure we got here yet angered at all that was lost (Kirmayer et al., 2007). Métis require a hopeful way to look at themselves and the world: “We are more than what has been done to us” (Linklater, 2011). The spirit has been wounded so raising critical awareness should include activities to rebuild individual and collective identity (Kearns and Anuik, 2015; Lavallée, 2009). It is time for new stories to be allowed to come forth.

### **Process to Undo**

While individual and community narratives will each require their own approach to counter narrative created for them, there are some general considerations that should be effective in working to undo some of the damage. These include reframing narratives, narrative resilience, supporting personal story, Indigenous counter-narratives and creating a space to explore and critically challenge the dominant story, as well as support for individuals to process this.

Reframing narratives are necessary to combat negative stereotypes regarding Métis people from becoming engrained, and deteriorating self-worth both individually and as a collective. Métis specific reframing narratives are often necessary to reverse the compounding

effects of negative portrayals. Using a strengths-based narrative at an individual, family, community and social level should provide a valuable way to promote healthy self-esteem, sense of belonging and resilience. This requires an “imaginative excellence” to take up the past and refigure it in ways that create new fields of meaning and ability; to create good stories about the world (Kirmayer et al., 2009, p. 465).

Narrative resilience contains a communal element, maintained by passing on stories with cultural power and authority, which can be used to speak up and assert identity, sustain core values and attitudes needed to face challenges, and generate creative solutions to new problems (Kirmayer et al., 2011). Powerful stories, songs, and family histories will all assist with taking apart colonial misrepresentations to support a transformational decolonizing experience (Gaudry and Hancock, 2012). Changing a person’s attitude towards themselves then becomes a priority, but “reaching the spirit of a person and lightening the load they have carried for so many years requires patience, perseverance, positive thinking and unconditional caring” (Battiste, 2007, p.16). This would contribute to success through cultural transformation by focusing on how to define a good life and then see oneself as virtuous within that way of life. Many hold a desire to no longer see themselves through colonial narratives and look to re-write oneself into a place that has all but erased Indigenous, towards prideful and positive self-concept (Cardinal, 2016; Leclair, 2008). Many wish to do this to provide for a new generation that would be happy and well-adjusted (Berry, 1999).

Learning a new story should be a rewarding, transformational and impactful experience. The importance of Indigenous peoples to “change their story” is transformative work which empowers people to find a story where they are heroic; to tell their stories in ways to begin the process of moving from helpless victim, through courageous survivor, toward creative thriving

(Kirmayer et al., 2009; Mehl-Madrona, 2011). Reframing counters the stereotype of “helpless victim” and reinforces power and hope by focusing on innate capacities and success (McGuire, 2010; Simpson, 2002). “This is travel in a full circle, from surreptitious comments, to silence, to naming and claiming, and now on to a path of creating” (Short, 2011, p.128). In other words, the stories that describe worthlessness reinforce oppression, while stories (often traditional) reinforce self-determination, self-worth and action. “Rather than re-inscribing Aboriginals as passive victims of change, I wish to demonstrate Aboriginal presence, participation, resistance, and agency in the events of the past. These are survival stories that give life back to those of us living today (Donald, 2011, p.545).”

Stories must be offered up that are more appealing than the stories they are replacing, thus enabling a re-knowing, re-claiming of Métis-ness, to produce better outcomes and as an act of refusal to assimilate (Adese, 2014; Mehl-Madrona, 2010). Stories hold the power to usher in a transformational mindset in which a heroic and strengths-based perspective diminishes negative stories. For many, embracing this identity as a positive one involves reframing narratives to combat the negative impressions or lack of understanding associated with the identity. Words and stories hold power. Many stories have never been heard, many have been lost and many need to be changed. There remains a problem that many stories of Métis are negative, and Métis have not been in the position to create their own stories.

### **Rekindled Spirits**

Story as experiential and cultural knowing is an effective resource for people to make meaning of their own story, so learning is transformative (MacLean and Wason-Ellam, 2006). A suggestion is to create new stories and ensure that they highlight positive, strength-based perspectives. In doing so, this should reinforce positive self, worth, confidence and desire to

embrace heritage. This will contribute to the whole as a people, strengthening all. These stories are significant because they reinforce a resistance strategy designed to highlight success at overcoming difficulties and remain strong in the face of challenges.

I believe shift in mindset is vital in this journey. Changing a person's own story helps transform to a healthier self-image, thereby increasing self-worth. Personal stories are told, often repeatedly, within settings that shape self-understanding and identity, and so these normative narrative practices help people make sense of their experiences because telling one's story is cathartic, promotes reflection, and is reciprocal (Slade, 2009). This would be part of a healing or restorative journey. Developing stories about growth, dealing with difficult life events, personal revitalization and the transformation of a bad experience into a good outcome all contribute to a positive narrative identity, facilitating individuals to rebuild lives with qualities better than before (Slade, 2009). An ability to bring forth a new narrative that is strength based can be a valuable and powerful practice. To do this, individuals will have to go through a process of unlearning what they have unconsciously internalized.

“Part of this process is learning their own history from the perspective of members of their own culture, reclaiming what has been lost or unknown to them, and reframing what has often been cast subconsciously as negative in more positive ways.” (Battiste, 2007, p.16). By doing so, “story is brought back into the everyday lives of Indigenous peoples by reconnecting generations and being infused into the lifelong process of affirming a Métis identity” (MacLean and Wason-Ellam, 2006, p.22).

Métis have been well-known as storytellers so reframing narratives and learning a new story ties into a storytelling lineage, capitalizing on a strength. Leclair says, (quoted in Adese, 2014, p.63) “The telling of a good Métis story creates and strengthens our connections to each

other, to our collective remembering of who we are, and to our personal and communal aspirations for our children's future." Storytelling offers a way to capitalize on a Métis strength while also reinforcing the notion that they hold the power to change and can lead this themselves.

The stories of the Métis combine elements, perspectives and traditions of their lineages, often told as teaching methods of passing on cultural history and entertaining (Vizina, 2008). They help form how one sees self. Like stories of mother picking rocks or uncle trapping, one can make connection to survival as these become stories of resilience, stories of hope, and stories of triumph (Maclean and Wason-Ellam, 2006). Story remains a valuable tool for Métis as means of conveying information, a teaching tool and a means to help people to see their own gifts and create their own stories in which heritage is legitimized, valued and worthy. Values, beliefs and practices are taught, shared and passed from generation to generation through storytelling and teachings, in the celebration of survival and achievements (Métis Center, National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2008).

*My people are prairie people. That is where I am from so the buffalo holds relevance for me. Certainly, there is a linking and connection between Métis and bison ("bufloo" in Michif). The "buffalo facing a storm" story has gained significance as a teaching for me through difficult periods. I have been able to draw upon it for strength, unity and spiritual support. The story is not simply a romanticized fable or parable. The wisdom imparted here has been handed down over generations from people who had keen observation skills gleaned from survival in harsh elements. In tying this to metaphor, most of us are not literally crossing prairie storms by foot, but all of us encounter difficult periods that require resilience, support, hope and optimism.*

*Metaphorically, for the Métis there have been many storms. “Stories and songs and ceremonies are ways of mapping; they are the tools of wayfinding in place and through life” (Chambers, 2008, p.124). We could do worse than look to the buffalo, and stories, for direction.*

## Chapter 11: Discussion

“People are starting to let go of some of the shame that’s associated with history and realizing the culture is beautiful” (The Métis Question, 2015, p.6).

When undertaking this enquiry, I set out to know more about Métis culture. The information presented here grew from a desire to provide insights on Métis learning considerations and identity reclamation. This was done to support a strengths-based approach, resurgence of Métis community, and to guide those seeking to understand.

The hypothesis for this thesis is that a gap exists in knowledge around Métis identity and approach in education that can lead to reduced participation and success from Métis learners. A core premise of this thesis is that reclaiming a healthy and prideful identity is beneficial for learning success for Métis, both in formal educational settings, and through informal and lifelong learning endeavors. This work sets out to look at ways of highlighting Métis learning practices, cultivating the importance of strengthening healthy and prideful cultural identity in education and examining what emerges from the author’s story that may further broaden understanding of Métis learning. It also acknowledged a differing measurement for educational success, potentially spanning across lifelong learning and entailing living a good life rather than only considering academic success in early life.

### Addressing Thesis Questions

Three questions formed a basis for enquiry. Several themes were identified and discussed related to these questions. These themes combine and compound, reinforcing each other in a

virtuous circle. The information gathered from these questions together form a picture to combine information, to better inform, and move toward improved educational opportunities for Métis. A summary of this inquiry follows:

Question 1. How does story provide insight on Métis learning?

The first question focused on exploring ways of supporting Métis learning aspects. Successful achievement in education can be realized by incorporating aspects of culture, through strong identity formation and retention. This is reinforced when provided through a perspective of respect and a sense of worth. My own experience taught me this.

Ways were examined to regain what was lost. Identity reclamation and supporting learning aspects becomes an approach of mapping out what to recover. This process is two-fold: an identification of what to regain and ways to reclaim these. Elements contributing to identity were highlighted, including cultural aspects, strengths and cherished characteristics to aspire to and be proud of. The process involves approaching Elders, returning to the land, gathering, traditions, ceremony, and story. Reclamation and preservation of the history, culture, language, identity and relationship of Métis to the land requires: seeking Traditional Knowledge, authenticity, a sense of worthiness, and respect for those that came before.

Attention was paid to the benefits of reframing narratives and changing story. Doing so involves relearning and rediscovering lost traditions and culture. For many, reclaiming this identity as a positive one involves reframing narratives, finding the songs, providing teachings to children and fostering a connection to land while forging identity. These elements are designed to enable a transformative process of cultural revitalization. This fosters identity and community. Elders should be involved to provide the support, knowledge and direction for people to develop their gifts, form a sense of identity and foster a sense of purpose and worthiness.

Implications stemming from history and colonization were reviewed. Recognition of the effects of intergenerational trauma evokes the need for protective factors to be identified and introduced. The emotional impact stemming from recognition that forces have conspired to eliminate Métis as a people and culture can be hard to process. This difficult process is mitigated by reconnecting with the land in small, personal, groups to comprehend the teachings and values of ancestors.

Question 2. Considering Métis history, what are ways to strengthen Métis positive identity in formal education settings?

The second question asked about ways we can cultivate the importance of strengthening cultural identity. This leads to another question that has not yet been asked directly, but nonetheless has been integral to this thesis. “Why bother”? Why bother at all to do this? Why encourage anyone to understand or develop learning strategies for a group which sits uncomfortably between First Nations and European worlds? Viewed often only as a damaged people, those feeling disconnected may have a hard time even wanting to reconnect with culture or take ownership of that identity. Having had their powerful, accepted and meaningful culture taken away, the identity Métis have been forced to either choose or reject is often laden with negative attributions. And, if reclaiming, there is often suspicion of motives with supposed economic or educational advantage to be gained. Although Métis worldview has been tarnished, it continues to provide a unique way of seeing the world. Holding Métis Knowledge as worthwhile is empowering.

Learning presents a challenge because for a long period, the practice of traditions was outlawed. Sources of knowledge include self, people, land, language and traditions. Learning occurs within a cultural and ecological context, demonstrating a relatedness between land,

people, spirit world and all beings. Learning from family, community and social relations is important, intertwined with the hope that intergenerational knowledge and healthy behavior is passed on.

An opportunity exists along with this challenge. Highlighting a richness in culture, gifts of the Métis and a resilient, defiant approach can bring forth a self-determined approach in education.

There is consensus that it is up to Métis people to retain their culture, language, past and current traditions (Michell et al., 2008; Truth and Reconciliation Summary, 2015).

Question 3. What emerges from the author's story that may broaden understanding of Métis learning and transformative mindset?

The third question considers the author's personal narrative and how that may further broaden understanding of Métis learning and transformative mindset. Whitinui (cited in Cardinal, 2016, p. 23) asks, "Will sharing your story about yourself bring people together?" In asking what examining the author's life brings to this work, I can answer wholeheartedly that rediscovering culture enriched my life. In communicating my process of reclaiming identity, reconnecting to community and reframing who I am as Métis, personal narrative is an act of empowerment, through which one can improve relationships, encourage personal accountability, and promote social and cultural change (Cardinal, 2016). Having a Métis world view is a beautiful way to live. I am thankful for all my ancestors and relations did to ensure we remain strong enough to reclaim this worldview.

I have found myself moving away from feeling disconnected and to a sense of belonging, and towards seeing through the eyes of my ancestors. I believe that the Métis gifts of humor, creativity, boldness, and being "of two minds" allows for bridging capacity between cultures.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous are intimately connected and this relationship persists to this day, despite the distrust, misunderstandings, and animosities that punctuate it (Donald, 2004).

Although these discussions are not always pleasant, they are important to have. It is these relationships by which knowledge is created through a continuous process of mutual exchange so that a new relationship can be imagined (Adese, 2014; Donald, 2004; Leclair, 2008).

### **Addressing What I Did (Methods)**

Examining ways to support Métis learning practices involved viewing global Indigenous learning aspects, considering Métis directed learning approaches, then turning to a Métis Lifelong Learning Framework to guide this. This model links lifelong learning and community well-being. It is a framework for a culturally relevant means to measure success from a different perspective. This could be encapsulated with this guidance: the key isn't to be rich or successful; it is to live a true life. Several features of this model are ideally suited to compliment a Métis education approach including land-based learning, Elders, language, family structure, storytelling, and self-determination. These highlight the lifelong learning aspects of family, community and social relations.

Incorporating ethnography led each chapter to contain storywork or personal reflection and literature review. Reflecting on my own experience and drawing upon the processes of métissage, bricolage and reframing narratives lead to a patched together whole (from seemingly loosely connected ideas). At first glance, the literature review topics appear unconnected, perhaps random in their choosing. Themes were chosen, in part determined by asset, deficit and transformation. This links themes- what remains and is needed (resilience), to what was taken away (culture, family, community, education, land), and what requires transformation (story). In

addition to these were aspects that remained and should be noted, respected and emulated (authenticity), and those that should be shed (negative stereotypes, colonial detriments).

The process of writing impacted my understanding, thus transforming and informing direction as that process unfolded.

Reframing counter-narratives emphasized strengths and values Indigenous cultures still embody, and insurgent methodology was incorporated to inspire people to action (Anderson, 2014; Freire, 1970; Gaudry, 2011; Henley, 1996; Smith, 2003). The theoretical findings, buoyed by putting Indigenous ideals into practice and working from within Indigenous frameworks, hold real practical application for those seeking a Métis way of being.

### **What Went Wrong?**

This was a rewarding experience for me but also an arduous process in many regards. Learning to speak from a voice of authority was the first obstacle to be overcome, as this was hindered by self-doubt. My strategy was to mix things together and carry on through any difficulty until it worked. I was heading in a particular direction yet could not always see the destination. Forging ahead when it was not clear how to get to the other side led to re-tracing. Several false starts led to areas that did not feel authentic to me. The process was anything but linear, yet that experience itself added to learning and formed this work.

In setting out to do this work, colonization was not intended to be a predominant theme as it has been discussed by many already. It became unavoidable as it permeated everything I wished to speak about. The history and legacy of colonization was reviewed to deepen understanding, but trauma and worthlessness were presented in a manner demonstrating these should not be defining features of Métis.

## **Limitations**

There are many limitations to this study. I recognize that an autobiographical approach to an Indigenous thesis may be viewed as used frequently, and there exists opinion it is possibly over-used. My ancestors, and most Indigenous ancestors, never got to tell their story in their own words. I believe it is especially relevant in academia to see this model for information sharing as worthy and contributing.

Contradictions exist in this work. There are suggestions for incorporating Métis learning aspects into western or mainstream education systems while also advocating for an Indigenous model of education that stands alone and is Métis directed.

Another potential limitation, for some, may be a perceived lack of specifics. The content presented here is not intended to be a step by step instruction manual. Much is left open to interpretation. This may be frustrating to some, who are looking for explicit steps, concrete examples or particular activities. Rediscovering or connecting with identity is an individualized process, and culture contains varying and localized elements. Reclamation of identity entails going at one's own pace and engaging Knowledge Holders. The intent is to present any insights as a guide rather than a decree, as each participant on a rediscovery journey will forge a unique path. Nor can I prescribe which specific traditions, practices or ceremony to participate in.

My intention was to share general learning aspects deemed supportive. This becomes more complicated for modern living, with urban context and blending a mix of traditional and non-traditional ways of living. A lot of people are unsure of how to be an urban Indigenous person and to allow for the blend to happen. I hope métissage and bricolage elements can be brought to those narratives, to add legitimacy to those experiences and components of this work can illustrate living as authentic Indigenous individuals comes in many forms.

Indigenous Spirituality was not discussed directly, but it is underlying the content of this paper and should be considered important. One other area I acknowledge a deficit in is language acquisition. I do not have functional knowledge of any Indigenous language so rely on European-derived means of communicating my own culture (Gaudry, 2011).

### **Directions for Future Study**

Implications for additional investigation include calls to action to develop culturally relevant curriculum (Truth and Reconciliation Summary, 2015). Curriculum revisions are required to include Indigenous issues and Métis-specific. Utilization of the Métis Lifelong Learning Model provides a framework and guidance on areas and means of fostering this learning. Also, when considering bringing this knowledge into education in a good way, it is advised to consult with Knowledge Holders. There are resources online or people at local Friendship Centres or Métis councils to find a respectful and appropriate way to do this.

All levels of government should consult with Métis Parents, communities, and national organizations to provide Métis-specific educational programming (Truth and Reconciliation Summary, 2015). King suggests “No one has spoken of Métis Control of Métis Education except the Métis people. No government has taken on this policy to devolve control of educational services to Métis people. Research into the application of Métis Control of Métis Education needs to be done” (as quoted in Dorion & Yang, 2000, p. 177).

The creation of a Métis specific land-based education model infused with key themes identified within this thesis is a worthy endeavor. Participation in a beautiful, fun, authentic, and autonomous program developed with Elders and imbedded in a Métis worldview would be desirable. People will want to learn and become our leaders.

## Chapter 12: Conclusion

“Over time and through reawakened connections to my Métis ancestors and to the contemporary Métis community, I have gained a deeper understanding of being Métis” (Short, 2011, pg. 76).

Earlier, a story was shared of a Polish Pow Wow and its implications to Indigenous authenticity. From this experience, I learned that even there, Métis struggled for recognition. Métis are differentiated, often seen as second fiddle from First Nations and non-Indigenous, even at the fake Pow Wow. I chose the title Second Place at the Polish Pow Wow to highlight this. Word-play seems to be intrinsic to Métis, and humor has served as a protective factor for many.

However, that story also speaks to the opportunity to engage and explain Métis to people who do not understand but may want to. Consider the benefits of supporting a healthy, vibrant, hybrid culture known for its ability to navigate the complex worldviews of both European and Indigenous. It is a beautiful world view that incorporates much from both cultures. Métis are influenced by two worlds, but also a people who will exist forever. This work is intended to reinforce and further motivate an adaptive people who have successfully blended hybrid culture in disrupted or changing environments, fought for rights and are characteristically doers and free thinkers who can offer a different perspective. These are a vibrant and distinguished people. It is a time of rejuvenation, with opportunity to be leaders, to show by example and to use indigenous ways of being in the world to effect change. These strengths have a lot to offer, especially at a time where divergent thinking, survival, resilience, and knowledge grounded in wholistic understanding of the relatedness of natural systems are needed.

Previously, Métis were respected for their capabilities and leadership. There is no reason that should not be re-established. This work asserts Métis as a distinct group with the ability to take on leadership positions in a Métis way (L. Higgins, personal correspondence, Oct. 15, 2018).

Strengthening a strong identity will reinforce the meeting of equals, the recognition of power dynamics and the opportunity for non-Indigenous to learn from Indigenous knowledge. My hope would be for everyone to have an opportunity to learn in an outdoor natural setting, from Elders, in an authentic way, to see from the eyes of the ancestors and for this knowledge and way of being to be considered legitimate, worthy, equal and valuable. There are people who carried this knowledge at a time when it was illegal to do so. We must honor their commitment and carry it on.

Herb Belcourt (quoted in Adese, 2014, p.64) issues a call, “Métis must be proud of their heritage and promise to themselves to keep it. To keep their heritage, Métis need to rediscover and recover their traditional ways of being in the world.” Drawing upon the (buffalo) quality of perseverance can be worthy in this regard. Having weathered a storm and come through the other side, the Métis are poised for a period of rejuvenation. The resilience of our people means we are here, having survived and are ready to flourish. I am proud to pass teachings and heritage onto my children and share in this period of re-emergence of Métis as a political spiritual force, with all my relations. On this path, I am both learner and teacher. I seek to learn this knowledge in a way that feels proper yet manageable. Part of graduate studies is preparing to speak with an authority and contribute to the greater knowledge. This is where I continue to find my voice. Battiste, (2002) comments: “purposeful lives are dignified and spiritual, this is what we strive for and hope that educational reform will help us achieve” (p. 30). There is much to learn.

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